

A CHRISTMAS CAROL

by Charles Dickens

CHARACTERS:

Narrator

Scrooge

Nephew Fred

Gentleman Collecting Donations

Bob Cratchit

Jacob Marley

Ghost of Christmas Past

Fezziwig

Belle

Young Scrooge

Ghost of Christmas Present

Mrs. Cratchit

Ghost of Christmas Future

Businessman One

Businessman Two

Boy

Good-Humored Fellows

Tiny Tim

ACT ONE

NARRATOR: Old Marley was as dead as a door-nail. That must be distinctly understood or nothing wonderful can come of the story I am going to relate. A story that begins on Christmas Eve, where we find Marley's old partner, Ebenezer Scrooge, that squeezing, wrenching, grasping, scraping, clutching, covetous old sinner, sitting busy in his counting-house. His long-suffering clerk, Bob Cratchit, is copying letters in a cold and dismal little cell beyond. Scrooge's nephew, Fred, enters.

NEPHEW: A merry Christmas, uncle!

SCROOGE: Bah! Humbug!

NEPHEW: Christmas a humbug, uncle! You don't mean that, I am sure?

SCROOGE: I do. Merry Christmas?! What right have you to be merry? You're poor enough.

NEPHEW: Come, then, what right have you to be dismal? You're rich enough.

SCROOGE: Bah! Humbug!

NEPHEW: Uncle!

SCROOGE: Nephew, keep Christmas in your own way, and let me keep it in mine.

NEPHEW: Keep it! But you don't keep it.

SCROOGE: Let me leave it alone, then. Much good may it do you! Much good it has ever done you!

NEPHEW: There are many things from which I might have derived good, by which I have not profited, I dare say. Christmas among the rest. But I am sure that I have always thought of Christmas time as a good time; a kind, forgiving, charitable, pleasant time: the only time I know of, in the long calendar of the year, when men and women seem by one consent to open their shut-up hearts freely. And therefore, uncle, though it put nothing in my pocket, I believe that it has done me good, and will do me good; and I say, God bless it!

NARRATOR: Bob Cratchit, still in the tank, involuntarily applauds. Becoming immediately sensible of the impropriety, he quickly pokes the fire and extinguishes the last frail spark.

SCROOGE: Good afternoon.

NEPHEW: I'll keep my Christmas humor to the last. So, a Merry Christmas, uncle!

SCROOGE: GOOD Afternoon!

NEPHEW: And a Happy New Year!

SCROOGE: GOOD AFTERNOON!!!

NARRATOR: Bob Cratchit lets Fred out, and a gentleman comes in.

GENTLEMAN: At this festive season of the year, Mr. Scrooge, we should make some slight provision for the poor and destitute, who suffer greatly at the present time. What shall I put you down for?"

SCROOGE: Nothing!

GENTLEMAN: You wish to be anonymous?

SCROOGE: I wish to be left alone. Since you ask me what I wish, that is my answer. I support the prisons and workhouses; they cost enough and those who are badly off must go there.

GENTLEMAN: 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. Good afternoon!

NARRATOR: Seeing clearly that it would be useless to pursue his point, the gentleman withdrew. At length, the hour of shutting up the counting-house arrived. With an ill-will, Scrooge dismounted from his stool.

SCROOGE: You'll want all day to-morrow, I suppose?

BOB CRATCHIT: If quite convenient, Sir.

SCROOGE: It's not convenient and it's not fair that I must pay a day's wages for no work.

BOB CRATCHIT: It's only once a year, Mr. Scrooge.

SCROOGE: A poor excuse for picking a man's pocket every twenty-fifth of December. But I suppose you must have the whole day. Be here all the earlier the next morning!

BOB CRATCHIT: I will. I promise.

NARRATOR: Scrooge walked out with a growl. He took his melancholy dinner in his usual melancholy tavern, then went home. He put his key in the lock of his door and saw in the knocker not a knocker, but Marley's face.

SCROOGE: Marley?

NARRATOR: As Scrooge looked fixedly at this phenomenon, it was a knocker again. He was startled, but he turned the key sturdily, walked in, and lighted his candle. He looked cautiously at the back of the door, as if he half-expected to be terrified with the sight of Marley's pigtail sticking out into the hall. But there was nothing.

SCROOGE: Pooh, pooh!

