

A Christmas Carol

CHARLES DICKENS

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A Christmas Carol



Christmas is humbug, Scrooge says – just a time when you find yourself a year older and not a penny richer. The only thing that matters to Scrooge is business, and making money.

But on Christmas Eve three spirits come to visit him. They take him travelling on the wings of the night to see the shadows of Christmas past, present, and future – and Scrooge learns a lesson that he will never forget.

[Word count 10,385]



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- ◀ STAGE 5
- ◀ STAGE 4
- ◀ **STAGE 3**
- ◀ STAGE 2
- ◀ STAGE 1
- ◀ STARTER



CLASSICS



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A Christmas Carol

CHARLES DICKENS

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A CHRISTMAS CAROL

Ebenezer Scrooge is a cross, miserable, mean old man. When his nephew visits him on Christmas Eve to wish him a merry Christmas, Scrooge is not at all pleased. 'Bah! Humbug!' he says. 'Christmas is humbug! Everyone who goes around saying "Merry Christmas" should have his tongue cut out. Yes, he should!'

Oh yes, Scrooge is a hard, mean man. His clerk, Bob Cratchit, gets only fifteen shillings a week, and has to work in a cold little office, with a fire too small to warm even his toes.

But that Christmas Eve Scrooge is visited by the ghost of his long-dead partner, Jacob Marley. And after him come three more ghostly visitors . . . It is a long night, and a frightening night, and when Christmas Day finally arrives, Scrooge is a very different man indeed.

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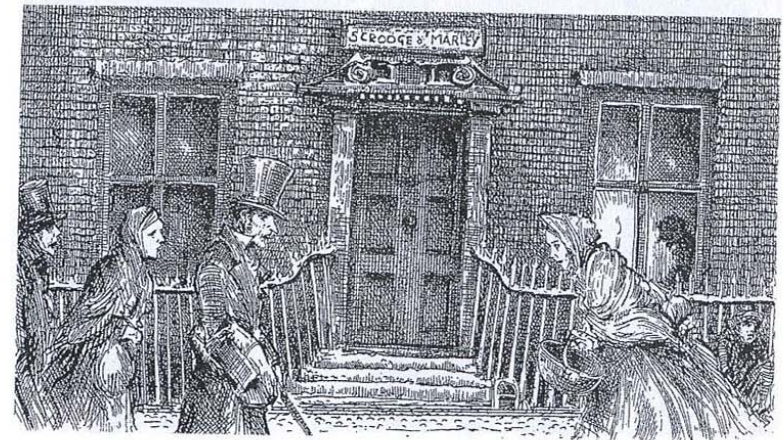
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Marley's ghost

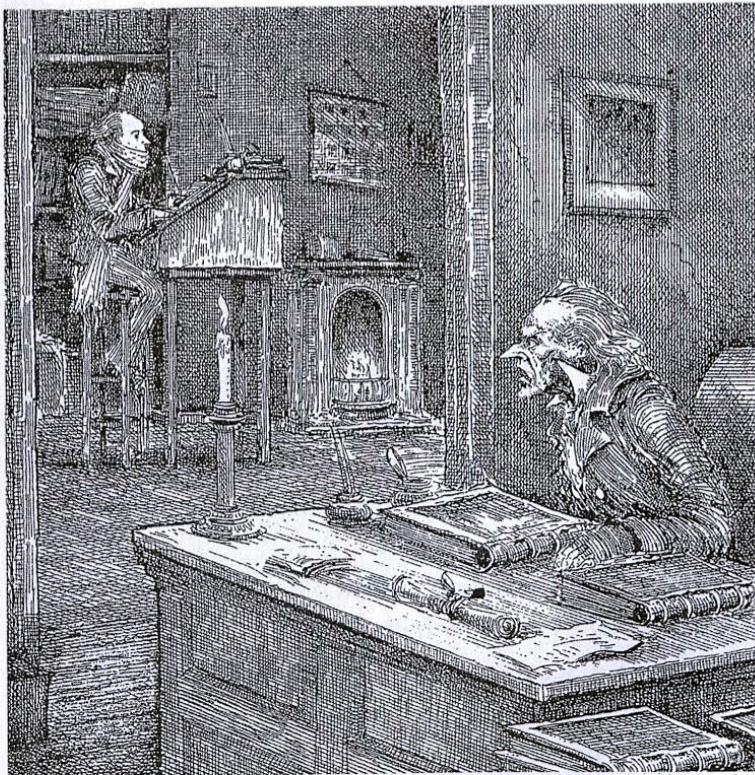
It is important to remember that Jacob Marley was dead. Did Scrooge know that? Of course he did. Scrooge and Marley had been partners in London for many years, and excellent men of business they were, too. When Marley died, Scrooge continued with the business alone. Both names still stood above the office door: Scrooge and Marley. Sometimes people who were new to the business called Scrooge Scrooge, and sometimes Marley, but he



Both names still stood above the office door.

