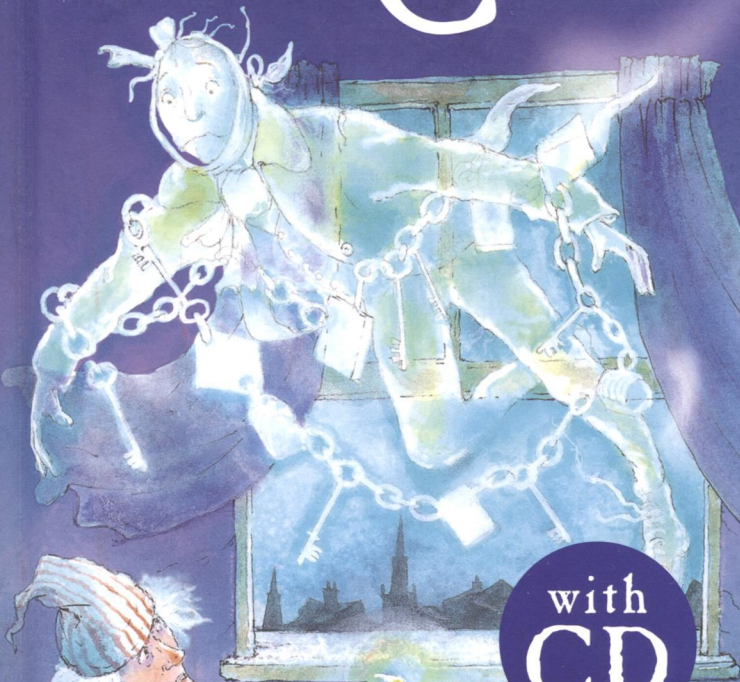


USBORNE YOUNG READING



A Christmas Carol



with
CD

From the story by **Charles Dickens**
Illustrated by **Alan Marks**

A Christmas Carol

Charles Dickens
Adapted by Lesley Sims



Illustrated by
Alan Marks

Reading Consultant: Alison Kelly
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Chapter 1

Scrooge and Marley



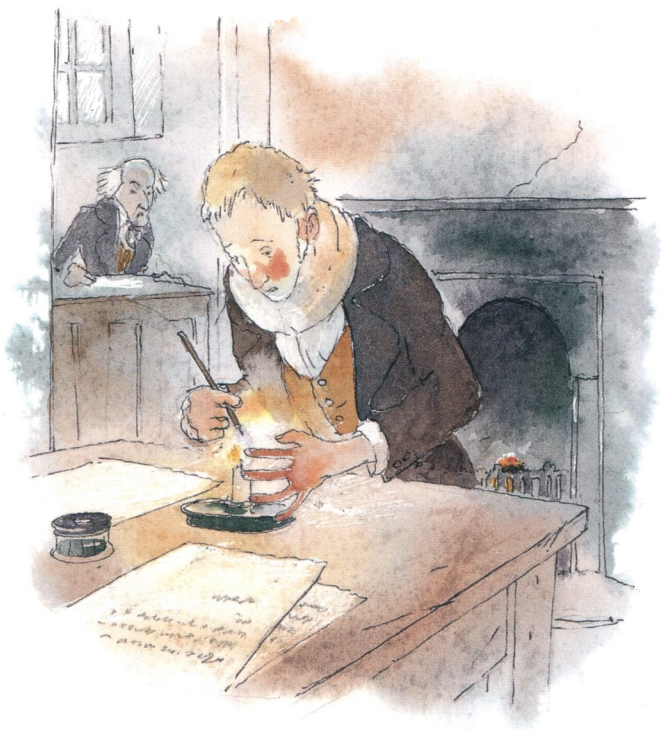
Marley was dead, dead as a doornail. All that remained of the firm of Scrooge and Marley was Ebenezer Scrooge.

Scrooge... a grasping, greedy, gruesome old man! He was as hard as stone, and so cold inside his face looked frozen.



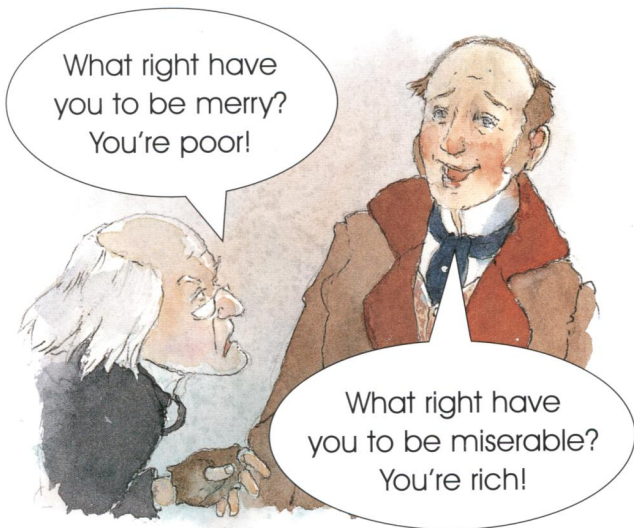
Scrooge didn't care for anyone and hardly anyone cared for him. Even Christmas cheer couldn't thaw his icy heart.

