

AN ABRIDGED VERSION OF

A Christmas Carol

A Ghost Story of Christmas

BY CHARLES DICKENS



This project was designed and implemented
by the creative team at

the third house
INTERACTIVE MULTIMEDIA

A CHRISTMAS CAROL

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A CHRISTMAS CAROL

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STAVE ONE

Cast of Characters

Ghost of Jacob Marley:

Mr. Scrooge:

Scrooge's nephew (Fred):

Gentleman:

MARLEY'S GHOST

Marley was dead, to begin with. There is no doubt whatever about that. The register of his burial was signed by the clergyman, the clerk, the undertaker, and the chief mourner. Old Marley was as dead as a door-nail.

Mind! I don't mean to say that I know, of my own knowledge, what there is particularly dead about a door-nail. But the wisdom of our ancestors is in the simile; and my unhallowed hands shall not disturb it

Scrooge never painted out Old Marley's name. There it stood, years afterwards, above the warehouse door Scrooge and Marley; he answered to both names. It was all the same to him.

Oh! but he was a tight-fisted hand at the grindstone, Scrooge! a squeezing, covetous, old sinner! Hard and sharp as flint, and solitary as an oyster. The cold within him froze his old features, and didn't thaw by one degree at Christmas.

Nobody ever stopped him in the street to say, "My dear Scrooge, how are you?" No beggars implored him to bestow a trifle, no children asked him what it was o'clock.

One Christmas Eve, old Scrooge sat busy in his counting-house. It was cold, bleak, biting weather. The City clocks had only just gone three, but it was quite dark already.

The door of Scrooge's counting-house was open, that he might keep his eye upon his clerk. Scrooge had a very small fire, but the clerk's fire was so very much smaller. The clerk put on his white comforter, and tried to warm himself at the candle; he failed.

Both men started at the cry of a cheerful voice. It was the voice of Scrooge's nephew.

NEPHEW "A merry Christmas, uncle! God save you!"

SCROOGE "Bah! Humbug!"

This nephew of Scrooge's, was all in a glow; his face was ruddy and handsome; and his eyes sparkled.

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

SCROOGE "I do. What reason 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 "Don't be cross, uncle!"

SCROOGE "What else can I be, when I live in such a world of fools as this? Merry Christmas!

NEPHEW "Uncle!"

SCROOGE "Nephew! Keep Christmas in your own way, and let me keep it in mine."

NEPHEW "But you don't keep it."

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

NEPHEW "I have always thought of Christmas-time as a good time; a kind, forgiving, charitable, pleasant time; and therefore, uncle, though it has never put a scrap of gold or silver in my pocket, I say, God bless it!"

The clerk in front of his little fire involuntarily applauded. Scrooge turned on him:

SCROOGE "Let me hear another sound from you and you'll keep your Christmas by losing your situation!"

NEPHEW "Don't be angry, uncle. Come! Dine with us to-morrow."

SCROOGE "Good afternoon."

NEPHEW "I want nothing from you; why cannot we be friends?"

SCROOGE "Good afternoon!"

NEPHEW "I am sorry, with all my heart, but I'll keep my Christmas humour to the last. So A Merry Christmas, Uncle! And A Happy New Year!"

SCROOGE "Good afternoon!"

His nephew stopped at the outer door to bestow the greetings of the season on the clerk, who, returned them cordially and, in letting Scrooge's nephew out; let another person in.

He was a portly gentlemen who now stood, with his hat off, in Scrooge's office. Referring to his list, he said,

GENTLEMAN "Scrooge and Marley's, I believe. Have I the pleasure of addressing Mr. Scrooge, or Mr. Marley?"

SCROOGE "Mr. Marley, died seven years ago, this very night."

GENTLEMAN "We have no doubt his liberality is well represented by his surviving partner.

At this festive season of the year, Mr. Scrooge, it is more than usually desirable that we should make some slight provision for the poor and destitute, who are in want of common comforts, sir."

SCROOGE "Are there no prisons?"

GENTLEMAN "Plenty of prisons."

SCROOGE "And the Union workhouses? Are they still in operation?"

GENTLEMAN "They are. I wish I could say they were not."

SCROOGE "Oh! I was afraid, from what you said at first, that something had occurred to stop them in their useful course."

GENTLEMAN "A few of us are endeavouring to raise a fund to buy the Poor some meat and drink, and means of warmth. What shall I put you down for?"

SCROOGE "Nothing!"

GENTLEMAN "You wish to be anonymous?"

SCROOGE "I wish to be left alone. I help to support the establishments that I have mentioned; and those who are badly off must go there."

GENTLEMAN "Many would rather die."

SCROOGE "If they would rather die, they had better do it, and decrease the surplus population. Good afternoon, gentlemen!"

The gentleman withdrew.

At length the hour of shutting up the counting-house arrived. With an ill-will Scrooge dismounted from his stool, and tacitly admitted the fact to the expectant clerk .

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

The clerk smiled faintly and observed that it was only once a year.

SCROOGE "A poor excuse for picking a man's pocket every twenty-fifth of December! Be here all the earlier next morning,"

Scrooge, buttoned his great-coat to the chin and walked out with a growl.

The office was closed in a twinkling, and the clerk, with the long ends of his white comforter dangling below his waist (for he boasted no great-coat), ran home to Camden Town to play at blindman's buff.

Scrooge took his melancholy dinner in his usual melancholy tavern; and went home to bed. He lived in chambers which had once belonged to his deceased partner. They were a gloomy suite of rooms, old and dreary; for nobody lived in it but Scrooge, the other rooms being all let out as offices. The yard was so dark that even Scrooge was fain to grope with his hands.

Now, it is a fact that there was nothing at all particular about the knocker on the door, except that it was very large. It is also a fact that Scrooge had seen it, night and morning, during his whole residence in that place. Let it also be borne in mind that Scrooge had not bestowed one thought on Marley since his last mention of him that afternoon. And let any man explain to me, if he can, how it happened that Scrooge, having his key in the lock of the door, saw in the knocker, not a knocker, but Marley's face.

Marley's face. It had a dismal light about it, like a bad lobster in a dark cellar. It was not angry or ferocious, but looked at Scrooge as Marley used to look with ghostly spectacles turned up on its ghostly forehead.

To say that he was not startled would be untrue. But he put his hand upon the key, turned it sturdily, walked in, and lighted his candle.

Before he shut his heavy door he walked through his rooms to see that all was right. Sitting-room, bedroom, lumber-room. All as they should be. Nobody under the table, nobody under the sofa; a small fire in the grate.

It was a very low fire indeed. He was obliged to sit close to it, before he could extract the least sensation of warmth. The fire-place was an old one, built long ago, and paved all round with quaint Dutch tiles, designed to illustrate the Scriptures and yet that face of Marley, seven years dead, came like the ancient Prophet's rod, and swallowed up the whole; a copy of old Marley's head on every tile.

