A close-up photograph of a man's face, likely Ebenezer Scrooge, wearing a dark top hat. He has a serious, somewhat stern expression and is looking slightly downwards and to the right. His hair is light-colored and somewhat messy. The lighting is dramatic, highlighting the texture of his skin and the brim of the hat.

A Christmas Carol

CHARLES DICKENS

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OXFORD BOOKWORMS

A CHRISTMAS CAROL

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

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

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



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Classics

A Christmas Carol

Stage 3 (1000 headwords)

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Marley's ghost

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



Both names still stood above the office door.

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

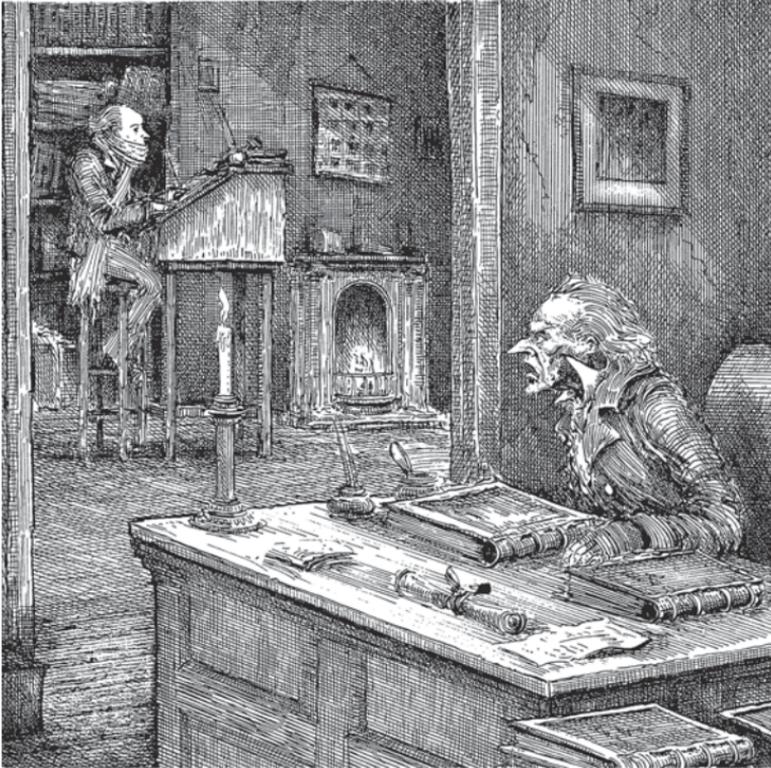
‘Bah!’ said Scrooge crossly. ‘Humbug!’

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

‘If I hear another sound from *you*,’ said Scrooge, ‘you’ll lose your job!’

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

‘Dinner with you? I’ll see you dead first!’

‘But why won’t you come? Why?’

‘Because Christmas is humbug! Good afternoon!’

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

‘Good afternoon!’ said Scrooge.

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

‘Good afternoon,’ said Scrooge.

‘And a happy new year!’

‘Good afternoon!’ said Scrooge.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

‘Are there no prisons?’ asked Scrooge coldly.

‘Plenty of prisons,’ said the gentleman.

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

‘Yes, they are, I’m sorry to say.’

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

‘If you don’t mind, sir.’

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

GLOSSARY

- carol** a special song which people sing at Christmas
- cheerful** looking or sounding happy
- Christmas Eve** 24th December, the day before Christmas Day
- clerk** someone who works in an office, writing letters, etc.
- delight** a pleased and happy feeling
- delighted** very pleased and happy
- extinguisher** a thing shaped like a tall hat, which you put on a candle to stop it burning
- fog** a thick mist that stops you seeing clearly
- foggy** very misty
- frost** a thin white cover of ice on the ground in very cold weather; (on page 2, Scrooge's white hair and cold heart)
- God bless you!** people used to say this when they liked someone or were grateful to them
- humbug** nonsense, silly ideas; dishonest or untrue words
- kiss** (*v*) to touch someone lovingly with your lips
- merry** happy, cheerful
- partner** someone who owns a business with another person
- point** (*v*) to show with your finger or arm where something is
- present** (*n*) the time now (not past, not future)
- shilling** a coin in old British money (equal to five pence today)
- spirit** the ghost of a dead person, or a kind of 'person' without a living body
- stare** to look hard at something or someone for a long time
- strike** (past tense **struck**) (of a clock) to tell the hour, half hour, or quarter hour by sounding a bell
- tiny** very small

A Christmas Carol



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

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

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