

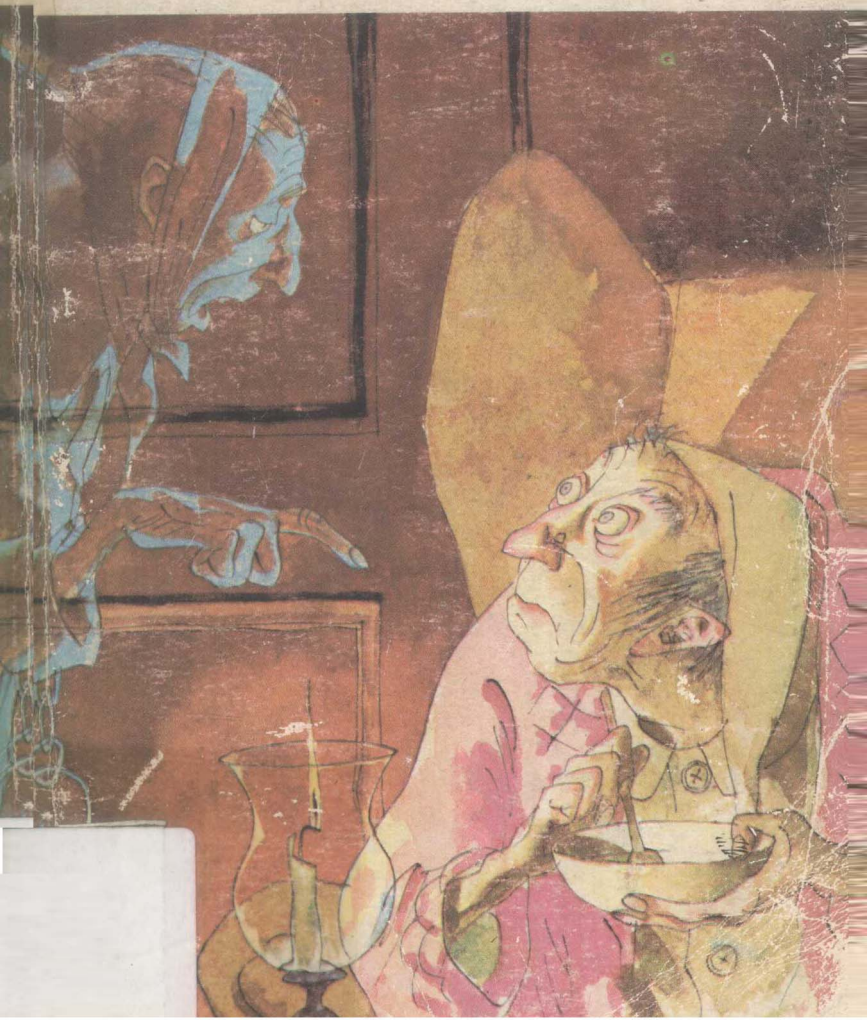
A Christmas Carol

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Charles Dickens



A CHRISTMAS CAROL
and
THE CRICKET
ON THE HEARTH

CHARLES DICKENS

Simplified by Michael West

Illustrated by Will Nickless

1800 word vocabulary

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List of extra words

A Christmas Carol

eve	the day before
Exchange	the building where men buy and sell shares in business companies
fiddle	a musical instrument of 4 strings (violin)
fog	very thick mist
ghost	the spirit of a dead person seen by a living person
holly	the dark green leaves of a tree
humbug	nonsense
ignorance	not knowing enough
knocker	an instrument fixed to a door to knock on it
lighthouse	a tower with a light to warn sailors of danger
miner	a man who digs coal from under the ground
nephew	one's brother's or sister's son
pudding	a sweet food; <i>Christmas pudding</i> is a special kind, dark and full of fruit
tiny	very small
turkey	a big bird, eaten especially at Christmas
workhouse	in old times, a miserable place for poor people without employment

The Cricket on the Hearth

cash	money
cricket	a noisy jumping insect about 2 to 3 cm long
cuckoo	a bird (or a wooden model of one) which cries "Cuckoo!"
hearth	the stones or bricks under and in front of a fireplace
Jack-in-a-box	a toy with a little man's figure that flies up when the lid is opened
kettle	a pot to boil water in

[No gloss needed for "wedding cake"]

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A Christmas Carol



A Carol is a song about the birth of Jesus Christ

One

MARLEY'S GHOST

The names on the door of the office were **SCROOGE AND MARLEY**.