Scrooge; walked across the room and said aloud,

SCROOGE "Humbug!"

After several turns he sat down again and his glance happened to rest upon a bell that hung in the room. As he looked, he saw this bell begin to swing. It swung so softly in the outset that it scarcely made a sound; but soon it rang out loudly, and so did every bell in the house before they ceased; as they had begun, together. The bells were succeeded by a clanking noise below, as if some person were dragging a heavy chain over the casks in the wine merchant's cellar.

The cellar door flew open, and then he heard the noise coming up the stairs.

SCROOGE "It's humbug still! I won't believe it."

His colour changed, though, when it came on through the heavy door, and passed into the room before his eyes.

The same face the very same. Marley. The chain he drew was clasped about his middle. It was long, and wound about him like a tail.

SCROOGE (*caustic and cold*) "How now! What do you want with me?"

GHOST "Much!"

It was Marley's voice, no doubt about it.

SCROOGE "Who are you?"

GHOST "In life I was your partner, Jacob Marley."
"You don't believe in me."

SCROOGE "I don't."

GHOST "Why do you doubt your senses?"

SCROOGE "Because, you may be an undigested bit of beef. There's more of gravy than of grave about you, whatever you are!"

Scrooge was not much in the habit of cracking jokes. The truth is, that he tried to be smart, as a means of keeping down his own terror. Then how much greater was his horror when the phantom, in taking off the bandage round his head as if it were too warm to wear indoors, its lower jaw dropped down upon its breast!

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

GHOST "Do you believe in me or not?"

SCROOGE "I do. But why do spirits walk the earth, and why do they come to me?"

GHOST "It is required of every man, that the spirit within him should walk 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 might have turned to happiness!"

The spectre raised a cry, and shook its chain and wrung its shadowy hands. Scrooge trembled.

SCROOGE "You are fettered. Tell me why?"

GHOST "I wear the chain I forged in life. Or would you know the weight and length of the coil you bear yourself?"

Scrooge trembled more and more. He glanced about him on the floor, but he could see nothing.

SCROOGE "Jacob! Speak comfort to me, Jacob!"

GHOST "I have none to give. It comes from other regions, Ebenezer Scrooge. Nor can I stay, I cannot linger anywhere. My spirit never walked beyond our counting-house in life; and weary journeys lie before me!"

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

GHOST "Business! Mankind was my business. The common welfare was my business; charity, mercy, forbearance, and benevolence were, all, my business. My trade was but a drop of water in the ocean of my business!"

GHOST "Hear me! My time is nearly gone."

SCROOGE "I will. But don't be hard upon me, Jacob! Pray!"

GHOST "I am here to-night to warn you, you have yet a chance and hope of escaping my fate, Ebenezer."

SCROOGE "You were always a good friend to me. Thankee!"

GHOST "You will be haunted by Three Spirits."

SCROOGE (*faltering voice*) "Is that the chance and hope you mentioned, Jacob?"

GHOST "It is."

SCROOGE "I think I'd rather not."

GHOST "Without their visits, you cannot hope to shun the path I tread. Expect the first tomorrow when the bell tolls One."

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

GHOST "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; and look, for your own sake, that you remember what has passed between us!"

When it had said these words, the spectre took its wrapper from the table, and bound it round its head as before.

The apparition walked backward from him; and beckoned Scrooge to approach. When they were within two paces of each other, Marley's Ghost held up its hand, warning him to come no nearer. Scrooge stopped in fear; for he became sensible of confused noises

in the air; sounds of lamentation and regret. The spectre, after listening for a moment, joined in the mournful dirge; and floated out upon the bleak, dark night.

The air was filled with phantoms, wandering hither and thither, and moaning as they went. Every one of them wore chains like Marley's Ghost; none were free. One old ghost cried piteously at being unable to assist a wretched woman with an infant. The misery with them all was, clearly, that they had lost the power to interfere, for good, in human matters.

Whereupon these creatures faded into mist; Scrooge closed the window and examined the door. It was double locked, as he had locked it with his own hands, and the bolts were undisturbed. He tried to say "Humbug!" but being, much in need of repose, went straight to bed without undressing.

STAVE TWO

Cast of Characters

Scrooge

Ghost

Scrooge sister (Fan)

Fezziwig

Belle (Scrooge's fiancée)

Another Man (eventual husband to Belle)

THE SECOND OF THE THREE SPIRITS

When Scrooge awoke it was so dark, that he could scarcely distinguish the transparent window from the opaque walls of his chamber. The chimes of a neighbouring church struck the four quarters so he listened for the hour.

To his great astonishment, the heavy bell went on from six to seven, and from seven to eight, and regularly up to twelve; then stopped.

SCROOGE "Twelve! It was past two when I went to bed. The clock is wrong. An icicle must have got into the works. Twelve! Why, it isn't possible that I can have slept through a whole day and far into another night."

He scrambled out of bed, and groped his way to the window. It was still very foggy and extremely cold, and there was no noise of people running to and fro, as there would have been if night had beaten off bright day, and taken possession of the world.

Scrooge thought it over and over, and could make nothing of it. The more he thought, the more perplexed he was; and, the more he endeavoured not to think, the more he thought.

Marley's Ghost bothered him exceedingly.

SCROOGE "Was it a dream or not?"

Scrooge lay in this state until the chime had gone three quarters more, when he remembered, that the Ghost had warned him of a visitation when the bell tolled one. He

resolved to lie awake until the hour was passed; and, considering that he could no more go to sleep than go to Heaven, this was, perhaps, the wisest resolution in his power.

"Ding, dong!"

SCROOGE "A quarter past,"

"Ding, dong!"

SCROOGE "Half past,"

"Ding, dong!"

SCROOGE "A quarter to it,"

"Ding, dong!"

SCROOGE "The hour itself, and nothing else!"

He spoke before the hour bell sounded, which it now did with a deep, dull, hollow, melancholy ONE. Light flashed up in the room upon the instant, and the curtains of his bed were drawn aside, I tell you, by a hand, and Scrooge, starting up found himself face to face with the unearthly visitor who drew them. It was a strange figure--like a child: yet not so like a child as like an old man. 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 wore a tunic of the purest white; and round its waist was bound a lustrous belt, the sheen of which was beautiful. But the strangest thing about it was, that from the crown of its head there sprung a bright clear jet of light, so

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

GHOST "I am!" (*The voice was soft and gentle.*)

SCROOGE "Who and what are you?"

GHOST "I am the Ghost of Christmas Past."

SCROOGE "Long Past?"

GHOST "No. Your past."

