

Chapter I

Marley's Ghost



Marley was dead. There is no doubt about that. And the fact that Marley was dead is important. Otherwise, nothing wonderful will happen in the story I'm about to tell you. Old Marley was as dead as a doornail.

And did Scrooge know he was dead? Of course he did. Scrooge and he were business partners for many years. They ran an accounting firm, where they kept track of other people's money. Scrooge was also Marley's only friend. But Scrooge wasn't particularly sad to see him go. Business and money were more important to Scrooge than anything.

In fact, Scrooge was incredibly tight-fisted with his money! He didn't have a generous bone in his body. He was a hard man who kept to himself. The cold in Scrooge's heart froze his face into a grimace. His nose



was sharply pointed, his cheeks shriveled, his eyes red, and his thin lips blue. He spoke in a rasping voice that was horrible to listen to. He spread coldness all around him, even at Christmas time.

Nobody ever stopped him in the street to say, “My dear Scrooge, how are you? When will you come to see me?” No children asked him what time it was, no one ever asked Scrooge for directions on the street. Even dogs avoided him.

But what did Scrooge care! This was exactly what he wanted—to be left alone.

Then one Christmas Eve, old Scrooge sat working in his office. It was a bitterly cold and foggy day. It was just past three o’clock, but it was already getting dark. Candles were flickering dimly in the windows of the neighboring offices. The fog was so thick that the buildings across the way looked to Scrooge like ghosts.

Scrooge kept his door open so that he could keep an eye on his one employee, a clerk named Bob Cratchit. It was Mr. Cratchit’s job to copy out by hand all written materials in the office. His workspace was very small and bare, much like a prison cell. Scrooge had a very small fire to warm his office, but Mr. Cratchit’s fire was much smaller. In fact, his fire gave off almost no warmth at all. Scrooge refused to pay for more than just the minimum amount of coal to heat the office. A single



Scrooge spread coldness all around him



candle provided light for Mr. Cratchit's workspace, and he huddled close to it, as if it could warm him.

"Merry Christmas, uncle!" cried a cheerful voice. It was the voice of Scrooge's nephew, Fred. Fred's visit was unexpected, and his greeting made Scrooge jump in surprise.

"Bah!" said Scrooge, "Humbug!"

Fred's face was glowing and handsome. His eyes sparkled with joy.

"Come, uncle! You don't mean that, I'm sure," said Fred.

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

"Well," returned Fred playfully. "What right do have you to be so crabby? You have all the money you need."

Scrooge had no answer to this. "Bah!" he said again in frustration. "Humbug."

"Don't be so angry, uncle!"

"What else can I be," returned Scrooge, "when I live in a world of fools? Merry Christmas! What's Christmas time to you? It's a time for paying bills when you don't have enough money. A time for finding that you're a year older, but not an hour richer. If I had my way, these idiots repeating "Merry Christmas" over and over would be punished. They would be boiled in pudding and buried with a stake of holly through their

hearts!"

"Uncle, please!"

"Nephew," returned the uncle, "you have Christmas your way, and I'll have it mine. It's never done anyone any good."

"There are many things in my life that are good but which don't bring me any money," returned Fred. "Christmas being one of them. I think of Christmas as a good time. It's a time of kindness, forgiveness, and charity. A time to appreciate your fellow human beings. It has never put an ounce of gold or silver in my pocket, but I believe that it has done me good. I say, God bless it!"

Bob Cratchit in the next room applauded, which he immediately regretted doing.

"One more peep out of you, Cratchit" said Scrooge, "and I'll celebrate Christmas by firing you!"

"Don't be angry, uncle. Come have Christmas dinner with me and my family tomorrow."

Scrooge refused.

"But why?" cried Fred. "Why?"

"Why did you get married?" said Scrooge.

"Because I fell in love."

"Because you fell in love!" growled Scrooge, as if that were more ridiculous than having a merry Christmas. "You can leave now!"



“Uncle, I don’t want or need anything from you. I just want us to be together as a family.”

“Just go,” said Scrooge.

“I’m sorry that you feel like this. We’ve never even argued, that I can remember. But I won’t let this ruin my Christmas spirit. Merry Christmas, uncle!”

“Good afternoon!” said Scrooge.

“And a Happy New Year!”

“Good afternoon!” said Scrooge.

