

SCENE TWO: PURGATORY

MARLEY is mid center stage on his knees, head down. He pounds the floor once with his fist. He is wearing chains.

MARLEY

Oh, Christmas! You have come again! The joyous time of hope for peace on earth and goodwill to all! But not for those who suffer such as I! The light you bring shines so brightly, but for me serves only to make darker the shadow of my existence!

The spirits enter from stage right.

PRESENT

Jacob Marley!

MARLEY quickly moves away from the booming voice DSL. The spirits move forward quickly and deliberately to mid center. PRESENT is in the center, PAST to his right, FUTURE to his left.

PRESENT

Look upon us, Jacob Marley!

MARLEY

(shocked)

You are not wandering phantoms. You bear no chains! Nor are you mortal creatures such as I was in life.

PRESENT

No! Not phantoms nor mortals! We are immortal creatures! And we work constantly to move human souls toward the light!

MARLEY

Who are you?

PRESENT

We are Christmas! I am the Spirit of Christmas Present! These are my partners!

PAST

I am the Spirit of Christmas Past

FUTURE

And I of Christmas Yet to Come.

PRESENT

We have arrived as we do at this time every year to help humanity to celebrate faithfully in the joy of the present; to remember with love and nostalgia the joy of the past; and to plan and hope for the joy of the future!

MARLEY

There is no joy here, sir! Why do you appear before me?

PAST

Seven years have passed since you left the mortal realm.

PRESENT

A good time to examine what you have come to understand since your arrival here.

MARLEY breaks down, resigned and hopeless.

MARLEY

I...have come to understand...suffering! The constant torment I experience here has caused me to understand all the suffering that, in life, I caused myself - and that I failed to alter.

FUTURE

And what of hope?

MARLEY

There is none. I left hope behind with my last breath of life.

PRESENT

Is your will not still your own?

MARLEY

No. I am doomed. Captive and bound, wandering the world, seeing all that I am powerless to change.

FUTURE

But - you choose where to wander.

PAST

This we know - for you return again and again to the places you inhabited in life.

PRESENT

You are drawn to the same places and to the same people.

MARLEY

Yes! It is like an anchor at the end of this great chain! I cannot escape! My shame tethers me to the broken lives I left behind! This torture will never end!

PRESENT

You are tortured by your own guilt. But there is no tether. This you do by your own choice.

MARLEY weeps. The spirits look to one another. They communicate non-verbally. FUTURE has an epiphany and raises a finger. PAST and PRESENT nod in agreement.

FUTURE

And what would you do - if you could?

MARLEY looks up, puzzled.

MARLEY

I would live my life differently.

PAST

(emphatically)

Your life has passed, Jacob Marley. You cannot return to life, or change the choices you made in life.

PRESENT

You exist here now.

FUTURE

Yet time still passes. The future becomes the present.

PRESENT

The present is here and now.

PAST

And the present constantly becomes the past. Seven years have passed since you arrived here.

FUTURE

And still time passes.

MARLEY

Yes! Eternally passing in agony! This pain shall never end for me!
Oh, spirits of Christmas! Why do you torment me in this way?!

Beat

PRESENT

We have come to inquire of you about Ebenezer Scrooge!

MARLEY

Oh! Dear Ebenezer! My only friend in life! What pain I brought to him!

PRESENT

Yes, yes! I know all about it. Jacob Marley, we have very little time. There is work to be done! Ebenezer Scrooge - you know him better than anyone. Tell me, is he worth the bother?

MARLEY

The bother?

PRESENT

Yes, man! The bother! Christmas comes but once a year! Not a great deal of time and none of it can be spared where it would be wasted!

MARLEY

I do not understand...

PRESENT

(to FUTURE)

What are the odds?

FUTURE

There is but one chance and hope.

PRESENT

(scoffs)

One chance!

MARLEY

What one chance?

PAST

The chain you wear, Jacob...

MARLEY

My chain?

PAST

Where have you seen another as heavy and as long?

MARLEY

Only once. When I received my chain, I saw next to it the chain of poor Ebenezer!

PAST

Seven years later - now seven years longer, Jacob.

PRESENT

Yours is short and light by comparison!

FUTURE

There is hope.

PRESENT

Not enough to make it worth our time.

MARLEY

Make what worth your time?

PRESENT

There is no dearth of human souls in need of the light we bring each year, Jacob Marley. Christmas miracles! That is our task. But - our time is limited - and we must decide how to spend it.

FUTURE

Ebenezer Scrooge will bear a chain longer and heavier than yours unless...

PRESENT

Then there is the question of the misery he leaves in his wake! It is a never-ending storm of pain and despair. Take Bob Cratchit for example.

MARLEY

Bob Cratchit...

PAST

Do you remember him?

MARLEY
(trying to remember)

Yes.

(pauses to think)

We were lucky to have found him. But, of course, I manipulated him. I took advantage of his situation... for my own purposes.

PAST

And do you recall the day you hired him?

MARLEY
(thoughtfully)

Yes. Cratchit said “two for one” that day.
(chuckles remorsefully)

PAST

(seizing upon this moment)

Two for one. You said “two for one” many times in your life.

PRESENT

What does that mean?

FUTURE

What were you hoping for?

MARLEY

It was my motto in life. I always thought I could identify the best opportunity when I could see that one action would yield two positive outcomes. And it worked many times. But now I see that my actions, my choices, the way I lived my life - it doomed me. And it dooms Ebenezer, too.