SCROOGE "What business brings you here?"

GHOST "Your welfare!"

Scrooge could not help thinking that a night of unbroken rest would have been more conducive to that end. The Spirit must have heard him thinking, for it said immediately:

GHOST "Your reclamation, then. Take heed! Rise! and walk with me!"

The grasp, though gentle as a woman's hand, was not to be resisted. He rose: but, finding that the Spirit made towards the window, clasped its robe in supplication.

SCROOGE "I am a mortal, and liable to fall."

GHOST "Bear but a touch of my hand there, and you shall be upheld in more than this!"

As the words were spoken, they passed through the wall, and stood upon an open country road, with fields on either hand. It was a clear, cold, winter day, with the snow upon the ground.

SCROOGE "Good Heaven! I was bred in this place. I was a boy here!"

GHOST "Your lip is trembling. And what is that upon your cheek?"

SCROOGE "It is a pimple; lead me where you would."

GHOST "You recollect the way?"

SCROOGE "Remember it! I could walk it blindfold."

GHOST "Strange to have forgotten it for so many years! Let us go on."

They walked along the road, Scrooge recognising every gate, and post, and tree, until a little market-town appeared in the distance. Some shaggy ponies were trotting towards them with boys upon their backs, who called to other boys in country carts. All these boys were in great spirits, and shouted to each other, until the broad fields were so full of merry music, that the crisp air laughed to hear it.

GHOST "These are but shadows of the things that have been. They have no consciousness of us."

SCROOGE "Spirit. I know them...each and every one. Why do I rejoice to see them? Why does my eye glisten and my heart leap up? Why am I filled with gladness when they give each other Merry Christmas?"

GHOST "The school is not quite deserted. A solitary child, neglected by his friends, is left there still."

SCROOGE "I know it." (*And he sobbed*)

They left the high-road and soon approached a mansion of dull red brick. Entering, and glancing through the open doors of many rooms, they found them poorly furnished, cold, and vast. There was a chilly bareness in the place, which associated itself with not too much to eat.

They went, across the hall, to a door at the back of the house. It opened before them, and disclosed a long, bare, melancholy room, made barer still by lines of plain desks. At one of these a lonely boy was reading near a feeble fire; and Scrooge sat down, and wept to see his poor forgotten self as he had used to be.

The Spirit touched him on the arm, and pointed to his younger self, intent upon his reading.

SCROOGE "Why, it's Ali Baba! It's dear old honest Ali Baba! Yes, yes, I know. One Christmas-time when I was left here all alone, he did come. There's the Parrot! Green body and yellow tail, with a thing like a lettuce growing out of the top of his head; there he is! Poor Robin Crusoe he called him, when he came home again after sailing round the island. 'Poor Robin Crusoe, where have you been, Robin Crusoe?'

"I wish, but it's too late now."

GHOST "What is the matter?"

SCROOGE "Nothing, Nothing. There was a boy singing a Christmas Carol at my door last night. I should like to have given him something: that's all."

GHOST "Let us see another Christmas!"

Scrooge's former self grew larger and the room became a little darker and more dirty. There he was, alone again, when all the other boys had gone home for the jolly holidays.

He was not reading now, but walking up and down despairingly. Scrooge glanced anxiously towards the door. It opened; and a little girl, much younger than the boy, came darting in, and, put her arms about his neck, and often kissed him.

SCROOGE SISTER "Dear, dear brother. I have come to bring you home, dear brother!" (*and bending down to laugh.*) "To bring you home! Home for good and all. Home for ever and ever. Father is so much kinder than he used to be, that home's like Heaven! He spoke so gently to me one dear night when I was going to bed, that I was not afraid to ask him once more if you might come home; and he said Yes, you should; and sent me in a coach to bring you. And you're never to come back here; but we're to be together all the Christmas long, and have the merriest time in all the world."

She clapped her hands and laughed and stood on tiptoe to embrace him. Then she began to drag him, in her childish eagerness, towards the door.

SCROOGE "She was quite a woman, little Fan!"

GHOST "Always a delicate creature, whom a breath might have withered. But she had a large heart! She died a woman and had, as I think, children."

SCROOGE "One child,"

GHOST "True. Your nephew!"

SCROOGE "Yes."

Although they had but that moment left the school behind them, they were now in the busy thoroughfares of a city. Here, too, it was Christmas-time again; but it was evening, and the streets were lighted up.

The Ghost stopped.

GHOST Do you know this warehouse?

SCROOGE "Know it! Was I apprenticed here?"

They went in. At sight of an old gentleman in a Welsh wig, sitting behind such a high desk, Scrooge cried in great excitement:

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

Old Fezziwig laid down his pen, and looked up at the clock, which pointed to the hour of seven. He rubbed his hands and called out, in a comfortable, oily, rich, fat, jovial voice:

FEZZIWIG "Yo ho, there! Ebenezer! Dick!"

Scrooge's former self, who, now grown a young man, came briskly in, accompanied by his fellow-'prentice.

SCROOGE "Dick Wilkins, to be sure!"

FEZZIWIG "Yo ho, my boys! No more work to-night. Christmas-eve, Dick. Christmas, Ebenezer! Let's have the shutters up, before a man can say Jack Robinson!"

You wouldn't believe how those two fellows went at it! They charged into the street with the shutters--one, two, three--had 'em up in their places--four, five, six--barred 'em and pinned 'em--seven, eight, nine--and came back before you could have got to twelve, panting like race-horses.

FEZZIWIG "Hilli-ho! Clear away, my lads, and let's have lots of room here! Hilli-ho, Dick! Chirrup, Ebenezer!"

In came a fiddler with a music-book and tuned like fifty stomachaches. In came Mrs. Fezziwig, one vast substantial smile. In came the three Miss Fezziwigs, beaming and lovable. In came the six young followers whose hearts they broke. In came all the young men and women employed in the business, the housemaid, the baker, the cook, and the milkman. In came the boy from over the way; trying to hide himself behind the girl from next door. Some came shyly, some boldly, pushing, pulling; any how and every how. Away they all went; round and round in various stages of affectionate grouping. Old Fezziwig, clapping his hands cried out,

FEZZIWIG "Well done"

And the fiddler plunged his hot face into a pot of porter, especially provided for that purpose.

There were more dances, and there was cake, and there was a great piece of Cold Roast, and there was a great piece of Cold Boiled, and there were mince-pies, and plenty of beer. But the great effect of the evening came when old Fezziwig stood out to dance with Mrs. Fezziwig.

When the clock struck eleven, this domestic ball broke up. Mr. and Mrs. Fezziwig took their stations, one on either side the door, and, shaking hands with every person individually as he or she went out, wished him or her a Merry Christmas.