Marley was dead. He was "dead as a doornail", as the saying is. I do not know why a doornail is supposed to be more dead than any other sort of nail; but Marley was dead. He died seven years ago.

Scrooge never painted out old Marley's name: there it stood years afterwards on the office door: **SCROOGE AND MARLEY**. The business was known as Scrooge and Marley. Sometimes people new to the business called Scrooge "Scrooge" and sometimes they called him "Marley", but he answered to both names. It was all the same to him.

He was a hard man with money, hard as a stone. He was

a secret self-contained man, friendless and alone. The coldness inside him froze his old face: his eyes were red: his thin lips were blue. Cold seemed to stiffen his way of walking. The hair on his head and above his eyes was white, white as snow. He carried this coldness with him always wherever he went. He iced his office in the summer, and at Christmas time it was just as cold.

No one ever stopped Scrooge in the street to say "My dear Scrooge, how are you? When will you come and see me?" No beggars asked him for a penny. No children asked him "What time is it?" No man or woman had ever once in his life asked him to tell them the way to such-and-such a place. Even the blind men's dogs seemed to know him and, when they saw him coming, they pulled their owners back into the doorway. But Scrooge did not care. He liked it. He liked to make his way through the crowded paths of life warning all men to keep their distance from him.

It was CHRISTMAS EVE, the evening before Christmas. Old Scrooge sat busy in his office. It was very cold: Scrooge could hear the people outside in the street beating their hands together to keep them warm. There was a thick FOG: it was only three o'clock but it was quite dark already. It had not been light all day. Candles were burning in the windows of the offices nearby, making red marks upon the brown air. The fog came pouring in at every crack and keyhole. The fog was so thick that you could hardly see the houses opposite.

The door of Scrooge's office was open so that he might keep his eye upon his clerk who worked in a very small room just on the other side of the passage. Scrooge had a very small fire, but the clerk's fire was even smaller so that it looked like one coal, and he could not add coals to it because Scrooge kept the coalbox in his room.

"Merry Christmas, uncle, and God bless you!" cried a cheerful voice. It was the voice of Scrooge's NEPHEW, his sister's son.

"Bah!" said Scrooge. "HUMBUG! Nonsense!"

Scrooge's nephew had so heated himself with rapid walking in the cold air that he was all in a glow. His face was bright, his eyes shone and his breath smoked in the cold air.

"Do you say that Christmas is a humbug, uncle?" he said. "You don't mean that, I'm sure."

"Yes, I do," said Scrooge. "Merry Christmas! What right have you to be merry? What reason have you to be merry? You're too poor to be merry."

"Come, come," said the nephew, laughing, "what right have you to be so solemn and sad? You are rich enough."

Scrooge had no better answer ready, so he said "Bah!" again and followed it with "Humbug!"

"Don't be angry," said the nephew.

"What else can I be," said the uncle, "when I live in a world of fools such as this? Merry Christmas! What is Christmas time to you but a time for getting in debt which you have not the money to pay off, a time for finding yourself a year older but not an hour richer, a time for adding up your account books and finding that you have less money than you had at Christmas a year ago? If I could have my way," said Scrooge angrily, "every fool who goes about saying 'Merry Christmas!' should be boiled with his own Christmas dinner!"

"Uncle!" said the nephew.

"Nephew!" said the uncle. "Keep Christmas in your own way and let me keep it in mine."

"Keep it?" said Scrooge's nephew. "But you don't keep it!"

"What good has it ever done you?"

"It has done me a great deal of good," said the nephew. "Christmas is a good time, a kind, forgiving, pleasant time. It is the only time in the year when men and women seem to open their shut-up hearts freely, to think of people below them as if they were fellow-travellers on life's journey, not as another race going their separate ways. And therefore, uncle, although it has never put any gold or silver in my pocket, I believe that Christmas has done me good and will do me good, and I say 'God bless it!'"

"I wonder you don't join the government and make speeches," said Scrooge.

"Don't be angry, uncle. Come and have dinner with us tomorrow."

"Certainly not!" said Scrooge. "Good afternoon!"

"But I want nothing from you. I ask nothing of you. Why can't we be friends?"

"Good afternoon!" said Scrooge.

"I am sorry to find you so determined not to join us. We have never had any quarrel. At least I have never quarrelled. But in honour of Christmas I have made this attempt at friendship and will still keep my Christmas kind feelings. So 'A Merry Christmas!' uncle."

