

Act One

Scene One

Overture. The stage is blank, save a frame of a house, perhaps the logo on a screen above it. The theatre or venue is decorated for Christmas, and the air is undeniably festive. At the conclusion of the overture, silence. We hear distant songs echoing from carolers we do not see.

Song- Joyous Sounds/ First Devil's Knell

Group 1:

*Here we come a caroling
Among the leaves so green*

Joy to the World, the Lord has come

*O come, all ye faithful
Joyful and triumphant*

Group 2:

*Love and Joy come to you
And to you glad tidings too*

*Deck the halls with boughs of holly
Fa la, la, la, la, la, la, la*

Joyful and triumphant

The voices fade, the orchestra modulates to minor, beginning that familiar melody our show is named for: Carol of the Bells. As they play, Father Christmas, a man who has seen many years but who has grown into a man of great majesty from them, enters from the rear of the house, ringing a bell in the tradition of the Devil's knell, though something is off. He is not morose, but to call him an embodiment of joy would be to lie. He is penitent. He walks to the front, and by the time he arrives at center stage, he stops completely. He observes the space silently. From the same entrance, Mother Christmas enters. She is not the homely, aged figure we so often see depicted, just as Father Christmas is not the bubbling, round, blushing man we see so often. She is old, yes, but we can tell she is a queen. One whose crown has earned her great respect. She is noble, refined, and beautiful, with the wisdom no woman of youth could have.

Mother Christmas:

What's happened?

Father Christmas:

Nothing has happened.

Mother Christmas:

Nothing is happening.

Father Christmas:

As I said.

Mother Christmas:

No, you said nothing has happened. I said nothing is happening. There's a difference.

Father Christmas:

I see.

Mother Christmas:

So?

Father Christmas:

So?

Mother Christmas:

You've stopped ringing the bell.

Father Christmas:

Yes.

Mother Christmas:

And...?

Father Christmas:

And?

Mother Christmas:

Dear, what is going on?

Pause.

I've not known Father Christmas to be a man of secrets.

Father Christmas:

I'm not one.

Mother Christmas:

Then why do you insist on keeping this secret?

Pause. Father Christmas thinks.

Father Christmas:

Where has Christmas gone?

Mother Christmas:

What?

Father Christmas:

Where has Christmas gone?

Mother Christmas smiles dismissively.

I'm serious. Look around. Have you read the letters they're sending?

Mother Christmas:

Not really.

Father Christmas:

Lists. That's all they are, lists! And longer and longer every year. No thank you, no wonder, I'm a shopping mall for them anymore. Look at the streets! Carolers, lights, celebrations – where are they? Some are there, sure, but where have they gone? Decorations by the score but no heart, no life. It's all icing and no cake!

Mother Christmas:

Well, winter does bring icing.

Father Christmas:

Love.

Mother Christmas:

Smile, dear. It's Christmas.

Father Christmas:

What is Christmas?

Mother Christmas:

It's joy, it's family, it's love. You are Christmas, dear, plain and simple.

Father Christmas:

What joy.

He turns to exit, leaving the bell.

Mother Christmas:

The bell!

Father Christmas:

I know!

Mother Christmas:

It's (current year), dear! You've still 565 left to go!

Father Christmas:

I will ring it when Christmas is Christmas again.

He exits. Mother Christmas is alone onstage. She looks at the bell and thinks. A lightbulb moment, she exits. Blackout.

End of Scene

Scene Two- The House of Father Christmas

Lights up. Mother Christmas is at center stage, directing the decoration of the Christmas Home by the staff.

Song- We'll Dress the House/ Deck the Hall

Staff:

*We'll dress the house with holly bright and sprigs of mistletoe
Then trim the Christmas tree tonight and set the lights aglow
We'll wrap our gifts with ribbons gay and give them out on Christmas day
By everything we do and say, our gladness we will show.
We'll dress the table daintily, our finest treasures use
So all a-sparkle it may be, so bright with lovely hues
Then for the feasting we'll prepare a kitchen full of wondrous fare
That each from all the dishes rare, his favorite one may choose!*

Music continues under dialogue.

Mother Christmas:

Noelle, any word of the guest yet?

Noelle:

No ma'am, but there have been strict instructions given to the doormen.

Mother Christmas:

Thank you, Noelle.

Noelle:

My pleasure.

Mother Christmas:

You will inform me when he does arrive?

Noelle:

As soon as I know, so will you.

Mother Christmas:

Thank you, Noelle.

Noelle exits to the door. Mother Christmas Resumes her duties directing the Staff.