During the whole of this time Scrooge's heart and soul were in the scene, with his former self. It was not until now, that he remembered the Ghost.

GHOST "A small matter, to make these silly folks so full of gratitude."

SCROOGE "Small!"

GHOST "Why! Is it not? He has spent but a few pounds 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 light or burdensome; a pleasure or a toil. The happiness he gives is quite as great as if it cost a fortune."

He felt the Spirit's glance, and stopped.

GHOST "What is the matter?"

SCROOGE "Nothing particular,"

GHOST "Something, I think?"

SCROOGE "No, no. I should like to be able to say a word or two to my clerk just now. That's all."

GHOST "My time grows short. Quick!"

The words produced an immediate effect, for again Scrooge saw himself. He was older now; a man in the prime of life. His face had begun to wear the signs of care and avarice. There was an eager, greedy, restless motion in the eye.

He was not alone, but sat by the side of a fair young girl in a mourning dress: in whose eyes there were tears, which sparkled in the light that shone out of the Ghost of Christmas Past.

BELLE "It matters little. To you, very little. Another idol has displaced me; a golden one. I have seen your nobler aspirations fall off one by one, until the master passion, Gain, engrosses you. 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."

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. When it was made you were another man. If this had never been between us, tell me, would you seek

me out and try to win me now? Ah, no! Your own feeling tells you that you were not what you are. I am. It is enough that I have thought of it, and can release you with a full heart, for the love of him you once were. May you be happy in the life you have chosen!"

She left him, and they parted.

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

GHOST "One shadow more!"

SCROOGE "No more! No more! I don't wish to see it. Show me no more!"

But the relentless Ghost pinioned him in both his arms, and forced him to observe what happened next.

They were in another scene and place; a room, not very large, but full of comfort. Near to the winter fire he saw her again, now a comely matron, sitting opposite her daughter. The noise in this room was perfectly tumultuous, for there were more children there than Scrooge could count; and, every child was conducting itself like forty. The consequences were uproarious beyond belief; but no one seemed to care; on the contrary, the mother and daughter laughed heartily, and enjoyed it very much.

But now a knocking at the door was heard, and she, was borne towards it by the boisterous group, just in time to greet the father, who came home attended by a man laden with Christmas toys and presents. The shouts of wonder and delight! The joy, and gratitude, and ecstasy!

By degrees, the children and their emotions got out of the parlour, and, by one stair at a time, up to where they went to bed, and so subsided.

And now Scrooge looked on more attentively than ever, when the master of the house, sat down with his daughter and her mother at his own fireside; and when he thought that such a creature, might have called him father, his sight grew very dim indeed.

ANOTHER MAN "Belle, I saw an old friend of yours this afternoon."

BELLE "Who was it?"

ANOTHER MAN "Mr. Scrooge it was. I passed his office window; and he had a candle inside, I could scarcely help seeing him. His partner lies upon the point of death, I hear; and there he sat alone. Quite alone in the world, I do believe."

SCROOGE "Spirit! remove me from this place."

GHOST "I told you these were shadows of the things that have been. That they are what they are, do not blame me!"

SCROOGE "Remove me! I cannot bear it! Leave me! Take me back! Haunt me no longer!"

In the struggle--if that can be called a struggle, the Ghost, with no visible resistance on its own part, was undisturbed by any effort of its adversary.

Scrooge was conscious of being exhausted, and had barely time to reel to bed before he sank into a heavy sleep.

STAVE THREE

Cast of Characters

Ghost of Christmas Present: Scrooge's nephew (Fred):
Mr. Scrooge: Scrooge's niece (by marriage):
Mr. Bob Cratchit:
Mrs. Cratchit:
Two young Cratchits:
Tiny Tim:

THE SECOND OF THE THREE SPIRITS

Scrooge awakened in the middle of a prodigiously tough snore, and knew without a doubt that the bell was again upon the stroke of One.

Now, when the bell struck One, and no shape appeared, he was taken with a violent fit of trembling. Five minutes, ten minutes, a quarter of an hour went by, yet nothing came but a blaze of ruddy light which streamed upon his bed; and, was more alarming than a dozen ghosts. He began to think that the source of this ghostly light might be in the adjoining room. He got up softly, and shuffled to the door.

A strange voice bade him enter. It was his own room. But the walls and ceiling were hung with living green; and such a mighty blaze went roaring up the chimney as that hearth had never known. In easy state upon his couch there sat a jolly Giant who bore a glowing torch and held it up, high up, to shed its light on Scrooge as he came peeping round the door.

GHOST "Come in! and know me better, man!
I am the Ghost of Christmas Present. Look upon me!"

Scrooge did so. It was clothed in one simple deep green robe, bordered with white fur. Its feet were bare; and on its head it wore no covering other than a holly wreath set with shining icicles. Its dark brown curls were long and free; free as its sparkling eye, its cheery voice and its joyful air. Girded round its middle was an antique scabbard; but no sword was in it.

GHOST "You have never seen the like of me before!"

SCROOGE "Never."

GHOST "You have never walked forth with the younger members of my family?"

SCROOGE "I don't think I have.

Spirit, conduct me where you will. I went forth last night on compulsion, and I learnt a lesson which is working now. To-night, if you have aught to teach me, let me profit by it."

GHOST "Touch my robe!"

The room vanished instantly. So did the fire and the hour of night; and they stood in the city streets on Christmas morning. The sky was gloomy and choked up with a sooty, dingy mist, as if all the chimneys in Great Britain were blazing away to their dear hearts' content. There was nothing very cheerful in the climate, and yet was there an air of cheerfulness abroad.

For, the people who were scraping the snow from the pavement in front of their dwellings and shovelling away on the housetops were jovial and full of glee; The poulterers' shops were still half open, and the fruiterers' were radiant in their glory.

The Grocers'! oh, the Grocers'! nearly closed, with perhaps two shutters down, or one; but through those gaps such glimpses! And the blended scents of tea and coffee were so grateful to the nose. The candied fruits were caked and spotted with molten sugar and everything that was good to eat, was in its Christmas dress. The customers were all so hurried and so eager, that they tumbled up against each other at the doorways, in the best humour possible.

But soon the steeples called good people all to church and chapel, and away they came, flocking through the streets in their best clothes and gayest faces. And there emerged innumerable people, carrying their dinners to the bakers' shops. The sight of these poor revellers appeared to interest the Spirit very much, for he stood in a baker's doorway, and sprinkled incense on their dinners from his torch. Once or twice, when there were angry words between some dinner-carriers, he shed a few drops of water on them and their good-humour was restored directly. For they said, it was a shame to quarrel upon Christmas-day. And so it was! God love it, so it was!

Scrooge asked of the Phantom,

SCROOGE "Is there a peculiar flavour in what you sprinkle from your torch?"

