

A Christmas Carol - synopsis

Stave 1

[Jacob Marley](#), the business partner of [Ebenezer Scrooge](#), died seven years ago. On a dingy Christmas Eve, Scrooge, a cold, unfriendly miser, works in his counting-house while keeping an eye on his clerk, a small man named [Bob Cratchit](#). Scrooge's nephew wishes Scrooge a merry Christmas, but Scrooge answers him with a disdainful "Bah! Humbug!" He believes Christmas is the same as any day of the year, a day in which one must still pay bills. His nephew, [Fred](#), thinks of Christmas as a "kind, forgiving, charitable, pleasant time." He invites Scrooge to dine with him tomorrow, but his uncle rejects the offer.

Two portly gentlemen enter and ask Scrooge for charity for the poor. Scrooge believes that prisons and workhouses are sufficient, and he dismisses them. Outside, it gets colder. A Christmas caroler tries to sing at Scrooge's door, but the old man scares him away. Scrooge closes up the counting-house and tells Cratchit he expects him to work on Christmas day. Cratchit goes home.

Scrooge goes through his dreary routine of dinner in a tavern, then goes to his gloomy home. Scrooge sees the dead Marley's face in the knocker of his door until it turns back into a knocker. It gives Scrooge pause, but he resolves not to be frightened. He thinks he sees a locomotive hearse going up the stairs before him. He walks through his rooms to make sure no one is there. After, he warms himself by a small fire. A bell in the room starts to ring, and soon all the other bells in the house do. After some time, the bells stop, and Scrooge hears the cellar-door open.

Marley's ghost transparent and bound in a long chain made of cash-boxes, keys, padlocks, ledgers, deeds, and heavy purses enters the room. Scrooge claims he does not believe the ghost exists, but soon he admits he does. Marley says his spirit has been wandering since he died as punishment for being consumed with business and not with people while alive. He has come to warn Scrooge and perhaps save him from the same fate. He tells him Three Spirits will come to him over the next three nights. Marley makes incoherent, sorrowful sounds, then leaves. Scrooge looks out the window and sees the sky filled with other chained spirits, some familiar to him, who cry about their inability to connect with others. He goes to sleep.

Stave 2

Scrooge wakes up, and the bell of a neighborhood church rings from six until twelve, then stops. He wonders if he slept through the day and into another night. He looks out the window to an empty scene. He worries over Marley's ghost and wonders if it was a dream. He remembers the ghost's warning of a visit at one at night, and waits. The hour arrives, a flash of light comes in the room, his bed-curtains are drawn aside, and the figure of a small old man appears.

The old man introduces himself as the [Ghost of Christmas Past](#). He says he is there for Scrooge's "welfare" and "reclamation," then puts Scrooge's hand on his heart. They instantly reappear on a wintry country road around Scrooge's childhood home. Scrooge is deeply affected by the memory, and he walks with the Ghost to the town. They see schoolboys, and the Ghost explains that the people they see are shadows of their former selves, and are unaware of him and Scrooge. The boys run out of school and wish merry Christmas to each other. The Ghost reminds Scrooge that one boy, ignored by the others, remains in school alone, and Scrooge weeps.

They walk into the dilapidated schoolhouse, where they see the young Scrooge reading alone by a small fire. The older Scrooge cries again, and says he wishes he had given something to the boy caroling at his door last night. The Ghost says they will see another Christmas, and the young Scrooge grows larger as the room becomes dirtier. Scrooge's younger sister, [Fan](#), enters the room and joyfully announces she is bringing him home for Christmas, as their father is much kinder than he used to be. After they eat and drink with the intimidating schoolmaster, they go off. The Ghost reminds Scrooge that his sister died after having had Scrooge's nephew.

The Ghost and Scrooge travel to the warehouse of Scrooge's apprenticeship. [Fezziwig](#), an old, jolly man, gives Scrooge and another worker the night off for Christmas Eve. Scrooge and his friend quickly clean up and build a cozy fire. Several more people come in and a party ensues. Scrooge enjoys himself immensely until the party ends, when he remembers he is merely revisiting the scene with the Ghost. Scrooge tells the Ghost that Fezziwig's gift of happiness to his friends far outweighs the money he spent on the party. He mentions he would like to say something to his clerk.

Scrooge now sees an older version of himself in the prime of life. His face shows the first signs of greed as he sits by a crying girl, [Belle](#). She breaks off their romance, reproaching him for replacing his love for her with the pursuit of money. The scene changes and Belle is now the mother of a raucous, affectionate brood of children. Her husband comes home and tells her he saw Scrooge sitting alone in his office. Scrooge begs the Ghost to take him back to his own time, and takes it upon himself to pull the Ghost's cap over its brightly-lit head. The light cannot be obscured, however, and Scrooge eventually falls into his own bed out of exhaustion.