Staff:

Deck the hall with boughs of holly

Fa, la, la, la, la, la, la, la,

'Tis the season to be jolly

Fa, la, la, la, la, la, la, la,

Don we now our gay apparel

Fa, la, la, la, la, la, la, la,

Let's troll that ancient yuletide carol

Fa, la, la, la, la, la, la, la,

Light the blazing yule before us

Fa, la, la, la, la, la, la, la,

Join us as we sing the chorus:

Fa, la, la, la, la, la, la, la,

Sing we joyous all together

Fa, la, la, la, la, la, la, la,

Heedless of the wind and weather

Fa, la, la, la, la, la, la, la,

The music continues under the dialogue.

Noelle:

Mother Christmas, He's here.

Mother Christmas:

What are you waiting for, send him in!

Noelle exits, and returns soon with Father Time. He also is not as we have seen him depicted. He is not withered, old, or in any way grey. He is a well-dressed man in the prime of his youth. Full of a suave energy and cool confidence.

Father Time:

Mother Christmas, you're looking lovely as always.

Mother Christmas:

Father Time?

Father Time:

At your service.

Mother Christmas:

It's a pleasure to meet you.

Father Time:

You seem confused.

Mother Christmas:

You look different than I had pictured, that's all. When you think of Father time, you always picture someone who has known time and...

Father Time:

I am all time. Past, present, and yet to be, when I've got such a rare choice why would I choose to be so...

Mother Christmas:

So what, Mr. Time?

Father Time:

Beautifully aged as you are, Mother Christmas. I could never hope to compare.

Mother Christmas:

That's what I thought you'd say. I take it you read the letter.

Father Time:

It's a shame. If he doesn't ring in Christmas, who knows if I'll be able to bring in the new year.

Mother Christmas:

So I take it you can help?

Father Time:

I can certainly try.

Mother Christmas:

Thank you.

Father Time:

Where is he?

Mother Christmas:

In his den. He's still got to check the list a second time.

Father Time:

Still a list with no Christmas?

Mother Christmas:

He's never been a man to dislike work, and he still has some he wants to look out for.

Father Time:

You married a good man, Mrs. Christmas.

Mother Christmas:

I know. Now go help me bring him back.

Father Time:

You have my word.

They share a moment; Father Time exits towards the den. Noelle crosses to Mother Christmas.

Noelle:

So?

Mother Christmas:

He's going to try.

Noelle:

What's his plan?

Mother Christmas:

I haven't the first clue. For someone who is in charge of the future, he isn't much of a planner.

Noelle:

Should we be worried?

Mother Christmas:

Worrying, Noelle, is trying to control that which we can never tame with our hands. For now, let's do the task before us and pray it's not for naught. Now come, we've still got trees to trim, gifts to give, and songs to sing.

Mother Christmas and Noelle direct the staff as they put the finishing touches on the décor.

Staff:

*We'll dress the house with holly bright and sprigs of mistletoe
Then trim the Christmas tree tonight and set the lights aglow
We'll wrap our gifts with ribbons gay and give them out on Christmas day
By everything we do and say, our gladness we will show.
We'll dress the house with holly bright
We'll dress the house with holly bright
We'll dress the house with holly bright
And sprigs of mistletoe!*

The décor is complete.

End of Song

Playoff. Set transitions to Father Christmas' den. He is examining a rather long list.

Scene Three- Father Christmas' Den

Lights up, Father Christmas sits in a large chair examining a large list.

Father Christmas:

Nice, nice, nice, naughty, nice, nice, naughty.

He looks closer.

See notes.

He looks over to a small notebook.

Clara Grace, Clara Greene, Aha! Clara Grimm. "Left chocolate mousse and fresh espresso in lieu of milk and cookies". Well, that was very nice Clara.

He scratches out the previous "naughty".

Clara Grimm: Nice. Note: ask for mousse recipe. Continuing on, nice, nice, nice, nice, nice...

Father Time knocks on the door.

Every time... Come in!

Father Time enters.

Father Time:

Beautiful weather isn't it?

Father Christmas:

Father Time, what are you doing here?

Father Time:

Your Mrs. called for me.

Father Christmas:

Seems an odd thing to tell a married man.

Father Time:

With concerns about you. Apparently, the knell has been cancelled this year, I hear?

Father Christmas:

Not cancelled, delayed.

Father Time:

Any news on when we'll finish it out?

Father Christmas:

I will resume the ringing when Christmas is Christmas again.

Father Time:

Am I mistaken in thinking this December has a twenty-fifth? I was not alerted the calendar had changed.

Father Christmas:

The twenty-fifth has nothing to do with it.

Father Time:

Is that not Christmas?

Father Christmas:

As a date, yes, as a holiday, no.

Father Time:

I don't follow.

