

Urchins (*in strident cacophony*) 'Ark the 'erald hayngels si-hing
Glory to the new-born king!
Peace on 'erf—an' mercy mi-hild——

1st Urchin (*aggressively*) Jesus Christ, that little child!

They continue to sing as Scrooge mutters angrily to himself

Scrooge Infernal horrible caterwauling! Don't they know I'm trying to run a business here?

There is a pounding on the door and Cratchit looks up fleetingly

Get on with yer work, Cratchit! Bah! Humbug! Insolent young ruffians, coming here with their Christmas nonsense ... bah!

The singing gets louder and Scrooge grabs his walking stick and stomps towards the door

Hell-fire and damnation! Why can't they leave a man in peace! (*He pulls open the door*)

A charming, elegant and smiling young man stands before him, his nephew, Harry. The Urchins run off, laughing

Scrooge (*scowling*) Oh, it's you.

Nephew Uncle Ebenezer, I cannot tell you what a joy it is to see your happy smiling face. And how are you, Bob?

Bob Cratchit Very well, thank you, sir.

Scrooge scowls his disgust and turns back to his desk. The Nephew follows him jauntily into the office and closes the door. He gives Cratchit a friendly nod and a wink and follows Scrooge to his desk

Nephew A merry Christmas, Uncle Ebenezer! God save you!

Scrooge God save me from Christmas! It's a lot of humbug! (*He swiftly and expertly counts up a handful of gold sovereigns, drops them into the money box and slams it shut to underline the sentiment. He picks up the money box and carries it over to the safe*)

The Nephew perches himself in carefree fashion on the corner of Scrooge's desk

Nephew Christmas a humbug? Come now, I'm sure you don't mean that!

Scrooge And I'm sure I do mean that! Merry Christmas, indeed! What reason have you to be merry? You're poor enough!

Nephew And what reason have you to be miserable? You're rich enough!

Scrooge There's no such thing as rich enough! Only poor enough! (*He rams the money box deep into the safe and slams and locks the door with much clanging of metal*)

Nephew Don't be so dismal, Uncle Ebenezer!

Scrooge What else can I be, when I live in a world of fools babbling "Merry Christmas" at one another? What's Christmas but a time for finding yourself a year older and not a day richer? (*He thrusts his face menacingly at his nephew*) If I could work my will, Nephew, every idiot who goes about with "Merry Christmas" on his lips should be boiled with his own pudding and buried with a stake of holly through his heart!

Nephew God forbid, Uncle!

Scrooge You keep Christmas in your way, and let me keep it in mine!

Nephew But you don't keep it!

Scrooge Then let me alone! And be good enough not to bother me, sir, during business hours. And get off me ledger—you'll ruin me binding!

The Nephew gets up off the desk and looks at his fob watch. Scrooge picks up the heavy ledger, examines the binding for possible damage and, with a reproachful glare at his Nephew, carries it across to a dusty bookcase and locks it away with a key from his watch-chain

Nephew Seven o'clock on Christmas Eve? That's not business hours! That's drudgery for the sake of it, and an insult to all men of goodwill!

Bob Cratchit (*muttering under his breath*) Hear, hear!

Nephew Thank you, Bob Cratchit!

Scrooge Another word from you, Cratchit, and you'll celebrate Christmas among the great unemployed.

Bob Cratchit Yes, sir. I'm sorry, Mr Scrooge.

The Nephew pulls a crusty face at his uncle, converting it into an instant smile as Scrooge turns to him

Scrooge You're quite a powerful speaker, sir. I wonder you don't go into politics—you're fool enough!

The Nephew roars with laughter. Scrooge returns to his work

Nephew Come now, don't be angry! Dine with my wife and me tomorrow!

Scrooge There's another thing! As though you hadn't got enough problems, you went and got married! Now why in God's name did you do that?

Nephew Because I fell in love with the lady.

Scrooge (*opening another ledger with a growl*) Love! If there's one thing in the world more nauseating than "Merry Christmas", it's a happy marriage with some love-sick female! Good-afternoon, sir!

Nephew My offer stands. You are always welcome, Uncle—just like Christmas itself!

Scrooge I said good-afternoon!

No. 1a: starts (underscore)

Nephew I want nothing from you. I ask nothing of you. Why can we not be friends?

Scrooge Good-afternoon!

Nephew Merry Christmas, Uncle. And you too, Bob Cratchit! And your family!

Bob Cratchit (*with a smile*) Thank you, sir. And to your good lady!

The Nephew exits, then reappears in a second, popping his head round the door

Nephew Oh, and Uncle!

Scrooge Hmmm?

Nephew A happy New Year!

Scrooge (*furious*) Good-afternoon, sir!

The Nephew exits, grinning

Bob Cratchit, considerably cheered up, warms his hands on the candle on his desk. The chimes of a nearby church are heard

Bob Cratchit Excuse me, sir, but it's—er—seven o'clock, sir.

Scrooge looks at his watch

Scrooge (*grudgingly*) Correct, Cratchit.

Bob Cratchit I don't wish to be impertinent, Mr Scrooge, but will it be too much trouble if I have my wages, sir?

Scrooge growls his disapproval and reluctantly stops work and takes out his purse, carefully counting out fifteen shillings as they talk. He counts it three times—twice in his own hand, and finally into Cratchit's hand

Scrooge The trouble with you, Cratchit, is that all you think about is money! You'll be wanting the whole of Christmas Day off tomorrow, I suppose?

Bob Cratchit If it's convenient, sir.