'Well,' replied the nephew, smiling, 'why are you so cross? You're too rich to be unhappy.'

'Of course I'm cross,' answered the uncle, 'when I live in a world full of stupid people like you! You say "Merry Christmas"! But what is Christmas? Just a time when you spend too much, when you find yourself a year older and not an hour richer, when you have to pay your bills.'



Scrooge kept his door open to check that Bob Cratchit was working.

Everyone who goes around saying "Merry Christmas" should have his tongue cut out. Yes, he should!

'Uncle! Please don't say that!' said the nephew. 'I've always thought of Christmas as a time to be helpful and kind to other people. It's the only time of the year when men and women open their hearts freely to each other. And so, uncle, although I've never made any money from it, I think Christmas has been and will be a good time for me! And I say, God bless Christmas!'

Bob, in the cupboard, agreed loudly, without thinking. He immediately realized his mistake, and went quickly back to his work, but Scrooge had heard him.

'If I hear another sound from you,' said Scrooge, 'you'll lose your job!'

'Don't be angry with him, uncle,' said the nephew. 'Come and have dinner with us tomorrow.'

'Dinner with you? I'll see you dead first!'

'But why won't you come? Why?'

'Because Christmas is humbug! Good afternoon!'

'I want nothing from you. I ask nothing of you. Why can't we be friends?'

'Good afternoon!' said Scrooge.

'I am sorry, with all my heart, to find you like this. I have never wanted to argue with you. But I came to see you and invite you because it's Christmas, and so I'll say, a merry Christmas, uncle!'

'Good afternoon,' said Scrooge.

'And a happy new year!'

'Good afternoon!' said Scrooge.

His nephew left the room, without an angry word, stopping only to wish Bob Cratchit a merry Christmas.

Then two other gentlemen came in. They were large, round, comfortable-looking men, with books and papers in their hands.

'This is Scrooge and Marley's, I think,' said one of them, looking at the papers that he was carrying. 'Am I speaking to Mr Scrooge or Mr Marley?'

'Mr Marley is dead,' Scrooge replied. 'He died seven years ago today, on Christmas Eve.'

'I'm sure that you are just as kind to the poor as your partner,' said the gentleman, smiling.

What *was* true was that Scrooge was just as mean as Marley, and Marley had been just as mean as Scrooge.

'At this happy time of year, Mr Scrooge,' the gentleman went on, taking up his pen, 'we should help poor people who have no food or clothes or homes.'

'Are there no prisons?' asked Scrooge coldly.

'Plenty of prisons,' said the gentleman.

'And the workhouses, where poor people can live and work? Are they still open?'

'Yes, they are, I'm sorry to say.'

'I'm happy to hear it,' said Scrooge. 'I thought, from what you said at first, that perhaps these useful places were closed, for some reason.'

'But some of us feel,' replied the gentleman, 'that these places don't offer enough to poor people. We're hoping to

give some meat and drink, and wood for a fire, to people who need all these things. This is a time when we should all be able to enjoy ourselves. How much will you give, sir?'

'Nothing!' Scrooge replied. 'I don't have a merry Christmas myself, and I won't pay for other people to be merry. We all have to pay for prisons and workhouses – they cost enough. The poor will have to go there.'

'Many can't go there, and many prefer to die.'

'If they prefer to die, why don't they die, then? There are too many people in the world, so it's a good thing if some of them die. All this is none of my business! It's enough for a man to understand his own business, and not to think about other people's. I'm a very busy man. Good afternoon, gentlemen!'

The gentlemen shook their heads a little sadly, and left the office. Scrooge went back to his work, feeling pleased with himself.

Now the fog was at its thickest outside, and the cold was biting. Lights shone brightly from the shop windows. People were hurrying here and there – rich and poor alike – to buy what they needed for tomorrow's Christmas dinner.

At last it was time to close the office. Scrooge got up slowly from his desk. Bob was waiting for this moment, and he immediately put on his hat.

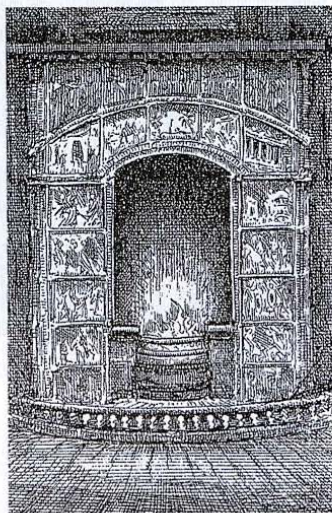
'You'll want a holiday all day tomorrow, I suppose?' said Scrooge.

he shut the door, and he *did* look behind the door, to see if anyone was hiding there. But there was nothing there.. He shut the door with a bang, to show that he was not afraid.

