

Ebenezer Scrooge

It was three o'clock in the afternoon on the day before Christmas – Christmas Eve. In the city of London it was very cold and almost dark. But it had been almost dark all day. There was no sunlight because it was winter and it was very foggy. It was possible to hear people and horses and carriages. But it was not possible to see them because the fog was so thick.

Two names were painted on the door of an old building in the centre of the city: Scrooge and Marley. Jacob Marley had died seven years ago. But Ebenezer Scrooge had left Marley's name on the door of the building. Scrooge answered if people called him Scrooge and he answered if people called him Marley.

Scrooge did not care what people called him. Scrooge did not care about people. Scrooge cared about one thing – money! He worked very hard all the time and he earned lots of money. But he did not like spending money.

Ebenezer Scrooge was an old man. His face was thin and his nose was long and thin. His hair, eyebrows and whiskers were all white. Scrooge never smiled.

He had no friends. Nobody visited his house. Nobody said hello to him as he walked along the street. No beggar stopped him in the street and asked him for money. No dog went near him.

But Scrooge wanted his life to be this way. He did not like people. He liked writing down amounts of money in his account books.

Visitors for Scrooge

On Christmas Eve, Scrooge was working in his office. He was writing in his account books. He was writing down amounts of money people had paid him. And he was writing down amounts of money people owed him.

It was cold outside, but the fire in the fireplace was very small. The door of Scrooge's office was open. Scrooge could see into the next room, which was very small, and very cold too. The fire in the next room was even smaller than Scrooge's fire. One tiny piece of coal was burning in the fireplace.

Bob Cratchit worked in this small room. He could not have a bigger fire because Scrooge kept the coal in his own office. And Scrooge would not let Bob have any more coal.

'If you take any more coal, Bob Cratchit,' said Scrooge, 'you will lose your job!'

So Bob continued to write letters for Scrooge. He put his scarf round his neck and sat very close to the flame of his candle. Bob told himself that the candle was warm and it would make him warm. But that wasn't true!

Suddenly someone opened the front door. A young man came in from the street. He looked happy and cheerful. His eyes were bright and his face was red because of the cold. He shouted cheerfully, 'Hello! Merry Christmas, Uncle!'

'Nonsense! Rubbish!' replied Scrooge. 'Christmas is nonsense. It's humbug! Bah!'

'You don't mean that, Uncle,' said the young man.

‘Oh yes I do,’ replied Scrooge. ‘Why are you cheerful? You don’t have much money.’

‘Why aren’t you cheerful, Uncle? You’ve got lots of money,’ said his nephew.

Scrooge couldn’t think of an answer, so he repeated, ‘Bah! Humbug!’

‘Don’t be angry, Uncle,’ the young man went on. ‘It’s Christmas.’

‘People who say “Merry Christmas” are stupid idiots,’ said Scrooge. ‘They said “Merry Christmas” last year. Now they are a year older and they have spent a lot of money and they say “Merry Christmas” again. They are idiots. I wish someone would cook them and then eat them for Christmas dinner!’

The young man was Fred, the son of Scrooge’s sister, Frances. Frances had died many years ago. So Fred was Ebenezer Scrooge’s only living relative. Fred was married to a pretty young woman. He was a kind and friendly young man. He liked people, so he went on talking to his uncle.

‘Christmas is a very important time of year,’ he said. ‘People are kind and helpful to each other at Christmas. They forgive each other for all the bad things they have done. They help poor people. I feel happy at Christmas. I like Christmas.’

‘Oh, yes! Yes! I agree!’ Bob Cratchit said suddenly, from the cold little room.

‘If you say one more word, Bob Cratchit,’ shouted Scrooge, ‘you will lose your job. And you mustn’t say anything more either, nephew! Goodbye!’

‘Oh, Uncle,’ said Fred, smiling at the old man, ‘I want you to have dinner with me and my family tomorrow.’



*'If you say one more word, Bob Cratchit,' shouted
Scrooge, 'you will lose your job.'*

‘Goodbye,’ replied Scrooge loudly.

‘I want you to have a happy Christmas with me and my family,’ the young man said.

‘Goodbye,’ said Scrooge again.

At last the young man opened the door to leave. But he was still cheerful.

‘Merry Christmas, Uncle,’ he said. ‘And Merry Christmas to you too, Bob.’

‘Merry Christmas, sir,’ replied Bob Cratchit. He smiled and waved.

‘Bah!’ said Scrooge to himself. ‘Bob Cratchit is a poor man. He earns fifteen shillings a week. He has to buy food for his wife and six children and he is talking about a merry Christmas. Everyone is mad – completely mad!’

As Scrooge’s nephew left, a gentleman came in. He went into Scrooge’s office.