His nephew left the room with a happy wave and stopped in the doorway of Bob Cratchit’s little workspace. Mr. Cratchit was cold, to be sure, but his heart was warmer than Scrooge’s. He returned Fred’s “Merry Christmas” enthusiastically.

As Fred left, two pleasant-looking, plump gentlemen entered Scrooge’s office. They had books and papers in their hands, and they greeted him with a bow.

“Hello,” said one of the gentlemen, referring to his papers. “Do I have the pleasure of speaking with Mr. Scrooge, or Mr. Marley?”

“Mr. Marley died seven years ago,” Scrooge replied. “I’m Scrooge, his business partner.”

“Oh, we’re sorry for your loss. And I’m sure you, his surviving partner, have a spirit just as generous as Mr. Marley’s,” said the gentleman.

At the word “generous,” Scrooge frowned and shook his head.



Scrooge’s nephew, Fred



“Your partner was usually happy to make a contribution to our cause, Mr. Scrooge,” said the gentleman. “There are so many people in need, sir, especially at Christmas time. So many that don’t have food and shelter.”

“Are the prisons full? What about the workhouses?” asked Scrooge.

“I don’t believe so,” said the gentleman.

“I’m very glad to hear it,” said Scrooge

“Yes, well,” stuttered the gentleman. He was confused and shocked by Scrooge’s attitude. “We are trying to raise money to provide for those in need. And we believe Christmas is a perfect time of year to do that. How much would you like to contribute today?”

“Nothing!” Scrooge replied.

“You wish to be anonymous?”

“I wish to be left alone,” said Scrooge. “Since you ask me what I wish, gentlemen, that is my answer. I myself don’t see Christmas as being so merry, and I can’t afford to help lazy people celebrate. If they need someplace to sleep tonight, let them have a jail cell. Now, if you don’t mind, I’m busy.”

“But, sir, there is just not enough government assistance for the needy. Without our help, many will die.”

“If they would rather die,” said Scrooge, “they had better do it. That would at least decrease the surplus

population of these poor wretches. But I have my own business to attend to. Good afternoon, gentlemen!”

Seeing that it was useless to continue, the gentlemen left. Scrooge went back to his work, quite pleased with himself.

The fog and darkness thickened, so much so that people had to help the horses pulling carriages to find their way. Normally, Scrooge could see the old church tower from his office window. Now the church bell was invisible, and it rang out somewhere in the cold gloom.

The cold became intense. But the cheery displays of the shop windows lifted everyone’s spirits. A young caroler stopped on the street outside of Scrooge’s door. Scrooge heard the Christmas carol begin and scowled. He raised up a ruler from his desk, threatening the boy with it. The singer ran off in terror.

Finally it was time to stop work for the day and go home. Scrooge stood up reluctantly and told the Bob Cratchit he could leave for the day. Mr. Cratchit immediately snuffed his candle out and put on his hat.

“I suppose you’ll want the day off tomorrow?” said Scrooge.

“If you don’t mind, sir.”

“I do mind,” said Scrooge, “and it’s not fair. Do you expect to get paid for not working tomorrow?”

Mr. Cratchit smiled faintly. “Christmas comes only



once a year,” he mumbled.

“A poor excuse for robbing me every twenty-fifth of December!” said Scrooge, buttoning his coat up to his chin. “But I suppose I’ll allow it. But be here earlier than usual the next morning.”

Mr. Cratchit promised that he would. He hurried along the cobblestone street, excited for the Christmas Eve festivities.

Scrooge, for his part, walked out with a growl. He headed for a sad little tavern where he ate his dinner alone every evening. He then went straight home. He was tired and longed for his bed.

He lived alone, of course, in a dark old building. The building may have been beautiful once, but it had lost its beauty as a child does with the passing of many years. Now, it is a fact that there was nothing unusual about the knocker on the door of Scrooge’s building. It was very large, but otherwise just a door knocker. Scrooge was so used to seeing it, after all these years, that he hardly even noticed it. And it is true that Scrooge had less imagination than most people in London. Also, keep in mind that Scrooge had not thought for one second about Marley since he was mentioned that afternoon. And so I wonder, can anyone explain to me why Scrooge saw Marley’s face in the knocker as he went to open the door?



Marley’s face in the door knocker

