

The Story

"Marley was dead". Marley was the partner of Scrooge, a mean, bad-tempered merchant who strikes fear and discomfort in the hearts of all he meets; not least his poor clerk, Bob Cratchit, who on Christmas Eve is working late in a freezing cold office for a miserly wage. Reluctantly Scrooge lets him go home to celebrate Christmas with his family, but refuses to accept his Christmas wishes. "Humbug!" he replies. Likewise he turns away carol singers, his nephew Fred, who invites him to dinner, and a gentleman collecting money for the poor. Cynically Scrooge asks him "Is there no Poor Law, are there no Workhouses?" "Many can't go there; and many would rather die." "If they would rather die, they had better do it and decrease the surplus population," replies Scrooge.

In the streets Christmas is in the air: "the fog and darkness thickened so that people ran about with flaring links, proffering their Services to go before horses in carriages and conduct them on their way. The ancient tower of a church, whose gruff old bell was always peeping slyly down at Scrooge out of a Gothic window in the wall, became invisible and struck the hours and quarters in the clouds, with tremulous vibrations afterwards as if its teeth were chattering in its frozen head up there. The cold became intense. In the main street, at the corner of the court, some labourers were repairing the gas-pipes, and had lighted a great fire in a brazier, round which a party of ragged men and boys were gathered: warming their hands and winking their eyes before the blaze in rapture. The water plug being left in solitude, its overflowings sullenly congealed, and turned to misanthropic ice. The brightness of the shops, where holly sprigs and berries crackled in the lamp heat of the Windows, made pale faces ruddy as they passed."

But Scrooge notices none of this as he walks back to his huge and desolate house. As he opens the door he thinks he sees in the door-knocker the face of his dead partner, Marley. Humbug, he decides - but sees it again in the fire-place. And at midnight he is woken by the fearful sight of Marley's ghost, wrapped in endless iron chains. Marley explains that he has come to give him a last chance to change his ways, and so avoid becoming a tortured soul, as he is forever doomed to be. Three ghosts will come to visit Scrooge: the Ghost of Christmas Past, the Ghost of Christmas Present and the Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come. These three ghosts in turn take Scrooge through life: back to his own unhappy childhood when he still had feelings for others; to families and homes celebrating Christmas with love and joy, even the poorest of them like the Cratchits with their crippled son, Tiny Tim; and finally into the future, where he sees a body lying on his bed, hears people discussing his death, is shown his own gravestone and visits a den of thieves where his belongings, even his own clothes, are being sold.

After these shattering revelations Scrooge realises how much happiness he has missed in his life and how much unhappiness he has caused. He repents and decides to change his ways - which he does with gusto! He visits his nephew Fred with Christmas greetings, he gives a large sum of money to the poor, he sends the biggest turkey in the town to the Cratchits, and gives Bob a rise in pay - in short he becomes a true - and happy Christian gentleman. "And it was said of him that he knew how to keep Christmas well, if any man alive possessed the knowledge. May that be truly said of us, and all of us. And so, as Tiny Tim observed, God bless Us Every One!"