NARRATOR: Closing the door with a bang, up the stairs Scrooge went. He put on his dressing-gown and slippers and his nightcap, and sat down before the very low fire to take his gruel. His glance happened upon a bell. It was with great astonishment, and with a strange dread, that, as he looked, he saw this bell begin to swing. (ding, ding, ding) Soon it rang out loudly. (DING, DING, DING!) This was succeeded by a clanking noise (clank) deep down below (clank) as if some person (clank) were dragging a heavy chain (clank). It came on through the heavy door (CLANK!!!).

SCROOGE: How now! What do you want with me?

MARLEY: Much!

SCROOGE: Who are you?

MARLEY: Ask me who I was.

SCROOGE: Who were you then?

MARLEY: In life I was your partner, Jacob Marley.

SCROOGE: Can you—can you sit down?

MARLEY: I can.

SCROOGE: Do it, then.

NARRATOR: The ghost sat down on the opposite side of the fireplace, as if he were quite used to it.

MARLEY: You don't believe in me.

SCROOGE: I don't.

MARLEY: Why do you doubt your senses?

SCROOGE: Because a little thing affects them. You may be an undigested bit of beef, a blot of mustard, a crumb of cheese, a fragment of an underdone potato. There's more of gravy than of grave about you, whatever you are!

NARRATOR: At this, the spirit raised a frightful cry and shook its chain with such a dismal and appalling noise, that Scrooge held on tight to his chair, to save himself from falling into a swoon.

MARLEY: [HOWLS]

SCROOGE: Mercy! Dreadful apparition, why do you trouble me?

MARLEY: It is required of every man that the spirit within him should walk abroad among his fellow men, and if that spirit goes not forth in life, it is condemned to do so after death. It is doomed to wander through the world and witness what it cannot share, but might have shared on earth, and turned to happiness!

NARRATOR: Again, the specter raised a cry, and shook its chain, and wrung its shadowing hands.

SCROOGE: You are fettered. Tell me why?

MARLEY: I wear the chain I forged in life. I made it link by link, and yard by yard; I girded it on of my own free will. Your chain was as heavy and as long as this seven Christmas Eves ago and you have laboured on it, since!

SCROOGE: Old Jacob Marley, speak comfort to me.

MARLEY: I have none to give. I cannot rest, I cannot stay, I cannot linger anywhere. In life my spirit never roved beyond the narrow limits of our money-changing hole; and weary journeys lie before me!

SCROOGE: But you were always a good man of business, Jacob.

MARLEY: Business! Mankind was my business. The common welfare was my business; charity, mercy, forbearance, and benevolence, were, all, my business. Hear me! I am here to-night to warn you that you have yet a chance and hope of escaping my fate. You will be haunted by Three Spirits. Expect the first tomorrow night, when the bell tolls One.

SCROOGE: Couldn't I take 'em all at once, and have it over, Jacob?

MARLEY: Expect the second on the next night at the same hour. The third, upon the next night, when the last stroke of Twelve has ceased to vibrate. Look to see me no more.

NARRATOR: Marley floated out through the window upon the bleak, dark night, and Scrooge went straight to bed, without undressing, and fell asleep on the instant.

ACT TWO

NARRATOR: Scrooge was awakened by a bright light and found himself face to face with a strange figure—its hair, which hung about its neck and down its back, was white as if with age; and yet the face had not a wrinkle in it, and the tenderest bloom was on the skin. It held a branch of fresh green holly in its hand and from the crown of its head there sprung a bright clear jet of light.

SCROOGE: Are you the Spirit, sir, whose coming was foretold to me?

PAST: I am!

SCROOGE: Who and what are you?

PAST: I am the Ghost of Christmas Past.

SCROOGE: Long past?

PAST: No. Your past.

NARRATOR: As the words were spoken, they passed through the wall, and stood in the busy thoroughfares of a city. It was made plain enough by the dressing of the shops that here, too, it was Christmas time. The Ghost stopped at a certain warehouse door, and asked Scrooge if he knew it.

SCROOGE: Know it! I apprenticed here!

NARRATOR: They went in. At sight of an old gentleman in a Welsh wig, sitting behind such a high desk that, if he had been two inches taller, he must have knocked his head against the ceiling, Scrooge cried in great excitement:

SCROOGE: Why, it's old Fezziwig! Bless his heart, it's Fezziwig, alive again!