GHOST "There is. My own."

SCROOGE "Would it apply to any kind of dinner on this day?"

GHOST "To any kindly given. To a poor one most."

SCROOGE "Why to a poor one most?"

GHOST "Because it needs it most."

And they went on, invisible, as they had been before, into the suburbs of the town, straight to the home of Scrooge's clerk. On the threshold of the door, the Spirit smiled, and stopped to bless Bob Cratchit's dwelling with the sprinklings of his torch.

Then up rose Mrs. Cratchit, Cratchit's wife, and she laid the cloth upon the table; while Master Peter Cratchit plunged a fork into the saucepan of potatoes. And now two smaller Cratchits, boy and girl, came tearing in, screaming that outside the baker's they had smelt the goose, and knowing it for their own danced about the table.

MRS. CRATCHIT "There's your father coming."

In came little Bob, the father, with at least three feet of comforter, hanging down before him; and Tiny Tim upon his shoulder. Alas for Tiny Tim, he bore a little crutch, and had his limbs supported by an iron frame!

The two young Cratchits hustled Tiny Tim, and bore him off into the wash-house, that he might hear the pudding singing in the copper.

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."

Bob's voice was tremulous when he told them this, and trembled more when he said that Tiny Tim was growing strong and hearty.

His active little crutch was heard upon the floor, and back came Tiny Tim before another word was spoken, escorted by his brother and sister to his stool beside the fire; while Master Peter and the two ubiquitous young Cratchits went to fetch the goose; with which they soon returned in high procession.

Such a bustle ensued that you might have thought a goose the rarest of all birds; and, in truth, it was something very like it in that house. Mrs. Cratchit made the gravy; Master Peter mashed the potatoes with incredible vigour; Miss Belinda sweetened up the apple sauce; Martha dusted the hot plates; Bob took Tiny Tim beside him in a tiny corner at the table; the two young Cratchits set chairs for everybody. At last the dishes were set on, and grace was said. It was succeeded by a breathless pause, as Mrs. Cratchit prepared to plunge the carving knife in the breast; and when the long-expected gush of stuffing issued forth, one murmur of delight arose all round the board, and even Tiny Tim, beat on the table with the handle of his knife, and feebly cried Hurrah!

TINY TIM "Hurrah!"

There never was such a goose. Its tenderness and flavour, size and cheapness, were the themes of universal admiration. Eked out by apple sauce and mashed potatoes, it was a sufficient dinner for the whole family; indeed! But now, Mrs. Cratchit entered-- with the pudding, so hard and firm, blazing in half of half-a-quartern of ignited brandy, and bedight with Christmas holly stuck into the top.

Oh, a wonderful pudding!

At last the dinner was all done. Then all the Cratchit family drew round the hearth.

BOB CRATCHIT "A merry Christmas to us all, my dears. God bless us!"

TINY TIM "God bless us every one!"

Tiny Tim sat very close to his father's side, upon his little stool. Scrooge spoke with an interest he had never felt before.

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

GHOST "I see a vacant seat in the poor chimney-corner, and a crutch without an owner, carefully preserved. If these shadows remain unaltered by the Future, the child will die."

SCROOGE "No, no! Oh, no, kind Spirit! say he will be spared."

GHOST "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. Will you decide what men shall live, what men shall die? It may be that, in the sight of Heaven, you are more worthless and less fit to live than millions like this poor man's child."

Scrooge bent before the Ghost's rebuke, and, trembling, cast his eyes upon the ground. But he raised them speedily on hearing his own name.

BOB CRATCHIT "Mr. Scrooge! I'll give you Mr. Scrooge, the Founder of the Feast!"

MRS. CRATCHIT "The Founder of the Feast, indeed! I'd give him a piece of my mind to feast upon."

BOB CRATCHIT "My dear, the children! Christmas-day."

MRS. CRATCHIT "It should be Christmas-day, I am sure, on which one drinks the health of such an odious, stingy, hard, unfeeling man as Mr. Scrooge. You know he is, Robert!!"

BOB CRATCHIT "My dear! Christmas-day."

MRS. CRATCHIT "I'll drink his health for your sake and the Day's, not for his. Long life to him!"

The children drank the toast after her though it had no heartiness in it. Scrooge was the Ogre of the family. The mention of his name cast a dark shadow on the party.

They were not a handsome family; but they were grateful, pleased with one another; and happier yet in the bright sprinklings of the Spirit's torch at parting. Scrooge had his eye especially upon Tiny Tim, until the last.

By this time it was getting dark, and snowing pretty heavily; and as Scrooge and the Spirit went along the streets, the brightness of the roaring fires in kitchens, parlours, and all sorts of rooms was wonderful.

It was a great surprise to Scrooge to hear a hearty laugh. It was a much greater surprise to Scrooge to recognise it as his own nephew's!

NEPHEW "Ha, ha! Ha, ha, ha!"

There is nothing in the world so irresistibly contagious as laughter and good-humour. When Scrooge's nephew laughed in this way; Scrooge's niece, by marriage, laughed as heartily as he; and their assembled friends roared out lustily.

NEPHEW "He said that Christmas was a humbug, as I live! He believed it, too!"

NIECE (*indignantly*) "More shame for him, Fred!"

NEPHEW "He's a comical old fellow, and not so pleasant as he might be. However, I have nothing to say against him."

NIECE "I'm sure he is very rich, Fred."

NEPHEW "What of that, my dear? His wealth is of no use to him. He don't do any good with it."

NIECE "I have no patience with him."

NEPHEW "Oh, I have! I am sorry for him; I couldn't be angry with him if I tried. Who suffers by his ill whims? Himself always. Here he takes it into his head to dislike us, and he won't come and dine with us. What's the consequence? He don't lose much of a dinner."

NIECE "Indeed, I think he loses a very good dinner."

NEPHEW "I was only going to say, that the consequence of his taking a dislike to us, and not making merry with us, is, as I think, that he loses some pleasant moments. I mean to give him the same chance every year, whether he likes it or not, for I pity him. I defy him--if he finds me going there in good temper, year after year, and saying, 'Uncle Scrooge, how are you?' If it only puts him in the vein to leave his poor clerk fifty pounds, _that's_ something."

After tea they had some music. But they didn't devote the whole evening to music. After awhile they played at forfeits. There was first a game at blindman's buff. They all played, and so did Scrooge; wholly forgetting, that his voice made no sound in their ears.

The Ghost was greatly pleased to find him in this mood, and looked upon him with favour.

NEPHEW "A merry Christmas and a happy New Year to the old man, whatever he is! Uncle Scrooge!"

Uncle Scrooge had imperceptibly become gay and light of heart, but at the last word spoken by his nephew; he and the Spirit were again upon their travels.

