

# A Christmas Carol - Stave One: Marley's Ghost



## 1.1 Humbug

*December 24, 1846 - London*

Old Marley was dead. There was no doubt about that.

Did Scrooge know he was dead? Of course he did. Scrooge and he were partners for many years. Scrooge was Marley's only friend. Scrooge never painted out Old Marley's name. There it stood, years after, above the door: *Scrooge and Marley*.

Sometimes people new to the business called him Scrooge. Sometimes they called him Marley. Scrooge answered to both names. It was all the same to him.

Scrooge was a cold, mean old man with no friends. Nobody ever stopped him in the street to say, 'My dear Scrooge, how are you? When will you come to see me?'

But what did Scrooge care?

That Christmas Eve old Scrooge sat busy in his office. It was very, very cold. And by three in the afternoon, it was already dark.

The door of Scrooge's office was open. His assistant, Bob Cratchit, was in a tiny, dark room at the back. Bob was copying letters for his boss.

Scrooge had a very small fire. Bob's fire was even smaller. Scrooge kept the coal-box in his own room.

## Fred

'A Merry Christmas, Uncle!' cried a cheerful voice from the front door. It was Scrooge's nephew, Fred.

'Bah!' said Scrooge, without looking up

'Humbug!'

'Christmas a humbug, uncle!' said Scrooge's nephew. 'You don't mean that, I am sure.'

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

'Come, then,' said the nephew. 'What reason have you to be morose? You're rich!'

'Bah!' said Scrooge, 'Humbug!'

'Don't be cross, uncle!' said the nephew.



‘Merry Christmas! What’s Christmas to you? A time for paying bills without money? To be a year older, but not an hour richer?’

‘Uncle!’ said the nephew.

‘Nephew!’ replied the uncle. ‘Keep Christmas in your own way. Let me keep it in mine.’

‘Keep it!’ repeated Scrooge’s nephew. ‘But you don’t keep it.’

‘Let me leave it, then,’ said Scrooge. ‘What good it has ever done you?’

‘I have always thought of Christmas time as a kind, forgiving time,’ said Fred. ‘It does me good. I say, God bless it!’

Without thinking, Bob clapped his hands.

Scrooge turned to his assistant. ‘Another sound from you,’ he said, ‘and you’ll be losing your job this Christmas.’

‘Don’t be angry, Uncle. Come! Dine with us tomorrow.’

‘No!’

‘I want nothing from you; I ask nothing of you. Why cannot we be friends?’

‘Good afternoon,’ said Scrooge.

‘I am sorry, with all my heart. Merry Christmas, Uncle!’

‘Good afternoon,’ said Scrooge.

His nephew left the room without an angry word.

## Charity

Soon after two other gentlemen came in. They stood in Scrooge’s office, with books and papers in their hands.

‘*Scrooge and Marley*, I believe,’ said one of the gentlemen, referring to his list. ‘And you are Mr. Scrooge? Or Mr. Marley?’

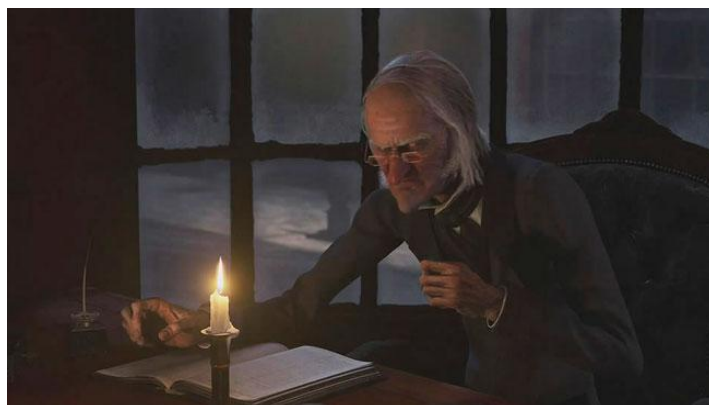
‘Mr. Marley has been dead seven years,’ Scrooge replied. ‘He died seven years ago, this very night.’

‘At Christmas, Mr. Scrooge,’ said the gentleman, taking up a pen, ‘We should give a little to the poor. They suffer greatly at this time of year.’

‘Why? Are there no prisons?’ asked Scrooge.

‘Plenty of prisons,’ said the gentleman, laying down the pen again.

‘And the workhouses?’ asked Scrooge. ‘Are they still in operation?’



‘They are,’ said the gentleman, ‘I wish they were not. A few of us are trying to raise money to buy the Poor some meat and drink and means of warmth. What shall I put you down for?’

‘Nothing!’ Scrooge replied. ‘I don’t make merry myself at Christmas and I can’t afford to make idle people merry. Good afternoon, gentlemen!’

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At last, it was time for Bob Cratchit to go home.

‘You want the day off work tomorrow, I suppose?’ said Scrooge.

‘If it’s convenient, sir.’

‘It’s not convenient,’ said Scrooge, ‘and it’s not fair. I pay a day’s wages for no work.’

‘It’s only once a year, sir.’

‘A poor excuse!’ said Scrooge, buttoning his great-coat to the chin.