NARRATOR: A living and moving picture of Scrooge's former self, a young man, came briskly in, accompanied by his fellow-prentice.

FEZZIWIG: Yo ho, my boys! No more work to-night. Christmas eve, Dick. Christmas, Ebenezer! Clear away, my lads, and let's have lots of room here!

EVERYONE SINGS: Deck the halls with boughs of holly, Fa la la la la, la la la la. / 'Tis the season to be jolly, Fa la la la la, la la la la. / Don we now our gay apparel, Fa la la, la la la, la la la. / Troll the ancient Yule tide carol, Fa la la la la, la la la la.

NARRATOR: Everyone drank and ate and danced to their hearts' content. During the whole of this time, Scrooge had acted like a man out of his wits. His heart and soul were in the scene, and with his former self. He corroborated everything, remembered everything, enjoyed everything, and underwent the strangest agitation.

PAST: A small matter to make these silly folks so full of gratitude. He has spent but a few pounds of your money, —three or four perhaps. Is that so much that he deserves this praise?

SCROOGE: It isn't that, Spirit. He has the power to render us happy or unhappy; to make our service a pleasure or a toil. The happiness he gives is quite as great as if it cost a fortune.

NARRATOR: Scrooge and the Ghost again stood side by side in the open air.

PAST: My time grows short. Quick!

NARRATOR: Again, Scrooge saw himself. He was older now; a man in the prime of life. His face had not the harsh and rigid lines of later years; but it had begun to wear the signs of care and avarice. A young woman sat beside him, with tears in her eyes.

BELLE: It matters little. To you, very little. Another idol has displaced me; and if it can cheer and comfort you in time to come, as I would have tried to do, I have no just cause to grieve.

YOUNG SCROOGE: What idol has displaced you?

BELLE: A golden one. Our contract is an old one. It was made when we were both poor, and content to be so, until, in good season, we could improve our worldly fortune by our patient industry. You are changed.

YOUNG SCROOGE: Have I ever sought release?

BELLE: In words, no. Never.

YOUNG SCROOGE: In what, then?

BELLE: In a changed nature; in an altered spirit. In everything that made my love of any worth or value in your sight. If this had never been between us, tell me, would you seek me out and try to win me now? Ah, no!

YOUNG SCROOGE: You think not.

BELLE: I would gladly think otherwise if I could. I release you with a full heart, for the love of him you once were.

SCROOGE: Spirit! Show me no more! Conduct me home. Why do you delight to torture me?

NARRATOR: Everything went black and Scrooge found himself in his own bedroom. He had barely time to reel to bed before he sank into a heavy sleep.

EVERYONE SINGS: It came upon the midnight clear, That glorious song of old, / From angels bending near the earth, To touch their harps of gold: / "Peace on the earth, goodwill to men, From heaven's all-gracious King." / The world in solemn stillness lay, To hear the angels sing.

ACT THREE

NARRATOR: Marley's ghost had warned Scrooge that another spirit would haunt him, and so, when he awoke in the middle of a prodigiously tough snore, he was ready for a good broad field of strange appearances, and nothing between a baby and a rhinoceros would have astonished him very much. He soon realized that a light was seeping into his room and so he got up softly and shuffled in his slippers to the door.

GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PRESENT: Scrooge!

NARRATOR: In easy state upon a throne of turkeys, geese, game, poultry, mince-pies, plum-puddings, cherry-cheeked apples, and seething bowls of punch, there sat a jolly Giant, glorious to see, who bore a glowing torch, in shape not unlike Plenty's horn, and held it up to shed its light on Scrooge as he came peeping around the door.

PRESENT: Come in! Come in! and know me better, man! I am the Ghost of Christmas Present. Look upon me! You have never seen the like of me before! Touch my robe!

NARRATOR: Scrooge did as he was told, and held it fast. The room and its contents all vanished instantly, and they stood on the threshold of Bob Cratchit's dwelling, where his wife and children were preparing the Christmas feast.

MRS. CRATCHIT: What has ever got your precious father then? And your brother Tiny Tim!

PETER: There's father coming!

NARRATOR: In came Bob Cratchit with Tiny Tim upon his shoulder. Alas for Tiny Tim, he bore a little crutch, and had his limbs supported by an iron frame!

MRS. CRATCHIT: And how did little Tim behave?