‘Good afternoon, sir,’ he said, smiling at Scrooge. ‘Am I talking to Mr Scrooge or Mr Marley?’

‘Marley is dead. He died seven years ago today – on Christmas Eve,’ replied Scrooge.

‘Mr Scrooge,’ said the gentleman, smiling again. ‘I have come to ask for your help because it is Christmas. I want money to help the poor people who have no money and no homes.’

‘Aren’t there any prisons?’ asked Scrooge. ‘Aren’t there any workhouses?’

‘Yes, of course there are,’ the gentleman replied.

‘Good. Good,’ said Scrooge. ‘I’m pleased. You can put these poor people in prisons and workhouses, can’t you?’

‘But prisons and workhouses are unpleasant places,’ replied the gentleman. ‘I am sure you want people to have a merry Christmas. How much money will you give me?’

‘None. None at all,’ said Scrooge. ‘I don’t have a merry Christmas. I don’t believe in Christmas. I’m not giving money to anyone else so they can have a merry Christmas. Put the poor people in workhouses.’

‘Many people fear and hate workhouses. They would rather die than live in workhouses,’ replied the gentleman.

‘Good,’ said Scrooge. ‘There are too many people in the world. Tell them to go away and die. Goodbye.’

The gentleman left and Scrooge started working again. Outside it became colder and darker and the fog became thicker. It was so cold that water froze into ice on the streets. But there were bright lights in the windows of the shops. People were buying good things to eat and drink.

In all the shops there was good food for Christmas – fruit and nuts, pies and puddings, turkeys and geese. Everyone bought a turkey or a goose to cook for Christmas dinner.

There was the sound of singing. Boys and girls sang Christmas carols and other people gave them money. A thin boy in torn clothes sang outside Scrooge’s window:

We wish you a Merry Christmas.

We wish you a Merry Christmas –

Scrooge shouted angrily and the boy ran away.

At last, Scrooge decided it was time to stop work. Bob Cratchit blew out his candle and put on his hat. He didn’t have a coat.

‘You want to have a holiday tomorrow, I suppose?’ asked Scrooge.

‘Yes, please,’ replied Bob, ‘if it’s all right.’

‘No, it isn’t all right. You will be paid a day’s wages and do no work,’ said Scrooge.

‘Christmas Day is only once a year,’ said Bob.

‘Bah!’ said Scrooge. ‘I suppose I can’t make you work on Christmas Day. Nobody else works. But you must be here very early the next day.’

Bob was happy that it was Christmas. On his way home, he stopped and played with some boys. The boys were sliding down the ice on a steep hill. Bob slid down the ice twenty times! Then he ran home happily to his wife and six children. Scrooge went to an inn to eat his dinner alone.

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Marley’s Ghost

Scrooge finished his dinner and began to walk home. He walked through the streets until he reached his house. His house was big and old. Seven years ago it had belonged to Jacob Marley. Scrooge lived in two of the rooms. The rest of the house was dark and empty.

Scrooge took some heavy keys out of his pocket and unlocked the big wooden front door. There was a metal knocker in the middle of the door. Usually Scrooge did not look at it. But tonight the knocker was different. Scrooge thought he saw something strange. He looked closely and he saw Marley’s face in the middle of the knocker!

The old man was very surprised. He opened the door. He looked at the back of it. But the back of Marley’s head was not there!

‘Bah!’ he said, and slammed the door shut.

Scrooge lit a candle and went up the big staircase to his rooms. He unlocked the door and went inside. Then quickly he locked the door again. He put on his night clothes and sat in a chair close to a very small fire. Then he saw Marley's face again – in the flames of the fire!

Suddenly, a bell above Scrooge's head started to ring. Then another bell! And another! And another! Bells rang all over the empty house. People had once used these bells to call servants to different rooms. But Scrooge lived alone. There were no servants in Scrooge's house.

The bells stopped. Then Scrooge heard another noise. It was a clanking, banging noise and it was getting louder. Someone was pulling metal chains across the floor downstairs. Now, someone was pulling metal chains up the stairs.

'This isn't happening!' said Scrooge. 'I won't believe it.'

The clanking noise grew louder and louder. Then the noise came straight through the door into Scrooge's room. Suddenly, Scrooge saw Jacob Marley. He saw the face he had seen on the door knocker and in the fire. He saw Marley's face and hair and coat and boots. He saw a white cloth tied round Marley's face and chin. But Scrooge also saw the door. He could see straight through Marley! Was this a ghost?

There were huge chains round Marley's body and on the floor behind him. On the chains were things which Scrooge recognised. There were money-boxes, keys, locks and account books.

'Who are you?' asked Scrooge.

'Ask me who I *was*,' replied the ghost.

'Bah!' said Scrooge. 'Who were you?'