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*Marley's ghost*

**I**t 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.*

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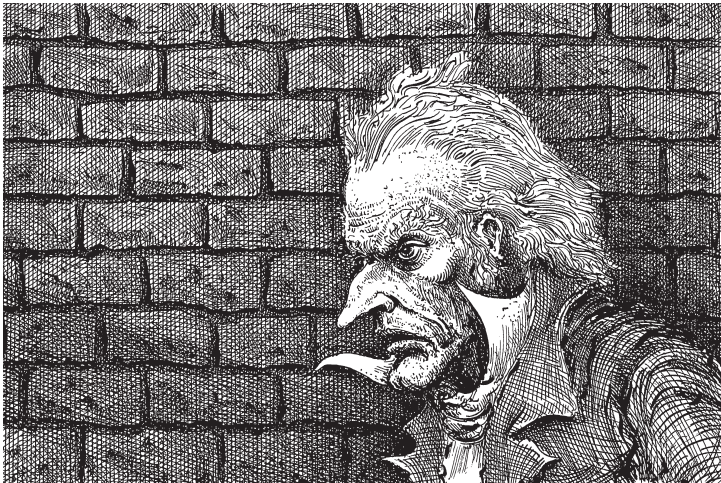
*A Christmas Carol*

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answered to both names. He did not care what name they called him. The only thing that mattered to him was the business, and making money.

Oh! He was a hard, clever, mean old man, Scrooge was! There was nothing warm or open about him. He lived a secretive, lonely life, and took no interest in other people at all. The cold inside him made his eyes red, and his thin lips blue, and his voice high and cross. It put white frost on his old head, his eyebrows and his chin. The frost in his heart made the air around him cold, too. In the hottest days of summer his office was as cold as ice, and it was just as cold in winter.

Nobody ever stopped him in the street to say, with a happy smile, 'My dear Scrooge, how are you? When will



*The cold put white frost on his head, his eyebrows and his chin.*

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*Marley's ghost*

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you come to see me?’ No poor man asked him for money, no children asked him the time, no man or woman ever, in all his life, asked him the way. Animals as well as people were afraid of him. Dogs used to hide in doorways when they saw him coming. But what did Scrooge care! It was just what he wanted. He liked being on the edge of people’s busy lives, while warning everyone to keep away from him.

One Christmas Eve, old Scrooge was working busily in his office. It was cold, frosty, foggy weather. Outside it was already dark, although it was only three o’clock in the afternoon, and there were candles in all the office windows. The fog covered everything, like a thick grey blanket.

Scrooge kept his office door open, in order to check that his clerk, Bob Cratchit, was working. Bob spent his days in a dark little room, a kind of cupboard, next to his employer’s office. Scrooge had a very small fire, but Bob’s fire was much smaller. It was very cold in the cupboard, and Bob had to wear his long white scarf to try to keep warm.

‘Merry Christmas, uncle! God bless you!’ cried a happy voice. Scrooge’s nephew had arrived.

‘Bah!’ said Scrooge crossly. ‘Humbug!’

‘Christmas is humbug! Surely you don’t mean that, uncle?’ said his nephew.

‘I do,’ said Scrooge. ‘Why do you call it “merry” Christmas? You’re too poor to be merry.’

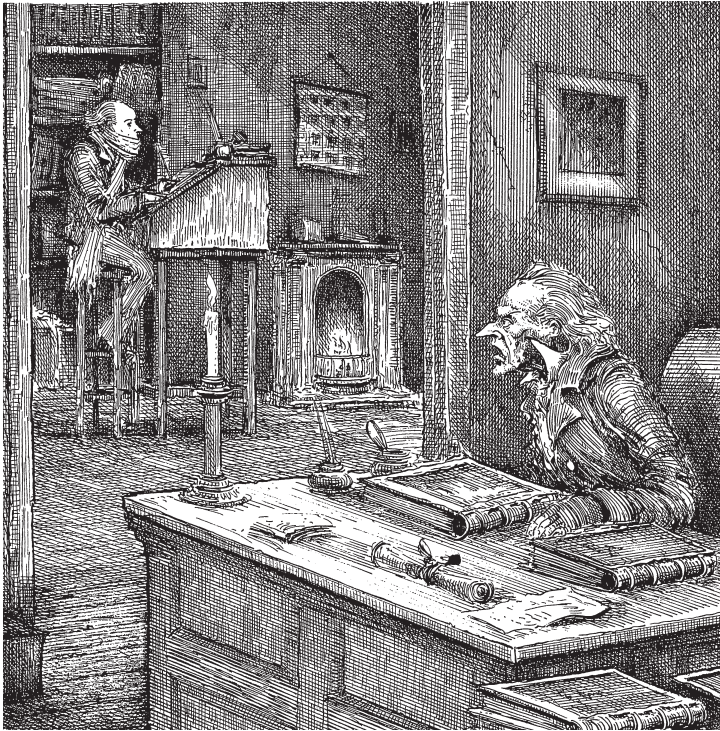
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*A Christmas Carol*

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‘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.*

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*Marley's ghost*

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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!'



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*A Christmas Carol*

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‘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

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*Marley's ghost*

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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.

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*A Christmas Carol*

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‘If you don’t mind, sir.’

‘I *do* mind. It’s not fair. I have to pay you for a day’s work when you don’t *do* any work.’