BOB CRATCHIT: As good as gold and better. Somehow he gets thoughtful, sitting by himself so much, and thinks the strangest things you ever heard. He told me, coming home, that he hoped the people saw him in the church, because he was a cripple, and it might be pleasant to them to remember, upon Christmas day, who made lame beggars walk and blind men see.

NARRATOR: The family sat down to their feast and there was much laughter and enjoyment despite the meager portions. Afterwards, they all drew round the hearth. Tiny Tim sat very close to his father's side, upon his little stool. Bob held his withered little hand in his, as if he wished to keep him by his side, and dreaded that he might be taken from him.

SCROOGE: Spirit, tell me if Tiny Tim will live.

PRESENT: I see a vacant seat and a crutch without an owner.

SCROOGE: No, no, kind Spirit! Say he will be spared.

PRESENT: If these shadows remain unaltered by the Future, none other of my race will find him here. What then? If he be like to die, he had better do it, and decrease the surplus population.

SCROOGE: I see something strange, and not belonging to yourself, protruding from your skirts. Is it a foot or a claw?

PRESENT: It might be a claw, for the flesh there is upon it. Look here!

NARRATOR: From the foldings of its robe, the spirit brought two children; wretched, abject, frightful, hideous, miserable. They knelt down at its feet, and clung upon the outside of the garment.

SCROOGE: Spirit! Are they yours?

PRESENT: They are Man's. And they cling to me, appealing from their fathers. This boy is Ignorance. This girl is Want. Beware them both, but most of all beware this boy, for on his brow I see that written which is Doom, unless the writing be erased.

SCROOGE: Have they no refuge or resource?

PRESENT: Are there no prisons? Are there no workhouses?

NARRATOR: The bell struck twelve. Scrooge looked about him for the Ghost, and saw it not. Lifting up his eyes, he beheld a solemn Phantom, draped and hooded, coming like a mist along the ground towards him.

ACT FOUR

SCROOGE: Ghost of the Future! I fear you more than any spectre I have seen. Will you not speak to me?

NARRATOR: It gave him no reply. The hand was pointed straight before them.

SCROOGE: Lead on! Lead on! The night is waning fast, and it is precious time to me, I know. Lead on, Spirit!

NARRATOR: They scarcely seemed to enter the city; for the city rather seemed to spring up about them. But there they were in the heart of it amongst the merchants.

The Spirit stopped beside one little knot of businessmen. Observing that the hand was pointed to them, Scrooge advanced to listen to their talk.

BUSINESSMAN ONE: I don't know much about it either way. I only know he's dead.

BUSINESSMAN TWO: What has he done with his money?

BUSINESSMAN ONE: I haven't heard. Left it to his company, perhaps. He hasn't left it to me. That's all I know.

BUSINESSMAN TWO: It's likely to be a very cheap funeral, for upon my life, I don't know of anybody to go to it.

NARRATOR: The scene had changed, and now he almost touched a bare, uncurtained bed. A pale light, rising in the outer air, fell straight upon this bed; and on it, unwatched, unwept, uncared for, was the body of a man. The Phantom's steady hand pointed to the covered head.

SCROOGE: I understand you and I would uncover it if I could, but I have not the power, Spirit!

NARRATOR: The Ghost conducted him to poor Bob Cratchit's house, and found the mother and the children seated round the fire. Quiet. Very quiet. The noisy little Cratchits were as still as statues in one corner, and sat looking up at Peter, who had a book before him. The mother and her daughters were engaged in needle-work. But surely they were very quiet! The mother laid her work upon the table, and put her hand up to her face.

MRS. CRATCHIT: The color hurts my eyes. They're better now again. It makes them weak by candle-light; and I wouldn't show weak eyes to your father when he comes home, for the world. It must be near his time.

PETER: Past it rather. But I think he has walked a little slower than he used these few last evenings, Mother.

MRS. CRATCHIT: I have known him walk with—I have known him walk with Tiny Tim upon his shoulder, very fast indeed. But he was very light to carry, and his father loved him so, that it was no trouble—no trouble. And there is your father at the door!

NARRATOR: She hurried out to meet him; and Bob came in. His tea was ready for him, and they all tried who should help him to it most. Bob spoke pleasantly to all the family. He looked at the work upon the table, and praised Mrs. Cratchit and the girls.

MRS. CRATCHIT: You went to-day, then, Robert?