Father Christmas:

What is Christmas? One day a year? No, that is far too simple an explanation. Christmas, Father Time, is not a date, it is a season, and not a season of the year, it is a season of the mind, a time of joy and laughter heedless of the wintry wind and snow. It's a time we laugh by a fireside with tea and punch. We eat cakes and carol through city streets with friends. Where lights like stars brought from heaven glisten through the bitter cold to find us smiling with red noses and chapped lips. Christmas is peace and Christmas is love. Now where, my friend, has that love gone? We see Christmas still, but the lights twinkle not like stars but burn as suns. Ever brighter but ever harsher too. Less we care about the kin and kith who come to call than we reach with gripping arms towards the base of the tree, and if it is barren: frown. Where is the magic in that? Where is the love? Where is the joy? What's the meaning of it then? My point, Mr. Time, is that this season has burnt like a candle for generations. Now, the wick is gone.

Father Time:

The wick is gone, are you hearing yourself?

Father Christmas:

I should think I would hear what I say.

Father Time:

What of its importance? What of the millions who need Christmas?

Father Christmas:

Those who need Christmas will find a way to keep it. As for importance, it seems you've found my point. Christmas simply is of no importance anymore.

Father Time:

No importance? Tradition! What of tradition?

Father Christmas:

Tradition is merely what we use to convince ourselves we don't need to move forward.

Father Time:

Tradition is our link to that which made us.

Father Christmas:

Even so. What does a bell mean in that? I did not come from a bell.

Father Time:

The Devil's knell is of more meaning than you know.

Father Christmas:

Once a year, I ring a bell one time for every year since the birth of Christ to symbolize the atonement of sins done by the holy child. Beautiful symbolism, I'll admit, but beyond the symbolism, no need to continue it, really.

Father Time:

Christmas won't happen without it.

Father Christmas:

Then we start a new tradition.

Father Time crosses to a framed piece of music.

Father Time:

It's not that simple!

Father Christmas:

How long have you been Father Time?

Father Time:

As long as time.

Father Christmas:

You've done it before then, so start a new tradition again.

Father Time:

Why did you frame this one?

Father Christmas:

What?

Father Time:

You've framed a song. Why this one?

Father Christmas:

I've framed many songs, Father Time.

Song: Carol of the Bells

Music begins under dialogue, small at first.

Father Time:

Carol of the Bells. Why this one? It doesn't seem of any significance.

Father time holds the frame loosely, as if he is to drop it.

Father Christmas:

Mr. Time!

Father time holds it firmly again.

That happens to be an original.

Father Time:

An original, it wasn't written for Christmas. New Year's, I believe.

Father Christmas:

It was adapted.

Father Time:

And that is this?

Father Christmas:

Yes.

Father Time laughs.

What?

Father Time:

It's quite the joke, Father Christmas. "What does a bell mean in that"? You can't believe that, really.

Father Christmas:

I do believe it, and Father Time I ask that you learn to...

Father Time:

*Hark! how the bells
Sweet silver bells
All seem to say
"Throw cares away."
Christmas is here
Bringing good cheer
To young and old
Meek and the bold
Ding, dong, ding, dong
That is their song
With joyful ring
All caroling*

Father Time:

*One seems to hear
Words of good cheer
From ev'rywhere
Filling the air
Oh how they pound
Raising the sound
O'er hill and dale
Telling their tale
Gayly they ring
While people sing
Songs of good cheer
Christmas is here
Ding dong ding dong
That is their song
With joyful ring
All caroling
On, on they send
On without end
Their joyful tone
To every home*

Father Christmas:

*Hark! How the bells
Sick silver bells
Cry out to say
"Throw cares away"
Christmas is here
Where went her cheer?
Young turning old
Meek from the bold
Wretched ding, dong
That is their song
No joyful ring
No caroling
Still strive to hear
Words of good cheer
From everywhere
Filling the air
Oh where did it go
I don't know*

*Oh how they pound
Raising the sound
O'er hill and dale*

Father Time:

*Telling their tale
gayly they ring
While people sing
Songs of good cheer
Christmas is here
Ding, dong, ding, dong
That is their song
With joyful ring
All caroling
On, on they send
On without end
Their joyful tone
To every home*

Ding, dong, ding, dong.
End of Song

Hold for applause. Father Time returns the frame to the wall.

Father Time:

When Christmas is Christmas again, eh?

Father Christmas:

Then shall I ring the bell.

Father Time:

Come, gather your wits and grab your coat, we've a journey to take.

Father Christmas:

A lovely invitation, Father Time, but I'm afraid I must decline.

Father Time:

Decline? Why so?

Father Christmas:

I'm afraid that with all the commotion around here the Mrs. wouldn't want me leaving.

Mother Christmas:

From offstage, as though she had been listening with an ear pressed to the door.
She wouldn't mind.

Father Christmas:

*Why must I ring?
Why do you sing?
Songs of good cheer
What do you fear?*

*I cannot believe that you can't see this
No more bells will ring, this can't be Christmas*

*Off! Let them end
I will not send
Tin-tainted tone
To every home*

Both: