

## **A Christmas Carol, by Charles Dickens**

### **Stave 1 - Marley's Ghost**

MARLEY was dead: to begin with. Old Marley was as dead as a door-nail. This must be understood, or nothing wonderful can come of the story I am going to relate.

Scrooge never painted out Old Marley's name, though his old partner was – definitely - dead. The company was known as Scrooge and Marley. Sometimes people called Scrooge Scrooge, and sometimes Marley, but he answered to both names. It was all the same to him.

Oh! Scrooge was a selfish old sinner! And he didn't thaw one degree at Christmas.

One dark Christmas Eve, old Scrooge sat busy in his counting-house. It was biting, foggy weather.

Scrooge had a very small fire. But his clerk's poor fire was barely warm.

"Merry Christmas, uncle!" Scrooge's nephew came into the room.

"Bah!" said Scrooge, "Humbug!"

"Christmas a humbug, uncle!" he said. "You don't mean that?"

"If I could work my will," said Scrooge indignantly, "every idiot who goes about with 'Merry Christmas' on his lips, should be boiled with his own pudding, and buried with a stake of holly through his heart!"

The nephew answered, "Don't be angry, uncle. Come for Christmas to-morrow."

"Bah, humbug!"

"Why cannot we be friends?" cried Scrooge's nephew. "Merry Christmas, uncle!"

"Good-bye!" said Scrooge.

His nephew even stopped to wish "Merry Christmas" to the clerk.

"My clerk," muttered Scrooge, "fifteen shillings a week, and a wife and family, talking about a merry Christmas. Humbug!"

Scrooge's nephew had let two other people in. They bowed to him.

"Mr. Scrooge, or Mr. Marley?" said one of the gentlemen.

"Mr. Marley," Scrooge replied, "died seven years ago, this very night."

"Mr. Scrooge," said the gentleman, "a few of us are going to buy the Poor some meat and drink, and means of warmth. What would you like to give?"

"Nothing," said Scrooge. "They can go to debtors' prisons."

"Many would rather die."

"If they would rather die," said Scrooge, "they had better do it, and decrease the surplus population. Good afternoon, gentlemen!"

Scrooge went back to his work.

Meanwhile the fog and darkness and biting cold thickened. One cold young boy stooped down at Scrooge's keyhole to sing a Christmas carol: but at the first sound of

"God bless you, merry gentleman!

May nothing you dismay!"

Scrooge jumped up so, that the singer fled in terror, leaving the keyhole to the fog.

At length the hour of shutting up arrived. Scrooge nodded to the clerk, who instantly snuffed his candle out, and put on his hat.

"You'll want all day to-morrow, I suppose?" said Scrooge.

The clerk observed that it was only once a year.

"A poor excuse for picking a man's pocket every twenty-fifth of December!" said Scrooge. "Be here all the earlier next morning."

Scrooge went home to his gloomy house. The yard was dark and the fog and frost hung about the house.

Now, the knocker on his door was very large and ordinary. But tonight it looked like - Marley's face.

Marley's face. The eyes were wide open, and its grayish colour made it horrible.

As Scrooge looked, it became a knocker again. He did look carefully, but there was nothing behind the door, so he said "Pooh, pooh!" and closed it with a bang.

He closed his door and double-locked himself in. He walked through his rooms to see that all was right and sat by the fire.

"Humbug!" he said. And then he heard it - a clanking noise, from the cellar, as if some person were dragging a heavy chain.

The cellar-door flew open with a booming sound, and then he heard the noise coming up the stairs; then straight towards his door.

"Humbug!" said Scrooge.

It came on through the heavy door, and passed into the room before his eyes.

Marley. The chain Marley pulled was long, and made of cash-boxes, keys, padlocks, and purses. His body was transparent; so that Scrooge could see the two buttons on his coat behind.

“What do you want with me?” said Scrooge. “Who are you?”

“In life I was your partner, Jacob Marley.”

“Humbug, I tell you! humbug!”

At this the spirit raised a frightful cry, and shook its chain. Scrooge fell upon his knees.

Asked the Ghost, “Do you believe in me or not?”

“I do,” said Scrooge. “I must. But why do spirits walk the earth, and why do they come to me?”

“It is required of every man,” the Ghost returned, “that the spirit within him should walk abroad among his fellowmen,; and if that spirit does not go forth in life, it is condemned to do so after death!”

“You are chained,” said Scrooge, trembling. “Tell me why?”

“I wear the chain I forged in life,” replied the Ghost. “I made it link by link, and yard by yard; and of my own free will I wore it.” Scrooge trembled more and more.

“Do you know,” pursued the Ghost, “your chain was as heavy as this, seven Christmas Eves ago? You have made it longer, since then.”

“But you were always a good man of business, Jacob,” faltered Scrooge.

“Business!” cried the Ghost, wringing its hands again. “Mankind was my business. Kindness was my business!”

“I am here to-night to warn you,” pursued the Ghost. You will be haunted by Three Spirits.”

“I—I think I’d rather not,” said Scrooge. The spectre floated out upon the bleak, dark night.

“Expect the first to-morrow,” said the Ghost, “when the bell tolls One.”

“Expect the second on the next night at the same hour. The third upon the next night at the last stroke of Twelve.”

When it had said these words, the spectre floated out upon the bleak, dark night.

The air was filled with moaning phantoms, and every one of them wore chains like Marley’s Ghost. They faded away. Scrooge closed the window, and examined the door by which the Ghost had entered. It was still as he had double-locked, with his own hands. He tried to say “Humbug!” but stopped. And he went straight to bed and fell asleep upon the instant.