BOB CRATCHIT: Yes, my dear, I wish you could have gone. It would have done you good to see how green a place it is. But you'll see it often. I promised him that I would walk there on a Sunday. My little, little child! My little child!

SCROOGE: Spectre, something informs me that our parting moment is at hand. I know it, but I know not how. Tell me what man that was whom we saw lying dead?

NARRATOR: The Ghost of Christmas Yet To Come conveyed him to a dismal, wretched, ruinous churchyard.

The Spirit stood among the graves, and pointed down to One. Scrooge advanced towards it, trembling, and following the finger, read upon the stone of the neglected grave his own name, —EBENEZER SCROOGE.

SCROOGE: Am I that man who lay upon the bed?

NARRATOR: The finger pointed from the grave to him and back again.

SCROOGE: No, Spirit! O no, no! Spirit! hear me! I am not the man I was. Why show me this, if I am past all hope? Assure me that I yet may change these shadows you have shown me by an altered life. I will honor Christmas in my heart, and try to keep it all the year. O, tell me I may sponge away the writing on this stone!

NARRATOR: Holding up his hands in one last prayer to have his fate reversed, he saw an alteration in the Phantom's hood and dress. It shrank, collapsed, and dwindled down into a bedpost. Yes, and the bedpost was his own. The bed was his own, the room was his own. Best and happiest of all, the Time before him was his own, to make amends in! Running to the window, he opened it, and put out his head.

SCROOGE: What's to-day?

BOY: To-day! Why, CHRISTMAS DAY!

SCROOGE: It's Christmas day! I haven't missed it. Hallo, my fine fellow!

BOY: Hallo!

SCROOGE: Do you know the Poulterer's, in the next street but one, at the corner?

BOY: I should hope I did.

SCROOGE: An intelligent boy! A remarkable boy! Do you know whether they've sold the prize Turkey that was hanging up there? Not the little prize Turkey, —the big one?

BOY: What, the one as big as me?

SCROOGE: What a delightful boy! It's a pleasure to talk to him. Yes, my buck!

BOY: It's hanging there now.

SCROOGE: Is it? Go and buy it, and tell 'em to bring it here, that I may give them the direction where to take it. Come back with the man, and I'll give you a shilling. Come back with him in less than five minutes, and I'll give you half a crown!

NARRATOR: The boy was off like a shot.

SCROOGE: I'll send it to Bob Cratchit's! He sha'n't know who sends it. It's twice the size of Tiny Tim.

NARRATOR: Scrooge dressed himself "all in his best," and at last got out into the streets. The people were by this time pouring forth, and, walking with his hands behind him, Scrooge regarded every one with a delightful smile. He looked so irresistibly pleasant, in a word, that three or four good-humored fellows said . . .

GOOD-HUMORED FELLOWS: Good morning, sir! A merry Christmas to you!

NARRATOR: Scrooge was early at the office next morning. If he could only be there first, and catch Bob Cratchit coming late! The clock struck nine. No Bob. A quarter past. No Bob. Bob was full eighteen minutes and a half behind his time. Bob's hat was off, before he opened the door. He was on his stool in a jiffy; driving away with his pen, as if he were trying to overtake nine o'clock.

SCROOGE: Hallo! What do you mean by coming here at this time of day?

BOB CRATCHIT: I am very sorry, sir. I am behind my time.

SCROOGE: You are? Yes. I think you are. Step this way, if you please. Now, I tell you what my friend. I am not going to stand for this sort of thing any longer. And therefore, I am about to raise your salary! A merry Christmas, Bob! A merrier Christmas, Bob, my good fellow, than I have given you for many a year! I'll raise your salary, and endeavor to assist your struggling family.

NARRATOR: Scrooge was better than his word. He did it all, and infinitely more; and to Tiny Tim, who did NOT die, he was a second father. He became as good a friend, as good a master, and as good a man as the good old city knew. And it was always said of him, that he knew how to keep Christmas well. May that be truly said of us, and all of us.

And so, as Tiny Tim observed . . .

TINY TIM: . . . God Bless Us, Every One!

EVERYONE SINGS: God rest ye merry, gentlemen, let nothing you dismay / For Jesus Christ our savior was born on Christmas Day / To save us all from Satan's power when we were gone astray / Oh, tidings of comfort and joy, comfort and joy / Oh, tidings of comfort and joy!