Much they saw and many homes they visited, always with a happy end. The Spirit stood beside sick-beds; by struggling men; and by poverty. In almshouse, hospital, and gaol, in misery's every refuge the Spirit left his blessing, and taught Scrooge his precepts.

It was a long night and strange, too, that, while Scrooge remained unaltered, the Ghost grew older, clearly older. Scrooge had observed this change.

SCROOGE "Are spirits' lives so short?"

GHOST "My life upon this globe is very brief. It ends to-night. The time is drawing near."

SCROOGE "Forgive me if I am not justified in what I ask, but I see something strange protruding from your robe."

From the foldings of the Spirit's robe came forth two children; wretched, frightful, miserable. They knelt down at its feet, and clung to him.

GHOST "Oh, Man! look here! Look, look, down here!"

They were a boy and girl but where grace should have filled their features out, they were shrivelled, like that of age.

Scrooge started back, appalled. He tried to say they were fine children, but the words choked themselves as it was a lie of enormous magnitude. He could say no more than;

SCROOGE "Spirit! are they yours?"

GHOST "They are Man's, and they cling to me. This boy is Ignorance. This girl is Want. "

SCROOGE "Have they no refuge or resource?"

GHOST "Are there no prisons? Are there no workhouses?"

The Spirit, turned on him for the last time with his own words.

The bell struck Twelve. Scrooge looked about him for the Ghost, and saw it not. As the last stroke ceased to vibrate, he remembered the prediction of old Jacob Marley, and, lifting up his eyes, beheld a solemn Phantom, draped and hooded, coming like a mist along the ground towards him.

STAVE FOUR

Cast of Characters

Scrooge	Mrs. Cratchit
Man 1	Bob Cratchit
Man 2	Peter Cratchit
Char Woman	
Old Joe	
Wife	
Husband	

THE LAST OF THE SPIRITS

The Phantom slowly, gravely, silently approached. Scrooge bent down upon his knee; for in the very air through which this Spirit moved it seemed to scatter gloom and mystery.

It was shrouded in a deep black garment, which concealed its head, its face, its form, and left nothing of it visible, save one outstretched hand.

It was tall and stately when it came beside him, and its mysterious presence filled him with a solemn dread. He knew no more, for the Spirit neither spoke nor moved.

SCROOGE "I am in the presence of the Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come?"

"You are about to show me shadows of the things that have not happened, but will happen in the time before us, Is that so, Spirit?"

The upper portion of its garment was contracted for an instant in its folds, as if the Spirit had inclined its head. That was the only answer he received.

SCROOGE "Ghost of the Future! I fear you more than any spectre I have seen. But, as I know your purpose is to do me good, and as I hope to live to be another man from what I was, I am prepared to bear you company, and do it with a thankful heart. Will you not speak to me?"

It gave him no reply. Its hand 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!"

The phantom moved away as it had come towards him. Scrooge followed in the shadow of its dress, which bore him up and carried him along.

They scarcely seemed to enter the City; but there they were in the heart of it; amongst the merchants; who hurried up and down, and chinked the money in their pockets, and conversed in groups.

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

MAN 1 "No, I don't know much about it either way. I only know he's dead."

MSN 2 "When did he die?"

MAN 1 "Last night, I believe."

MSN 2 "Why, what was the matter with him? I thought he'd never die."

MAN 1 "God knows."

MSN 2 "What has he done with his money?"

MAN 1 "I haven't heard. Left it to his company, perhaps. He hasn't left it to me. That's all I know. (LAUGH). It's likely to be a very cheap funeral for, upon my life, I don't know of anybody to go to it. I don't mind going if a lunch is provided." (LAUGH)

MAN 2 "Well, I am the most disinterested among all of us after all, for I never wear black gloves, and I never eat lunch. But I'll offer to go if anybody else will."

Scrooge looked about, another man stood in his accustomed corner, and, though the clock pointed to his usual time of day for being there, he saw no likeness of himself among the multitudes.

They left the busy scene, and went into an obscure part of the town, where Scrooge had never penetrated before, although he recognised its situation and its bad repute. The ways were foul and narrow; the people half naked, drunken. Alleys and archways of smell, and dirt, and life; the whole quarter reeked with crime, with filth and misery.

Far in this den of infamous resort, there was a low-browed, beetling shop, where iron, old rags, bottles, bones, and greasy offal were bought. Upon the floor were piled up heaps of rusty keys, nails, chains, hinges, and refuse iron of all kinds. Sitting in among the wares he dealt in, by a charcoal stove made of old bricks, was a grey-haired rascal, nearly seventy years of age, who had screened himself from the cold air by a frouzy curtaining of miscellaneous tatters hung upon a line, and smoked his pipe in all the luxury of calm retirement.

Scrooge and the Phantom came into the presence of this man, just as a woman with a heavy bundle slunk into the shop. But she had scarcely entered, when another woman, similarly laden, came in too, followed by a man in faded black.

WOMAN "Look here, old Joe, here's a chance! If we haven't all three met here without meaning it!"

JOE "You couldn't have met in a better place. Come into the parlour.

The parlour was the space behind the screen of rags. The woman who had already spoken threw her bundle on the floor, and sat down in a flaunting manner on a stool; looking with bold defiance at the other two.

WOMAN Open the bundle, Joe."

But the man in faded black, first, produced his plunder. A seal or two, a pencil-case, a pair of sleeve-buttons, and a brooch of no great value, were all. They were examined and appraised by old Joe, who chalked the sums he was disposed to give for each upon the wall.

Mrs. Dilber was next. Sheets and towels, a little wearing apparel, two old-fashioned silver tea-spoons, a pair of sugar-tongs, and a few boots. Her account was stated on the wall in the same manner.

WOMAN "And now undo my bundle, Joe,"

Joe went down on his knees for the greater convenience of opening it, and dragged out a large heavy roll of some dark stuff.

JOE "What do you call this? Bed-curtains?"

WOMAN "Ah! Bed-curtains!"

JOE "You don't mean to say you took 'em down, rings and all, with him lying there?"

WOMAN "Yes, I do. Why not?And, you may look through that shirt you are holding till your eyes ache; but you won't find a hole in it, nor a threadbare place. It's the best he had, and a fine one too. They'd have wasted it, if it hadn't been for me."

JOE "What do you call wasting of it?"

WOMAN "Putting it on him to be buried in, to be sure. Somebody was fool enough to do it, but I took it off again (*BOTH LAUGH*)"

Old Joe, producing a flannel bag with money in it, told out their several gains upon the ground.

SCROOGE "Spirit! I see, I see. The case of this unhappy man might be my own. My life tends that way now. Merciful Heaven, what is this?"