One Christmas Eve, he was busy in his counting house. He had left his office door open, to keep an eye on his clerk, Bob Cratchit.



“A Merry Christmas, Uncle!”
cried a cheerful voice suddenly. It
was Scrooge’s nephew, Fred.

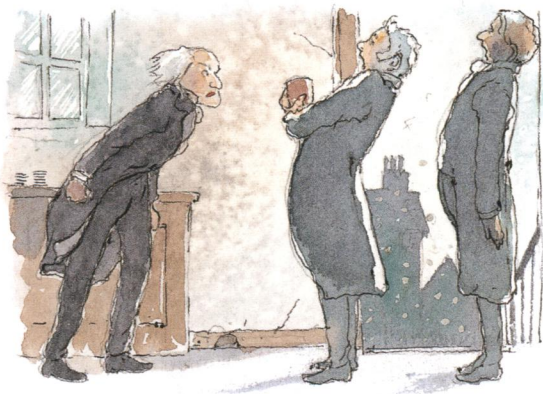
“Bah, humbug!” said Scrooge.



“If I had my way,” Scrooge
added, “every idiot who said
‘Merry Christmas’ would be
cooked with his own cake!”

“Really, Uncle!” cried Fred.
“Come, why not eat with us
tomorrow?”

“Good afternoon!” Scrooge
replied, returning to his books.



As Fred left, two other men
came in, collecting for the poor.

“Are there no prisons?” asked
Scrooge. “No workhouses? I pay
for those. That’s enough.”

The men went out into the bitterly cold afternoon, shaking their heads. A little later, a scruffy boy paused by Scrooge's office and began to sing.

God bless you, merry gentlemen...

But one look at Scrooge and he fled without finishing the verse.





Finally, it was time to go home.

“You’ll want the whole day off tomorrow, I suppose?” Scrooge snapped at Bob.

“If it’s convenient,” said Bob.

“It isn’t. Be here all the earlier the day after.”

Scrooge left the office with a growl. Bob quickly locked up and set off for home. Scrooge went for his usual lonely dinner in a lonely inn.



Then he too set off for home, a few gloomy rooms in an old house which once belonged to Marley.



Chapter 2

Marley's ghost



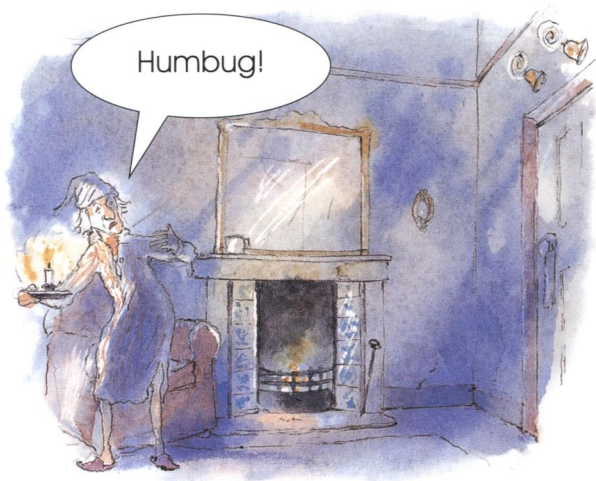
The door knocker on this house was not unusual, just large. But, as Scrooge put his key in the door, the knocker changed into Marley's face.



Startled, Scrooge turned his key and went in. Was the back of Marley's head sticking out into the hall? No, he saw only screws.

"Pah, humbug!" he said, closing the door with a bang. But he checked all his rooms, just in case, before he got ready for bed.

Without warning, an old bell began to ring. It started quietly but soon rang loudly, along with every other bell in the house. Suddenly, the bells stopped. A clanking noise followed, as if someone in the cellar was dragging a chain.



Then, slowly, something came through the door...



Marley's ghost?
It can't be!

Scrooge could not believe it.

“Why don't you believe your eyes?” asked the ghost.

“Because even an upset stomach can disturb the senses,” Scrooge told him. “Maybe the milk was sour and it's giving me a nightmare.”

The ghost let out a frightful cry and rattled its chains.

“Mercy!” cried Scrooge. “Why do you trouble me?” Again, the ghost shook its chains. “And why are you chained up?” Scrooge added.

“These chains are a punishment for my selfish life,” said the ghost. “There are some waiting for you, too, and getting heavier every day.”




“I’ve come here tonight to warn you,” said the ghost. “You might escape my fate.”

Scrooge looked relieved.

“You will be haunted by three spirits,” the ghost went on.

“I think I’d rather not,”
said Scrooge.