Stave 3

Scrooge awakes when the bell strikes one, and is immediately prepared for the second Ghost's arrival. After a while, he sees a light come from the adjacent room. A strange voice tells him to enter, and when he does, he sees his room has been decked out with Christmas decorations and a feast. A giant ghost introduces himself as the [Ghost of Christmas Present](#) and tells Scrooge to touch his robe. When he does, they are transported to the streets on Christmas morning where, despite the gloomy weather, people frolic joyously in the snow as shopkeepers pass out delicious food. The people carry their dinners off with them and occasionally bump each other accidentally and argue. When the Ghost sprinkles a few drops of water from his torch on them, however, peace is restored.

The Ghost transports Scrooge to the modest house of [Bob Cratchit](#). His family, dressed in its best clothing, waits for Bob to return from church before they eat dinner. He comes in with his small, crippled son, [Tiny Tim](#). They discuss Tiny Tim's good heart and his growing strength, then have a wonderful dinner. When Scrooge asks, the Ghost informs him that, unless the future is altered, Tiny Tim will die. At the dinner, Mrs. Cratchit curses Scrooge, but her husband reminds her that it is Christmas.

The Ghost brings Scrooge to a number of other happy Christmas dinners in the city, as well as to celebrations in a miner's house, a lighthouse, and on a ship. Scrooge is then taken to his nephew [Fred](#)'s house, where Fred tells his pretty wife and his sisters he feels sorry for Scrooge, since his miserly, hateful nature deprives him of pleasure in life. Scrooge's niece plays a tune on the harp, which softens Scrooge's heart. Scrooge even joins in for some of their games, though they are not aware of his ghostly presence.

The Ghost pulls Scrooge away from the games to a number of other Christmas scenes, all joyful despite the often meager environments. As they travel, the Ghost ages and says his life is short he will die at midnight. A boy and girl, looking ragged, unhealthy, and impoverished, crawl out from his robes. The Ghost tells Scrooge they are named Ignorance and Want. He tells him to beware of them, especially the boy, on whose brow is written doom. He encourages Scrooge to deny Ignorance in himself and others. When Scrooge asks if the children have no refuge, the Ghost answers with Scrooge's previous words "'Are there no prisons? Are there no workhouses?'" The bell strikes twelve, the Ghost disappears, and Scrooge sees a new phantom, solemn and robed, approach.

Stave 4

The [Ghost of Christmas Yet To Come](#) solemnly approaches Scrooge in its black garment. It responds to Scrooge's questions with silence and motions for him to follow. They instantly appear in the city and listen in on some businessmen who casually and jokingly discuss someone's death. Scrooge wonders why the Ghost is showing him these conversations and what bearing they have on his future self. However, he does not see himself among the crowds.

Scrooge and the Ghost travel through a poor, run-down part of town. In a shop, several people divvy up some possessions they have plundered from a man who has recently died. Scrooge tells the Ghost that he sees his life might turn out like the dead man's. The scene changes and Scrooge is at the plundered bed of the corpse. Scrooge cannot bring himself to raise the veil of the dead man and see his face. Scrooge asks the Ghost to show him someone who has been emotionally affected by the man's death.

They are transported to the house of a young couple, who rejoices since their merciless creditor has died and they are not ruined from debt. Scrooge asks the host to show him some tenderness connected with a death. In the Cratchit home, Bob mourns for [Tiny Tim](#), who has recently died. He tells the family about the kindness of Scrooge's nephew, [Fred](#), and soon feels better when he discusses Tiny Tim's lasting memory.

Scrooge asks the Ghost who the dead man they saw was, but the Ghost only brings him to Scrooge's office. However, someone new has taken over the office. The Ghost points Scrooge toward a graveyard and to a specific grave. Before Scrooge looks at it, he asks the Ghost if these are the shadows of things that "Will" be or "May" be. Scrooge believes they are the shadows of what "May" be, but the Ghost says nothing. Scrooge sees his own name on the tombstone, and realizes he was the dead man from before. Scrooge vows to honor Christmas in his heart and live by the lessons of the past, present, and future, such that he may alter his life. The Ghost shrinks and collapses into a bedpost.

Stave 5

Scrooge wakes up in his bedroom and joyfully repeats his vow to live from the lessons of the three ghosts. He runs around his house and then outside, where church bells ring. A boy tells him it is Christmas Day, and Scrooge realizes that the ghosts visited him all in one night. Scrooge buys a prize turkey and sends it to [Bob Cratchit](#)'s house.

Scrooge dresses in his best clothing and walks in the crowds with a smile. He gives a great deal of money to the portly gentleman who had asked him for a charitable donation yesterday. Scrooge continues to walk through the city and happily talks with everyone he meets. He visits [Fred](#)'s house and has a wonderful time at the party. The next morning, Scrooge gets to work early. When Cratchit comes in late, Scrooge pretends to reprimand him, then gives him a raise.

Scrooge continues his kindly ways, befriending everyone and becoming a second father to [Tiny Tim](#), who does not die. He never sees the ghosts again, but he keeps the spirit of Christmas alive in his heart as well as anyone.