He recoiled in terror, for the scene had changed, and now he almost touched a bed: a bare, uncurtained bed: on which, beneath a ragged sheet, there lay a something covered up.

The room was too dark to be observed with any accuracy, A pale light, rising in the outer air, fell straight upon the bed: and on it, plundered and bereft, unwatched, unwept, uncared for, was the body of this man.

Scrooge glanced towards the Phantom. Its steady hand was pointed to the head. The cover was so carelessly adjusted that the slightest raising of it, would have disclosed the face.

He lay, in the dark, empty house, with not a man, a woman, or a child to say he was kind to me in this or that, and for the memory I will be kind. A cat was tearing at the door, and there was a sound of gnawing rats beneath the hearth-stone.

SCROOGE "Spirit! This is a fearful place. In leaving it, I shall not leave its lesson, trust me. Let us go!"

Still the Ghost pointed with an unmoved finger to the head.

SCROOGE "I understand you, and I would do it if I could. But I have not the power, Spirit. I have not the power."

Again it seemed to look upon him.

SCROOGE "If there is any person in the town who feels emotion caused by this man's death, show that person to me, Spirit! I beseech you."

The Phantom spread its dark robe before him for a moment, like a wing; and, withdrawing it, revealed a room by daylight, where a mother and her children were.

She was expecting some one for she walked up and down the room; started at every sound; tried, but in vain, to work with her needle; and could hardly bear the voices of her children in their play.

At length the long-expected knock was heard. She hurried to the door, and met her husband; a man whose face was careworn and depressed, though he was young.

He sat down to the dinner that had been hoarding for him by the fire.

WIFE "What news? Is it good, or bad?"

HUSBAND "Bad,"

WIFE "We are quite ruined!"

HUSBAND "No. There is hope yet, Caroline."

WIFE "If he relents, there is! Nothing is past hope, if such a miracle has happened."

HUSBAND "He is past relenting. He is dead."

WIFE "To whom will our debt be transferred?"

HUSBAND "I don't know. But, before that time, we shall be ready with the money; and, even though we were not, it would be bad fortune indeed to find so merciless a creditor in his successor. We may sleep to-night with light hearts, Caroline!"

It was a happier house for this man's death! The only emotion that the Ghost could show him, caused by the event, was one of pleasure.

SCROOGE "Let me see some tenderness connected with a death, or that dark chamber, Spirit, which we left just now, will be for ever present to me."

The Ghost conducted him through several familiar streets; and, as they went along, Scrooge looked here and there to find himself, but nowhere was he to be seen. They

entered poor Bob Cratchit's house--the dwelling he had visited before--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 sewing. 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 colour hurts my eyes,"

The colour? Black? The colour of grieving. Ah, poor Tiny Tim!

MRS. CRATCHIT "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 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: And there is your father at the door!"

She hurried out to meet him; His tea was ready for him on the hob, and they all tried who should help him to it most.

Bob was very cheerful with them, and spoke pleasantly to all the family. He looked at the work upon the table, and praised the industry and speed of Mrs. Cratchit and the girls.

BOB CRATCHIT "They will be done long before Sunday."

MRS. CRATCHIT "Sunday! You went to-day, then, Robert; to the churchyard?"

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!"

He broke down all at once. He couldn't help it.

BOB CRATCHIT "Let me tell you of the extraordinary kindness of Mr. Scrooge's nephew, whom I have scarcely seen but once, and who, meeting me in the street

this day, and seeing that I looked a little down, you know, inquired what had happened to distress me. On which, I told him.

'I am heartily sorry for it, Mr. Cratchit,' he said, 'and heartily sorry for your good wife.' By-the-bye, how he ever knew that I don't know."

MRS. CRATCHIT "Knew what, my dear?"

BOB CRATCHIT "Why, that you were a good wife."

PETER "Everybody knows that."

BOB CRATCHIT 'Heartily sorry,' he said, 'for your good wife. If I can be of service to you in any way,' he said, giving me his card, 'that's where I live. Pray come to me.' It really seemed as if he had known our Tiny Tim; and felt with us."

MRS. CRATCHIT "I'm sure he's a good soul!"

BOB CRATCHIT "You would be sure of it, my dear, if you saw and spoke to him. I shouldn't be at all surprised if he got Peter a better situation."

MRS. CRATCHIT "Only hear that, Peter."

BOB CRATCHIT "It's just as likely as not, But, however and whenever we part from one another, I am sure none of us shall forget poor Tiny Tim -- or this first parting that there was among us?"

ALL "Never, father!"

BOB CRATCHIT "And I know. I know, my dears, that when we recollect how patient and how mild he was, we shall not quarrel easily among ourselves, and forget poor Tiny Tim in doing it."

ALL "No, never, father!"

Mrs. Cratchit kissed him, his daughters kissed him, the two young Cratchits kissed him, and Peter and himself shook hands.

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?"

The Ghost of Christmas Yet To Come conveyed him, as before into the resorts of business men; but showed him not himself. Indeed, the Spirit did not stay for anything, but went straight on, until besought by Scrooge to tarry for a moment.

SCROOGE "This court is where my place of occupation is, and has been for a length of time. I see the house. Let me behold what I shall be in days to come."

The Spirit stopped; the hand was pointed elsewhere.

SCROOGE "The house is yonder. Why do you point away?"

Scrooge hastened to the window of his office, and looked in. It was an office still, but not his. The furniture was not the same, and the figure in the chair was not himself. The Phantom pointed as before.

He accompanied it until they reached an iron gate. A churchyard. Here, then, the wretched man, whose name he had now to learn, lay underneath the ground.

The Spirit stood among the graves, and pointed down to One.

SCROOGE "Before I draw nearer to that stone to which you point, answer me one question. Are these the shadows of the things that Will be, or are they shadows of the things that May be only?"

Still the Ghost pointed downward to the grave by which it stood.

Scrooge crept towards it, trembling as he went; 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? No, Spirit! Oh no, no!"

The finger still was there.

SCROOGE "Spirit! Hear me! I am not the man I was. Why show me this, if I am past all hope?"

For the first time the hand appeared to shake.

SCROOGE "Good Spirit. Assure me that I yet may change these shadows you have shown me by an altered life?"

The kind hand trembled.

SCROOGE "I will honour Christmas in my heart, and try to keep it all the year. I will live in the Past, the Present, and the Future. The Spirits of all Three shall strive within me. I will not shut out the lessons that they teach. Oh, tell me I may sponge away the writing on this stone!"

In his agony, he caught the spectral hand. It sought to free itself, but he was strong in his entreaty, and detained it. The Spirit, stronger yet, repulsed him.

Holding up his hands in a last prayer to have his fate reversed, he saw an alteration in the Phantom's hood and dress. It shrunk, collapsed, and dwindled down into a bedpost.

