

The Story of Old Scrooge

ADAPTED FROM A CHRISTMAS CAROL
IN PROSE
BY CHARLES DICKENS



The little tailor busied himself stirring tomorrow's pudding while his wife and baby went to the market to buy the beef.



When the hour for closing arrived at the counting-house, Scrooge grumpily stopped his money-counting, dismounted from his stool and told his clerk, Bob Crachit, that work was ended for the day.

Scrooge didn't approve of the holiday, but he had to recognize that it existed. "You'll want all day tomorrow, I suppose?"

"If quite convenient, sir."

Looking the more unpleasant, Scrooge said: "It's not convenient, and it's not fair. If I was to stop half-a-crown for it, you'd think yourself ill-used, I'll be bound? And yet, you don't think me ill-used, when I pay a day's wages for no work."



Tactfully as he could, Crachit reminded his employer that Christmas came but once a year.

"A poor excuse for picking a man's pocket every twenty-fifth of December!" said Scrooge. "But I suppose you must have the whole day. Be here all the earlier next morning."

Buttoning his greatcoat to the chin, Scrooge growled to himself as he walked out the door. He was hardly out of sight before the clerk had closed the office and headed homeward to Camden Town. Because it was Christmas Eve, he paused long enough to go down a slide on Cornhill, twenty times, behind a line of boys.

Scrooge took his usual lonely dinner in a melancholy tavern, read all the newspapers in the place, then turned homeward to bed. He lived in chambers that once had belonged to his deceased partner. It was a dreary place. No one else lived there, although some rooms were let out as offices.

The fog lay heavy and the yard was dark, but Scrooge knew every stone and soon was putting his key into the door lock.



There was, upon the door, a huge knocker. There was nothing unusual about it except, at this very moment, it appeared not as a knocker but to the startled Scrooge as the face of his late partner. Marley's face, plain as could be.



Scrooge felt a terrible sensation within himself. He had never had such a feeling before. He stared until the sight before his eyes became only a door knocker again, turned the key and let himself into the room. Once inside, he paused, looking behind the door as if he expected to see Marley standing there. He closed the door with a bang, and the sound echoed like thunder throughout the house.



Satisfied with his search, Scrooge locked himself in — double-locked himself in, which was not his custom. Strange sounds were in the air, and strange things happened. A disused bell hung near his bed. It began to swing slowly, then rang loudly, as did every other bell in the house. Scrooge listened intently. Another sound began when the bells ended. It seemed someone was dragging heavy chains over the wine merchant's casks in the cellar below.

The sound grew nearer and nearer. And then, within the room, he stood. Marley, with his pigtailed, his waist-coat, tights and boots. The chain he drew was wrapped around his middle. It was made in steel, but resembled familiar things—cash boxes, keys, padlocks, ledgers, deeds and heavy purses.



It was a ghost, no doubt, for Scrooge could see right through the waistcoat, the two buttons on the back clearly visible. A ghost that talked. The ghost told Scrooge that the chain represented all the misdeeds and unkind acts of a lifetime and that he, Scrooge, was fashioning his own chain, a heavy weight that would bear upon him when he was dead.

But, all was not hopeless, the ghost reminded. He told Scrooge that other visitors would follow throughout the night. Three spirits in all would come, each with a message of importance. If Scrooge were wise, the ghost cautioned, he would listen carefully and see clearly all the visitors would show him.



When the ghost vanished, Scrooge checked his door. It was still double-locked. Wearily he put himself to bed and eventually fell asleep. He awoke,

not knowing the time, to find it was still dark. The curtains beside his bed were drawn back by a hand and the first vision appeared. It was a strange figure, like a child, and yet again like an old man. Its hair was white, yet the face was smooth as that of a child. It held a branch of fresh green holly in its hand and, in contradiction, its dress was trimmed with summer flowers. Strangest of all, however, was a bright clear crown of light that surrounded the head.