"Good afternoon!" said Scrooge.

"And a happy New Year!"

"Good afternoon!" said Scrooge.

The nephew stopped at the door so as to say "Merry Christmas!" to the clerk who, although he was so cold, was warmer than Scrooge. "Merry Christmas to you, sir!" answered the clerk.

"There's another fellow!" said Scrooge, who had heard what he said: "My clerk, with fifteen shillings a week and a wife and family, talking about a merry Christmas! He must be mad!"

As the clerk opened the door to let Scrooge's nephew out he let in two other people. They were well-dressed gentlemen and stood with their hats off in Scrooge's office. They had books and papers in their hands.

"Scrooge and Marley's, I believe?" said one of the gentlemen, looking at the list. "Am I speaking to Mr. Scrooge or to Mr. Marley?"

"Mr. Marley has been dead these seven years," answered Scrooge. "He died seven years ago this very night."

"At this happy season of the year, Mr. Scrooge," said the gentleman taking up his pen, "we usually try to do something for the poor. They are suffering greatly at this present time. Many thousands have no food and no warmth, and many have no home to go to."

"Are there no prisons?" asked Scrooge.

"There are plenty of prisons," said the gentleman, putting down his pen.

"Are there no WORKHOUSES to which the poor can go?"

"There are," said the gentleman. "I wish that so many were not needed."

"I was afraid from what you said that something had happened to stop the Prisons and Workhouses doing their usual work," said Scrooge. "I am glad to hear that there are still Prisons and Workhouses."

"Prisons and Workhouses can hardly make people merry at Christmas time," said the gentleman. "A few of us are trying to collect money to buy some food and drink and warmth for the poor. How much will you give us?"

"Nothing!" said Scrooge. "I don't make merry myself at Christmas time, and I have not the money to make other people merry. Good afternoon, gentlemen!"

Seeing that it was useless to argue, the gentlemen went out of the room.

The fog became thicker; the darkness became darker; the cold became colder. At last the hour for shutting up the office arrived. Scrooge got down from his chair. The clerk put out his candle and put on his hat.

"You'll want all day tomorrow, I suppose?" said Scrooge.

"Yes, sir, if that will suit you."

"It will not suit me," said Scrooge, "and it is not fair or just. If I were to pay you three shillings less for that wasted day, you would think that I was being unjust to you."

The clerk smiled.

"And yet," said Scrooge, "you don't think it unjust to me when I have to pay you for a day on which you do no work."

"It's only once a year," said the clerk.

"That is not a very good reason for stealing three shillings from my pocket every twenty-fifth of December," said Scrooge; "but I suppose you must have the whole day. Be here all the earlier on the next morning."

The clerk promised that he would. Scrooge went out, and

the clerk shut up the office and ran home to Camden Town as fast as he could, so as to play with his children.

Scrooge had dinner in an inn and then went home. He had rooms in a house which had once belonged to Marley. They were dark and uncomfortable rooms in an old house in a dark courtyard. All the rest of the rooms in the house were offices. No one lived there except Scrooge.



The Knocker

There was a big KNOCKER on the door; it was made in the shape of a face. As Scrooge came to the door and was about to open it, he looked at the knocker; and in the knocker he seemed to see Marley's face! The eyes were open and fixed upon him, and the hair seemed to move in the wind. Scrooge's heart stood still! Then, when he looked again, it was the knocker as before.

He unlocked the door, went in and lit a candle. But, before he shut the door, he looked back as if he expected to see the back of Marley's head on the other side of the door. Then he shut the door. "Pooh!" he said. "Humbug!"

Scrooge went upstairs to his rooms. Before he shut his heavy door he walked through his rooms to see that everything

was all right: he remembered that face which he had seemed to see on the outer door. He went into the sitting-room, the bedroom, the store-room. Everything was all right. There was nobody under the table, nobody under the bed.

There was a small fire burning in the fireplace and a pot of some hot drink stood by it. He shut the door of his rooms and locked it, then went and sat down by the fire. There were heads of prophets in the Bible cut in stone round the fireplace and, as Scrooge looked at them, each one of them seemed to be Marley's face.

"Humbug!" he said and walked across the room. Then he came back and sat down again. He looked up and saw a bell, a bell no longer used which still hung in the room. As he looked at it he saw the bell begin to move, quietly at first so that it hardly made a sound; and then it rang out loudly, and so did every bell in the house. Then suddenly, they stopped.