STAVE FIVE

Cast of Characters

Narrator:

Mr. Scrooge:

Boy:

Gentleman:

Scrooge's nephew (Fred):

Mr. Bob Cratchit:

Tiny Tim:

THE END OF IT

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!

Scrooge scrambled out of bed,

SCROOGE (*broken voice*) "I will live in the Past, the Present, and the Future! The Spirits of all Three shall strive within me. Oh, Jacob Marley! Heaven and the Christmas Time be praised for this! I say it on my knees, old Jacob; on my knees!"

He was so fluttered and so glowing with his good intentions, that his broken voice would scarcely answer to his call. He had been sobbing violently in his conflict with the Spirit, and his face was wet with tears.

He folded one of his bed-curtains in his arms,

SCROOGE "They are not torn down. They are not torn down, rings and all. They are here--I am here--the shadows of the things that would have been may be dispelled. They will be. I know they will!"

SCROOGE (*laughing and crying*) "I don't know what to do! I am as light as a feather, I am as happy as an angel, I am as merry as a school-boy. I am as giddy as a drunken man. A merry Christmas to everybody! A happy New Year to all the world! Hallo here! Whoop! Hallo!"

Scrooge was laughing and crying. He had frisked into the sitting-room, and was now standing there, perfectly winded.

SCROOGE "There's the saucepan that the gruel was in! There's the door by which the Ghost of Jacob Marley entered! There's the corner where the Ghost of Christmas Present sat! There's the window where I saw the wandering Spirits! It's all right, it's all true, it all happened. Ha, ha, ha!"

He was checked by the churches ringing out the lustiest peals he had ever heard. Oh, glorious, glorious!

Running to the window, he opened it, and put out his head. No fog, no mist; clear, bright; merry bells. Oh, glorious! Glorious! He called down to a boy in Sunday clothes.

SCROOGE "What's to-day?"

BOY "EH?"

SCROOGE "What's to-day, my fine fellow?"

BOY "To-day! Why, CHRISTMAS DAY."

SCROOGE *(to himself)* "It's Christmas Day! I haven't missed it. The Spirits have done it all in one night."

(calling down) "Hallo, my fine fellow! Do you know the Poulterer's in the next street but one, at the corner?"

BOY "I should hope I do."

SCROOGE "Do you know whether they've sold the prize Turkey that was hanging up there?--The big one?"

BOY "What! the one as big as me? 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 directions where to take it. Come back with the man, and I'll give you half-a-crown!"

(whispering to himself) "I'll send it to Bob Cratchit's. He shan't know who sends it. It's twice the size of Tiny Tim."

The boy was off like a shot.

Scrooge went down-stairs to open the street-door, ready for the coming of the poulterer's man. As he stood there, waiting his arrival, the knocker on the door caught his eye. He patted it with his hand

SCROOGE "I shall love it as long as I live! I scarcely ever looked at it before. It's a wonderful knocker!--Here's the Turkey. Hallo! Whoop! How are you? Merry Christmas!"

"Why, it's impossible to carry that to Camden Town. You must have a cab."

It was a Turkey!

The chuckle with which he paid for the Turkey was only exceeded by the chuckle with which he sat down in his chair again; and chuckled till he cried.

Quite satisfied, he dressed himself "all in his best," and got out into the streets. The people were as he had seen them with the Ghost of Christmas Present; and, Scrooge regarded every one with a delighted smile. Three or four good-humoured fellows said, "Good morning, sir! A merry Christmas to you!"

Scrooge had not gone far when he beheld the portly gentleman who had walked into his counting-house the day before, and said, "Scrooge and Marley's, I believe?"

Scrooge quickened his pace, and taking the old gentleman by both his hands, said,

SCROOGE "My dear sir, how do you do? I hope you succeeded yesterday. It was very kind of you. A merry Christmas to you, sir!"

GENTLEMAN "Mr. Scrooge?"

SCROOGE "Yes. Allow me to ask your pardon. And will you have the goodness..."

At this point, Scrooge leaned towards the portly gentleman and whispered in his ear.

GENTLEMAN (*breathlessly excited*) "Lord bless me! My dear Mr. Scrooge, are you serious?"

SCROOGE "If you please. Not a farthing less. Will you do me that favour?"

GENTLEMAN "My dear sir. I don't know what to say to such munifi..."

SCROOGE "Don't say anything, please. Come and see me. Will you come and see me?"

GENTLEMAN "I will!".

SCROOGE "Thankee. I am much obliged to you. Bless you!"

He went to church, and walked about the streets, and watched the people hurrying to and fro; and patted the children on the head

In the afternoon he turned his steps towards his nephew's house. He passed the door a dozen times before he had the courage to go up and knock. The maid servant answered the door.

SCROOGE "Is your master at home, my dear?"

"Where is he, my love? -- He knows me"

Scrooge had his hand already on the dining-room lock. He turned it gently, and sidled his face in round the door. They were looking at the table (which was spread out in great array).

SCROOGE "Fred!"

NEPHEW "Why, bless my soul! Who's that?"

SCROOGE "It's I. Your uncle Scrooge. I have come to dinner. Will you let me in, Fred?"

Let him in! It is a mercy he didn't shake his arm off. Nothing could be heartier. His niece looked just the same. So did Topper when he came. So did the plump sister when she came. So did every one when they came. Wonderful party, wonderful games, won-der-ful happiness!

But he was early at the office next morning. Oh, he was early there to catch Bob Cratchit coming late! That was the thing he had set his heart upon.

And he did it; yes, he did! The clock struck nine. No Bob. A quarter past. No Bob. He was full eighteen minutes and a half behind his time.

Bob's hat was off before he opened the door and he was on his stool in a jiffy; driving away with his pen, as if he were trying to overtake nine o'clock.

Scrooge in his accustomed voice as near as he could feign it, said,

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, sir, if you please."

BOB CRATCHIT "It's only once a year, sir. It shall not be repeated, sir."

SCROOGE "Now, I'll tell you what, my friend. I am not going to stand this sort of thing any longer. And therefore I am about to raise your salary!"

Bob trembled. He had a momentary idea of knocking Scrooge down, holding him, and calling to the people in the court for help. But Scrooge clapped him on the back with an earnestness that could not be mistaken.

SCROOGE "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 endeavour to assist your struggling family, and we will discuss your affairs this very afternoon, over a Christmas bowl of smoking bishop, Bob! Make up the fires and buy another coal-scuttle before you dot another i, Bob Cratchit!"

* * * * *

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. Some people laughed to see the alteration in him, but he let them laugh. His own heart laughed and that was quite enough for him.

He had no further intercourse with Spirits, but lived upon the Total-Abstinence Principle ever afterwards; 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!