The visitor told Scrooge that he was the Ghost of Christmas Past and, before Scrooge knew it, he was taken back in spirit, many weary years, to his boyhood home. The Christmases of his youth paraded before him. Some of them were sad, for he was a lonely boy, but others were jolly. Scrooge was amazed as events of the past flew before his eyes. Times and people that he had known and many of them long ago forgotten. The best of these he had not forgotten and he felt pleasure when the spirit took him to a warehouse where he had served as an apprentice.



When they peered into the window, Scrooge saw an old gentleman in a Welsh wig, sitting at a high desk and he exclaimed, "Why, it's old Fezziwig!" Bless his heart, it's Fezziwig alive again."

As they looked, Old Fezziwig laid down his pen. He looked at the clock. "Yo, ho, there! Ebenezer! (that's me, thought Scrooge), Dick! (Ah, Dick, Wilkins, to be sure), no more work tonight. Christmas Eve, Dick. Christmas, Ebenezer. Let's have the shutter's up."

In came a fiddler, who sat on a lofty desk and began to play. In came Mrs. Fezziwig and the three Miss Fezziwigs and six young followers. In came all the young men and women employed in the business, the housemaid, with her cousin, the baker.

The party began. Scrooge relived every moment of it. Yet, ever-conscious that the Ghost of Christmas Past still had eyes upon him. Other scenes of his past life were re-lived, until at last he felt he could bear no more.

Scrooge cried out, "Leave me! Take me back. Haunt me no longer!" Again, he was in his own bedroom, exhausted, drowsy, and eventually to sleep.



Again, in the dark, Scrooge found himself awake. No vision appeared within the room. He waited. When he could restrain himself no longer, he reached for his slippers, put them on, and walked cautiously to the door. As he reached for the lock, a voice on the other side called his name and bade him enter. He complied.



It was his own room, no doubt, but it was changed. It was gaily decorated, with holly, mistletoe, and ivy. In the center of the room, heaped together to form a throne, were turkeys, geese, game, sausages, mince pies and much more. In the center of the room, too, a jolly giant. "I am the ghost of Christmas Present. Look upon me!"

Suddenly, the two of them stood in the city streets on Christmas morning. All the sights and sounds that Scrooge had refused to recognize were there—people in the streets, greeting one another, the smell of good food and fruits, the church bells calling good people to church and chapel. Scrooge and the jolly giant went on, invisible, through the streets, to the very door of Bob Crachit's house. Scrooge stood in awe as the Spirit blessed the small dwelling. Inside, Mrs. Crachit, her daughters Belinda and Martha, and son Peter, awaited the return of their father. In he came, carrying Tiny Tim upon his shoulder. Tiny Tim, bearing a crutch, and his limbs supported by an iron frame.

Scrooge continued to watch as the Crachits busily prepared their small Christmas feast. Everyone joined in preparation of the meal. Excitement mounted as they gathered about the table and Mrs. Crachit approached the roast goose with a carving knife. A murmur of delight arose and even Tiny Tim shouted, Hurrah! A pudding, much too small for so large a family, was a wonderful treat. Dinner over, the family gathered round the hearth. Bob Crachit raised a toast: "Merry Christmas to us all, my dears, God bless us." The family echoed the sentiment and Tiny Tim, the last of all, said "God bless us every one!"



Scrooge felt an interest he had never known before. He asked of the Spirit if Tiny Tim would live. The Spirit replied, "I see a vacant seat and a crutch without an owner, carefully preserved." Scrooge hung his head. He felt worse when he heard Bob Crachit propose another toast and Mrs. Crachit respond that she did not wish to drink a toast to Mr. Scrooge, "such an odious, stingy, hard, unfeeling man." But, she did, and the children drank after her, while the Ghost of Christmas Present took Scrooge to visit here and there about the town, showing him both misery and happiness along the way.

And soon thereafter, Scrooge was face to face with another visitor.