With his one candle he went slowly up the stairs. It was impossible to see into all the dark corners. Darkness was cheap, and Scrooge liked it. But he remembered the face, so he walked through all his rooms, checking that everything was all right. Nobody under the table or the bed, nobody behind the door! On the small fire in the bedroom there was a pot of soup, and Scrooge's bowl was ready on the table. Nobody in any of the rooms! Sure that he was safe now, Scrooge shut and locked his bedroom door behind him. He sat down by the fire to eat his soup.

The fireplace was an old one, with hundreds of pictures on the tiles around the fire. But Scrooge could only see Marley's face on every tile.

'Humbug!' said Scrooge to the tiles, and walked across the room. When he sat down again, he noticed a bell on the other side of the room. As he looked, he saw, with great surprise and fear, that the bell



The fireplace was an old one.

was slowly beginning to move from side to side. Soon it was ringing loudly, and so was every bell in the house.

Suddenly they all stopped ringing at the same moment, and then came a strange noise from down below. It sounded like someone pulling heavy chains across the floor. Scrooge remembered hearing that ghosts in old houses sometimes pulled chains behind them. Then a door below opened with a crash, and the noise started coming up the stairs. It was coming towards his door.

'It's humbug still!' cried Scrooge. But the colour left his face when, without stopping, it came straight through the heavy, locked door, and appeared in front of him. It was Marley's ghost!

Scrooge could see right through its body. Around its middle was a long chain, which had money-boxes, keys, bank books, and heavy purses on it. The ghost's death-cold eyes stared fixedly at Scrooge.

'Well!' said Scrooge, trying to pretend that nothing strange was happening. 'What do *you* want? And who are you?'

'In life I was your partner, Jacob Marley.'

'It's humbug, I tell you!' said Scrooge. 'There *are* no ghosts!' But when he said this, the ghost gave a terrible cry, and shook its chain in a very frightening way. At once Scrooge fell on the ground in great fear, crying, 'Yes! Yes! You *are* real! I see that now! Why have you come? Why do ghosts come back from the dead? Tell me, Jacob!'

'The spirit of every man who does not help other people

ACTIVITIES

Before Reading

1 The title of this story is *A Christmas Carol*. Do you think it is going to be about . . .

- | | |
|----------------------|------------------------------|
| 1 Christmas music? | 3 changes in someone's life? |
| 2 a party in winter? | 4 a baby girl? |

2 Read the story introduction on the first page of the book, and the back cover. What have you found out? Cross out the words that are wrong.

- Scrooge is a *kind/cross*, *miserable/happy*, *mean/generous* old man, who *enjoys/hates* Christmas and is only interested in *family life/making money*.
- Bob Cratchit is Scrooge's *clerk/partner* and he works in a *warm/cold office/library* with a *small/large* fire.
- Jacob Marley, Scrooge's *clerk/partner*, is *dead/alive*.
- Frightening/Enjoyable* things happen to Scrooge on Christmas *Day/Eve*, and he sees *three/four* ghosts.
- By Christmas Day, Scrooge is a *changed man / has forgotten all about it*.

3 How much do you know about Christmas in Britain? Think about these questions.

- Do people give presents?
- What kind of food do people eat?

ACTIVITIES: Before Reading

- Do people go to work, or to church, or stay at home?
- Do people visit friends or family?
- What do people say when they meet in the street?

What do you do in your country for special holidays like Christmas?

4 This is a ghost story. What do you think about ghosts?

- What time of day or night do ghosts usually appear?
- Are ghosts always frightening?
- What do you expect a ghost to look like?
- What kinds of message do ghosts often bring?
- Do you believe in ghosts?
- Have you ever seen a ghost?
- Do you know anyone who has seen a ghost?

5 'Scrooge learns a lesson that he will never forget.' Can you guess what kind of lesson? Choose Y (Yes), N (No) or P (Perhaps) for each of these ideas.

- He loses all his money. Y/N/P
- He dies of heart trouble. Y/N/P
- His family refuses to speak to him. Y/N/P
- He finds the love of his life again. Y/N/P
- He has no one to work for him. Y/N/P
- He sees what the future holds for him. Y/N/P
- He learns to like people. Y/N/P
- He has his tongue cut out. Y/N/P