‘It’s only once a year, sir,’ said Bob politely.

‘That’s no reason for robbing me every twenty-fifth of December!’ said Scrooge, putting on his coat. ‘But I suppose you must have it. Be here early next morning.’

‘Yes, sir, I will, I promise,’ Bob said happily. Scrooge walked out, without another word. When Bob had closed the office, he ran home to his family in Camden Town as quickly as possible.

Scrooge always used to eat his dinner alone, in the same miserable little eating-house. Tonight was no different from other nights. He read the newspapers, looked at his bank books, and went home to bed. He lived in rooms which had once belonged to his dead partner. They were in an old, dark building in a lonely side street, where no one except Scrooge lived.

In the blackness of the night, through the fog and the frost, Scrooge had to feel his way along the street with his hands. He finally reached his front door and put the key in the lock. Suddenly, to his great surprise, he saw that the knocker was not a knocker any more, but had become the face of Jacob Marley!

He had not thought of his partner for seven years, until that afternoon, when he spoke Marley’s name to his visitors. But there in front of him was Marley’s face, white and ghostly, with terrible staring eyes.



*Marley's ghost*



*The knocker had become the face of Jacob Marley!*

As Scrooge looked, it became a knocker again. He was afraid, but he did not show his fear. He turned the key, opened the door and walked in. He *did* look around before

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*A Christmas Carol*

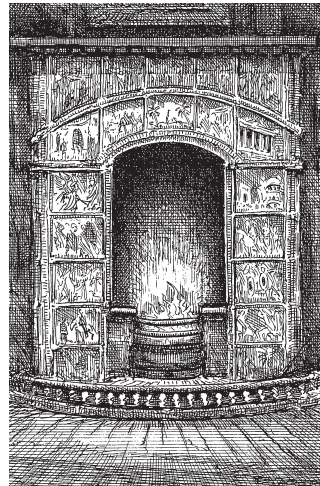
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he shut the door, and he *did* look behind the door, to see if anyone was hiding there. But there was nothing there. He shut the door with a bang, to show that he was not afraid.

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.*

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*Marley's ghost*

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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

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*A Christmas Carol*

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in life has to travel endlessly through the world after his death. We have to carry the chains that we made for ourselves in our lifetime. Do you, Ebenezer Scrooge, recognize my chain? It is very like the one that you wear!’

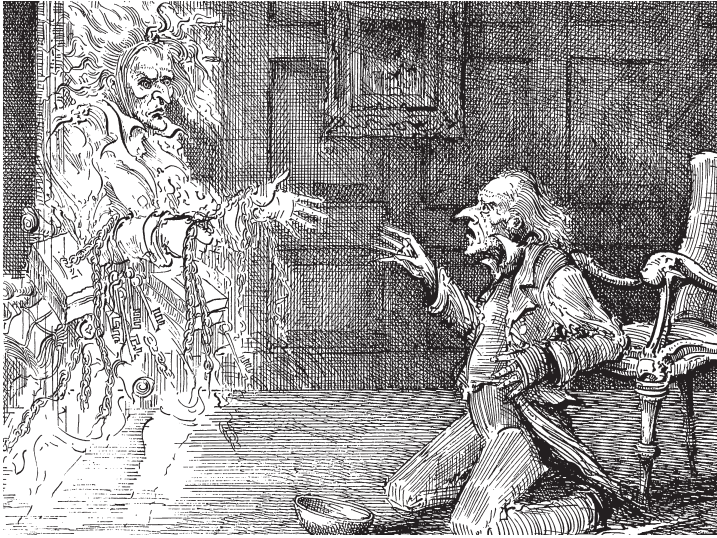
Scrooge looked around him, but could see no chain. ‘Jacob,’ he said, ‘please tell me more!’

‘I cannot help you much, Ebenezer! I cannot rest, I cannot stay anywhere for long. I have been dead for seven years and all that time I have been travelling on the wings of the wind! No peace, no rest for me in death, because I was never good or kind in life!’

‘But you were always a good man of business, Jacob,’ said Scrooge, who was now beginning to worry about his own life.

‘Business!’ cried the ghost miserably. ‘Why didn’t I think of *people* as my business? I thought only about making money, not about being kind and helpful to other people. Listen to me, Ebenezer! I am here tonight to warn you. You still have a chance to save yourself from what has happened to me. Three spirits will come to visit you: the first tomorrow at one o’clock, the second at the same time the next night, and the third at midnight the following night. You will not see me any more, and for your own peace after death, remember what I have told you!’

The spirit walked slowly backwards to the window, which began to open. When the ghost reached the window, it held up its hand, and Scrooge listened. He could hear a noise of sad crying in the air. The spirit began to cry, too,

*Marley's ghost*

*'Do you, Ebenezer Scrooge, recognize my chain?'*

and it moved out into the frosty, dark night to join the others. Scrooge ran to the window. Outside, the air was full of spirits, all wearing chains like Marley's ghost, all crying miserably as they realized, too late, the terrible mistakes that they had made in their lives.

Little by little, the spirits and their voices disappeared into the fog and the darkness, and the night was silent again. Scrooge closed the window, and checked his bedroom door. It was still locked. He started to say, 'Humbug!' but stopped suddenly. Perhaps because he was very tired, or because it was late, he went straight to bed, without taking off his clothes, and fell asleep immediately.