There was a noise down below as if some person was pulling a heavy chain. It came up the stairs straight towards his door.

"It's humbug!" said Scrooge. "I won't believe it!"

It came through the heavy door and passed into the room before his eyes. The dying flame leapt up in the fireplace.

It was the same face, the very same—Marley dressed as he had always dressed in his lifetime. The chain was wound about him and lay behind him like a tail. It was made of money-boxes, keys, locks, account books, business papers and money bags. Scrooge, as he looked at him, could see through his body. He could see the two buttons on Marley's coat behind.

"Well?" said Scrooge in his cold voice, "what do you want with me?"

"Much!"

Yes, it was Marley's voice.

"Who are you?"

"Ask me who I *was*!"

"Who *were* you then?" said Scrooge.

"In life I was Jacob Marley. You do not believe in me," said the GHOST.



Marley's ghost visits Scrooge

"No," said Scrooge, "I do not."

"You do not believe your eyes."

"No," said Scrooge; "I do not. I do not always trust my eyes: a little thing can affect one's eyes. If I eat a bit of cheese or some meat which is not well cooked, it may make my eyes see things wrongly. Humbug, I tell you, humbug!"

At this the Ghost gave a fearful cry and shook its chain with such a terrible noise that Scrooge held on to his chair to save himself from falling senseless. Then the Ghost took off the cloth which was tied round its head, and its mouth fell open like the mouth of a dead man.

Scrooge fell upon his knees and held his hands in front of his face. "Mercy!" he cried. "Why have you come to trouble me?"

"Now," said the Ghost, "do you believe in me or not?"

"I do," said Scrooge, "I do! But why must the spirits of the dead walk the earth, and why do they come to me?"

"Every man," answered the Ghost, "should in his lifetime walk among his fellow men and travel far. He should share their sorrows and their joys. But if a man's spirit does not do this in life, then it must wander through the world after death and see what it can no longer share but might have shared on earth and turned to happiness."

Again the Ghost gave a cry and shook its chain.

"You are chained!" said Scrooge, shaking with fear. "Tell me why?"

"I am wearing the chain which I made during my life," replied the Ghost. "I made it, foot by foot, and bound it on myself of my own free will. Do you wish to know the weight and length of the chain which you yourself bear? It was as heavy and as long as this one seven Christmas Eves ago, and you have laboured on it since."

"Tell me no more. Say something to comfort me, Jacob."

"I have no comfort to give," the Ghost replied. "I cannot rest. I cannot stay here. I must go. In life my spirit never walked outside the office, but now many weary journeys lie before me."

"Seven years dead!" thought Scrooge, "and travelling all the time!"

"The whole time," said the Ghost. "No rest. No peace. Do you not know that any Christian spirit finds its life on earth too short for the measureless chances of usefulness, and no sorrow afterwards can pay for those chances which have been missed? But I, I missed them all."

It took up the chain in its arms as if that was the cause of its grief and threw it heavily upon the floor.

"At this time of the year," it said, "I suffer most. Why did I walk through the crowds of fellow men with my eyes turned down, and never raised them to that blessed star which led the Wise Men to the child Jesus Christ? Were there no poor homes to which its light might have led me? . . . Hear me!"

"I will," said Scrooge, "I will! But don't be hard on me."

"I have sat beside you unseen for many a day."

This was not a pleasant idea to Scrooge.

"I am here tonight," continued the Ghost, "to warn you. You have still a chance and a hope of escaping my fate."

"You were always a good friend to me," said Scrooge. "I thank you."

"You will be visited," said the Ghost, "by three spirits. Expect the first tomorrow when the church bell sounds one o'clock. Expect the second on the next night at the same hour, and the third on the next night when the last stroke of twelve o'clock has ceased to sound. You will not see me any more; but for your own sake remember what I have said."

The Ghost took the cloth from the table and bound it round its head. The teeth made a sharp *click* when they were brought together by it. Then it walked backwards from Scrooge. At every step it took, the window raised itself a little so that, when the Ghost reached it, it was wide open. The Ghost made a sign to Scrooge to come near. When they were within two steps of each other Marley's Ghost held up its hand, warning him to come no nearer. Scrooge heard in the outside air cries of sorrow and weeping. The Ghost listened for a moment and then joined in the sound and floated out upon the dark night.