## 1.2 Jacob Marley



*Scrooge returns home on the evening of Christmas Eve. It is the seventh anniversary of the death of his business partner, Jacob Marley.*

Scrooge lived in a gloomy old building once owned by his dead partner. Now, only Scrooge lived there. The other rooms were let out as offices. There was also a wine cellar.

Fog and frost surrounded the black old gateway of the house. The yard was very dark and gloomy. Scrooge had to grope with his hands, to find his way to the front door.

Scrooge put his key in the lock. As he did so, the knocker suddenly became Marley’s face!

The knocker looked at Scrooge as Marley used to look. Its eyes were wide open.

A moment later it was a normal knocker again.

Scrooge turned the key firmly, lit his candle and walked in.

He did pause before he shut the door. And he did look behind it first. But there was nothing on the back of the door.

He was seeing things!

'Bah!' said Scrooge and closed it with a bang.

The sound echoed through the house like thunder.

Scrooge was not a man frightened by echoes. He walked across the hall and slowly up the stairs.

Up Scrooge went, not caring about the poor light given by his candle. Darkness is cheap, and Scrooge liked it.

But before he shut his heavy door, he walked through his rooms to see that all was right.

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He looked in the sitting-room and the bedroom. Everything was normal. Nobody was under the table. Nobody was under the sofa. A small fire was in the grate.

On the table his spoon and basin were ready. There was also a little saucepan of gruel upon the hob.

Nobody was under the bed or in the closet. His dressing-gown was hanging up against the wall. Everything was as usual.

Scrooge closed his door. He double-locked himself in.

Feeling safer, he put on his dressing-gown, slippers, and nightcap. Then he sat down before the fire to eat his gruel.

He tried not to think about Marley.



## A ghost?

An old unused bell hung in the room. Suddenly it began to swing.

Soon it rang out loudly. So did every bell in the house.

This lasted half a minute, but it seemed an hour. The bells stopped as they had begun, together.

Then there was a clanking noise, deep down below.

It sounded like someone was dragging a heavy chain over the casks in the wine merchant's cellar below.

Then he heard the cellar-door fly open. This was followed by a much louder sound. It started on the floors below; before coming up the stairs. Now it was coming straight towards his door.

'Humbug!' cried Scrooge.

His colour changed though, when the heavy door opened. Something passed into the room before his eyes.

It was Marley's ghost. The very same. Marley in his usual clothes.

A long chain, made of cash-boxes, keys and padlocks, wound about him like a tail.

'Who are you? What do you want with me?'

'Ask me who I was.'

It was Marley's voice, no doubt about it.

'Who were you then?' said Scrooge, raising his voice.

'In life I was your partner, Jacob Marley.'



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The ghost sat down on the opposite side of the fireplace.

'You don't believe in me,' said the Ghost.

'I don't,' said Scrooge. 'Humbug!'

The spirit shook its chain and made a terrible noise. Scrooge held on tight to his chair.

To his horror, the ghost was taking off the bandage round its head.

Scrooge fell upon his knees, and held his hands before his face. 'Why do you trouble me?'

'Do you believe in me or not?' replied the Ghost.

'I do,' said Scrooge. 'I must. But why are you in chains?'

'It was like this seven Christmas Eves ago.'

'Jacob!' said Scrooge. 'Old Jacob Marley. Tell me more! Speak comfort to me, Jacob.'

'I have none to give,' the Ghost replied. 'I cannot stay. I cannot stay anywhere. I must walk the earth.'

'Seven years dead,' said Scrooge. 'And travelling all the time?'  
'The whole time,' said the Ghost. 'I have no rest, no peace.'

The Ghost made another cry in the dead silence of the night.



'But you were always a good man of business, Jacob,' said Scrooge.

'Business!' cried the Ghost. 'Mankind was my business. Mercy was my business.'

It held up its chain and flung it heavily upon the ground again.

'At this time of year,' the ghost said, 'I suffer most. Why did I walk with my eyes turned down?'

Scrooge hated to hear the spirit talking like this. He shivered, and wiped the perspiration from his brow.

'Hear me!' cried the Ghost. 'My time is nearly gone.'

'I will,' said Scrooge. 'But don't be hard upon me, Jacob!'

'I am here tonight to warn you,' said the ghost. 'You still have a chance and hope of escaping my fate.'

'You were always a good friend to me,' said Scrooge. 'Thank you.'

'You will be haunted,' resumed the Ghost, 'by Three Spirits.'

### Three Spirits

Scrooge's face fell. 'I-I think I'd rather not.'

'Without their visits,' said the Ghost, 'you cannot avoid the path I tread. Expect the first spirit tomorrow, when the clock strikes one.'

'Couldn't I take them all at once, Jacob?' said Scrooge.

'Expect the second on the next night at the same hour. The third will come the next night on the last stroke of twelve.'

The spirit walked backwards, away from him. With every step, the window raised itself a little until it was wide open.

A terrible wailing sound began. The spirit floated out into the dark night.

Scrooge went to the window and looked out. The air was filled with spirits. Every one of them wore chains like Marley's Ghost.

Eventually the spirit voices faded together.

Scrooge closed the window. The door by which the Ghost had entered was still double-locked.

'Humbug!' Scrooge started to say but stopped.

Instead he went straight to bed, without undressing, and instantly fell asleep.



### End of Stave One

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