"I am in the presence of Christmas Yet to Come?" said Scrooge.

The robed spirit seemed to incline its head. It quickly showed Scrooge how his own death might be, with no one to mourn his loss; in fact, some seemed happy at his passing. It also showed him how Tiny Tim might die and leave countless friends to mourn and sorrow for him.

Scrooge assured the Spirit that he was a changed man, and that the shadows that had passed before him had altered his life: He said: "I will honor Christmas in my heart, and try to keep it all the year. I will live in the past, the present, and the future . . . Oh, tell me I may sponge away the writing on this stone!"

When the third Spirit had gone, Scrooge kept the memory of the sight of his own name upon a tombstone, and no mourners in sight. When he awakened, he renewed his promise, "I will live in the past, the present and the future."

Scrooge dressed in his very best and went into the streets. People were everywhere. Many of them he had seen during the time of his visit with the Ghost of Christmas Present. Scrooge looked so pleasant that people spoke to him and, afterwards, he confessed, their voices were music to his ears. One gentleman, only days before rudely refused when he asked Scrooge for a donation to a fund for the poor, was surprised when Scrooge presented to him a healthy sum of money.

Scrooge journeyed on, to his nephew's house. He passed the door a dozen times before he had the courage to knock. Then he made a dash to the door and did it.

"Fred," he said when his nephew appeared.

"Why, bless my soul!" cried Fred.

"It's I. Your Uncle Scrooge. I've come to dinner. Will you let me in, Fred?"

He was made so heartily welcome. He thought his nephew would shake his arm off. He was perfectly at home within minutes.

Next morning, Scrooge hurried to the office, much earlier than usual . . . he wanted to be there before Bob Crachit, to catch Crachit coming late to work. He did. Bob was nearly twenty minutes late. He had his hat in his hand, awaiting the wrath of scrooge. It never came.

Instead, Scrooge greeted him cheerfully—and told him that he was to receive a raise in pay. Crachit was amazed. But he knew, finally, that Scrooge was sincere. The old man patted him on the back. "A Merry Christmas, Bob! A Merry Christmas—a merrier Christmas, Bob than I've given you in many a year."



In the years that followed, Scrooge kept his word and his promises. Tiny Tim did not die and to the gentle lad Scrooge became a second father. He also became as good a friend, a master and a man as the city ever knew. A few people laughed to see the change in him, but Scrooge let them laugh and paid little heed. His own heart was laughing, with joy and happiness, and he gave joy to all who knew him.

Scrooge never encountered another Spirit. And, long years after, it was often said of him that he truly knew how to keep the Christmas. May that be true of each of us and, always, as Tiny Tim observed, "God bless us every one!"

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The Raleigh Report "Shooting at the wrong target"

BY N.C. STATE SENATOR ANDY WELLS

After Hurricane Florence, when you read the newspapers, it looked like North Carolina faced an environmental disaster because of flooded hog farm lagoons. But, as it turns out, the media got it wrong. Which isn't a surprise.

When the NC Department of Environmental Quality gave its report on Hurricane Florence damage to the General Assembly's Oversight Committee on Agriculture and Natural and Economic Resources, hog farms weren't the problem by a long shot. There are 3,000 lagoons on hog farms in counties hit by Florence but only a fraction—less than 2%—experienced breaches, flooding, or overflows during the hurricane.

At the same time, municipal sewage treatment plants spilled 87 million gallons of waste into creeks, rivers and the Atlantic Ocean, a problem which the media largely ignored.

A whopping 44% of the municipal sewage treatment facilities had problems during the hurricane and what that means is simple: We have to start preparing for the next major storm by focusing our attention on those sewage treatment plants.

It's hard not to wonder: Is the media interested in explaining and solving real problems? Or is it simply interested in writing sensational eye-catching stories—in this case about lagoons—in the hope those stories will get more 'clicks' and sell more internet ads?



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