(chuckles remorsefully once again)

Two for one. I ruined us both.

The spirits look to one another again, regrouping to take another approach. FUTURE has another epiphany and raises a finger again. PAST and PRESENT nod in agreement.

FUTURE

There is but one chance and hope, and if that hope is realized, both Ebenezer Scrooge and Bob Cratchit will benefit.

They all look to MARLEY in unison.

PRESENT

Two for one.

MARLEY stands slowly.

MARLEY

Two for one.

(beginning to understand)

(to PAST)

My dear friend Ebenezer Scrooge - and Bob Cratchit?

PAST stares at him in a leading manner but says nothing.

(to FUTURE)

A Christmas miracle for one is also a Christmas miracle for the other?

FUTURE

There is but one chance and hope.

MARLEY

(to PRESENT)

You must! Yes! What is it you said? Yes! He is worth the bother!

PRESENT takes Marley's arm and brings him DSL.

PRESENT

Do you really believe that, Jacob? Let us look in on your friend on this very night. Let us see if he is worth the bother!

PRESENT points DSL where a spotlight reveals SCROOGE and a SOLICITOR from a local charity who has a book and quill pen ready to record a charitable pledge.

SOLICITOR

(happy and cheerful)

At this festive season of the year, Mr. Scrooge, it is more than usually desirable that we should make some slight provision for the poor and destitute, who suffer greatly at the present time. Many thousands are in want of common necessities. Hundreds of thousands are in want of common comforts, sir.

SCROOGE

(coldly)

Are there no prisons?

SOLICITOR

(acknowledging sadly)

Plenty of prisons, yes, Mr. Scrooge.

SCROOGE

And the union workhouses - are they still in operation?

SOLICITOR

They are. Still. I wish I could say that they were not.

SCROOGE

The treadmill and the poor law are in full vigor, then?

SOLICITOR

Both very busy, sir.

SCROOGE

Oh! I was afraid from what you said at first, that something had occurred to stop them in their useful course! I am very glad to hear it.

SOLICITOR

Under the impression that they scarcely furnish Christian cheer of mind or body to the multitude, a few of us are endeavoring to raise a fund to buy the poor some meat and drink and means of warmth. We choose this time because it is a time, of all others, when want is keenly felt, and abundance rejoices. What shall I put you down for?

SCROOGE

Nothing!

SOLICITOR

You wish to be anonymous?

SCROOGE

I wish to be left alone! Since you ask me what I wish, sir, that is my answer! I don't make merry myself at Christmas and I can't afford to make idle people merry. I help to support the establishments I have mentioned. They cost enough - and those who are badly off must go there.

SOLICITOR

Many can't go there - and many would rather die.

SCROOGE

If they would rather die, they had better do it, and decrease the surplus population.

The SOLICITOR is visibly appalled by this comment as the spotlight slowly fades

PRESENT

(shaking his head)

Worth the bother, eh Jacob? This one chance and hope is hardly sufficient to make the investment. Our time is better spent on opportunities with a greater chance of success.

He starts to leave stage right and the others follow.

MARLEY

No! Wait! He is worthy! There is still time!

The spirits all stop and turn.

PRESENT

Why do you want this, Jacob? Why do you persist?

MARLEY

I ruined his life. I am responsible. Let me fix it.

PRESENT

What power do you have to fix it?

MARLEY

None. But you do.

PRESENT

And what do you believe we could do?

MARLEY

You must tell him! Go to him and use the power you have to make him see!

FUTURE

We cannot make anyone do anything.

PRESENT

We can only show them what is true.

PAST

And what has happened before.

FUTURE

And what is possible.

PRESENT

We are Christmas, but Ebenezer Scrooge hates us. He calls us a Humbug! If we intervened he would certainly ignore us, just as he has ignored every Christmas for a great many years!

MARLEY

But he would believe me if I told him you were coming! I could herald your arrival!

PRESENT

You he cannot see!

PAST

You know this. He has never seen you in all the times you have visited with him.

MARLEY

Then use your powers to allow him to see me!

FUTURE

And what would you say to him?

PAST

Human words do not exist that could suitably describe the situation in which you find yourself.

PRESENT

You cannot take a message of sympathy, as that is neither what is needed from you, nor needed for him.

FUTURE

You could only tell him what is true, and only in words that he would understand. There is but one chance and hope.

MARLEY

Then let me do just that. Please, Spirits of Christmas! Permit me to tell him that you will visit him. And lacking that, he cannot avoid my fate!

Pause. All the spirits look to one another.

PRESENT
(to MARLEY)

Are you asking this of us?

MARLEY

Yes! I beg of you!

PRESENT

And you make this request of your own accord, with the free will you still possess?

MARLEY

Yes!

FUTURE

What gain is there for you from this request?

MARLEY

None.

PRESENT

Then why do you ask for this?

MARLEY

(hesitantly trying to find the right words)

In all my life, I never knew love. Only greed, envy, pride. He was my business partner. He was my friend. I failed him. My life was over before I understood that. The truth is, I loved him like a brother. That is why I ask.

(beat)

I exist without hope. I have nothing to give and nothing to gain. My penance is never-ending.

(beat)

Please. I beg of you. Go to him. Show him the truth, whatever you deem he needs to know. Let me herald your visit so that he will know it is true and he will not ignore it.

The spirits look to one another and nod in agreement.

PRESENT
(smiling)

You have procured this one chance and hope, Jacob Marley. Now - let us prepare!

Blackout.