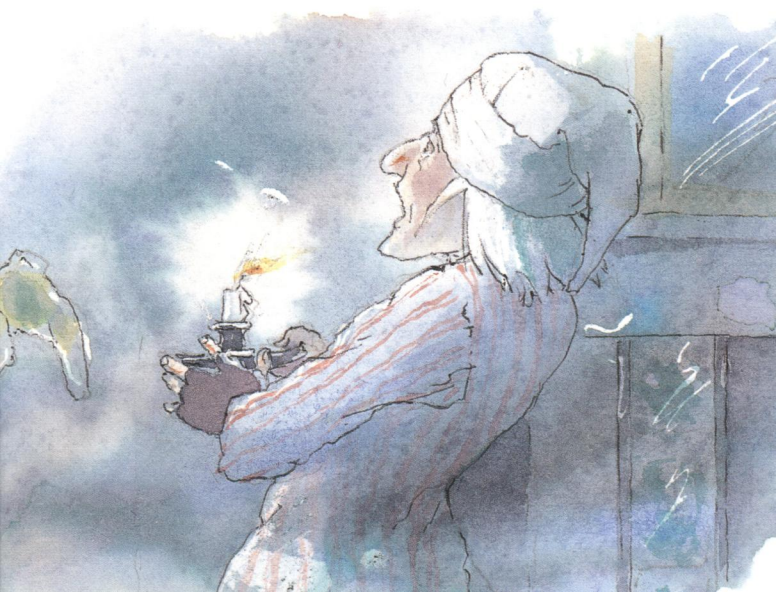
The ghost ignored him and headed for the window.

An illustration of Scrooge, depicted as a man with a large nose and a worried expression, wearing a green coat and heavy chains around his wrists and waist. He is standing in a dark, industrial setting with a window in the background showing a ghostly figure. A speech bubble from the ghostly figure contains the text: "Expect the first spirit when the clock chimes one."

Expect the first spirit when the clock chimes one.

Scrooge closed the window and checked his door. It was still locked. “Humb—” he began, but the word stuck in his throat.

Worn out – partly from shock, partly because it was two in the morning – Scrooge fell into bed. He was asleep in an instant.





Chapter 3

The first spirit



Scrooge awoke in total darkness. To his surprise, a clock chimed twelve. He lay awake, fearfully counting down the next hour. On the stroke of one, a hand drew back the curtain around his bed...

Scrooge gasped. He was face to face with the strangest creature he had ever seen. A light shone out of its head and it carried a cap like a candle snuffer.

“Are you the spirit I was told about?” he asked.

“I am!” said the ghost, softly.

“I’m the Ghost of Christmas Past... your past.”



Scrooge clung to the spirit as he floated through the window and out... not into the foggy city but a bright, cold day in the country.

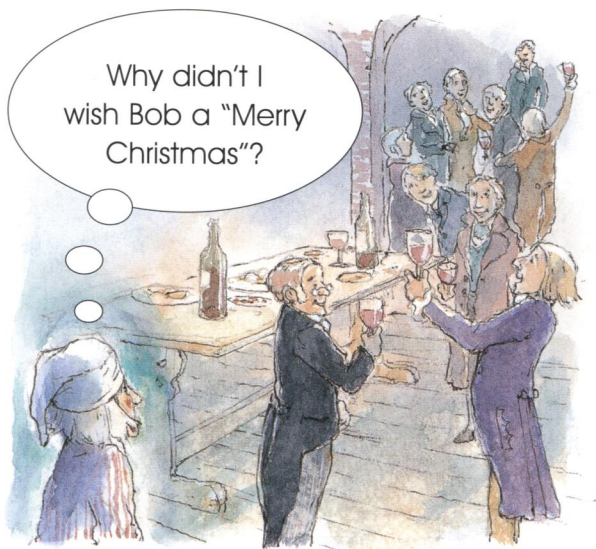
“I was a boy here,” Scrooge cried. The ghost took him to his old schoolroom where a lonely boy sat alone.

An illustration of a schoolroom. In the foreground, a young boy with blonde hair, wearing a dark blue jacket, sits at a wooden desk, looking thoughtful. In the background, a man in a long, light-colored coat and a white head covering stands near a blackboard. A large speech bubble originates from the boy, containing the text: "I wish I had given the carol boy something...".

I wish I had given the carol boy something...

Before he knew it, they were back in a busy city and entering a warehouse, where a party was in full swing.

“And here I was an apprentice!” cried Scrooge. “There’s my master, old Fezziwig. He made us so happy...”



The party faded, leaving Scrooge and the spirit outside. There was the young Scrooge again, sitting beside a beautiful girl.

“I cannot marry you,” she said, sadly. “You love money more than you love me.”



The scene changed and Scrooge found himself in a comfy room, filled with children. There was his old love, now married to another man.



Scrooge began to struggle with the ghost. As he did, he noticed the light on its head burning even more brightly. Scrooge grabbed the spirit's cap and put it over the light, pressing hard.



The spirit sank down and Scrooge sank into a deep sleep.



Chapter 4

The second spirit

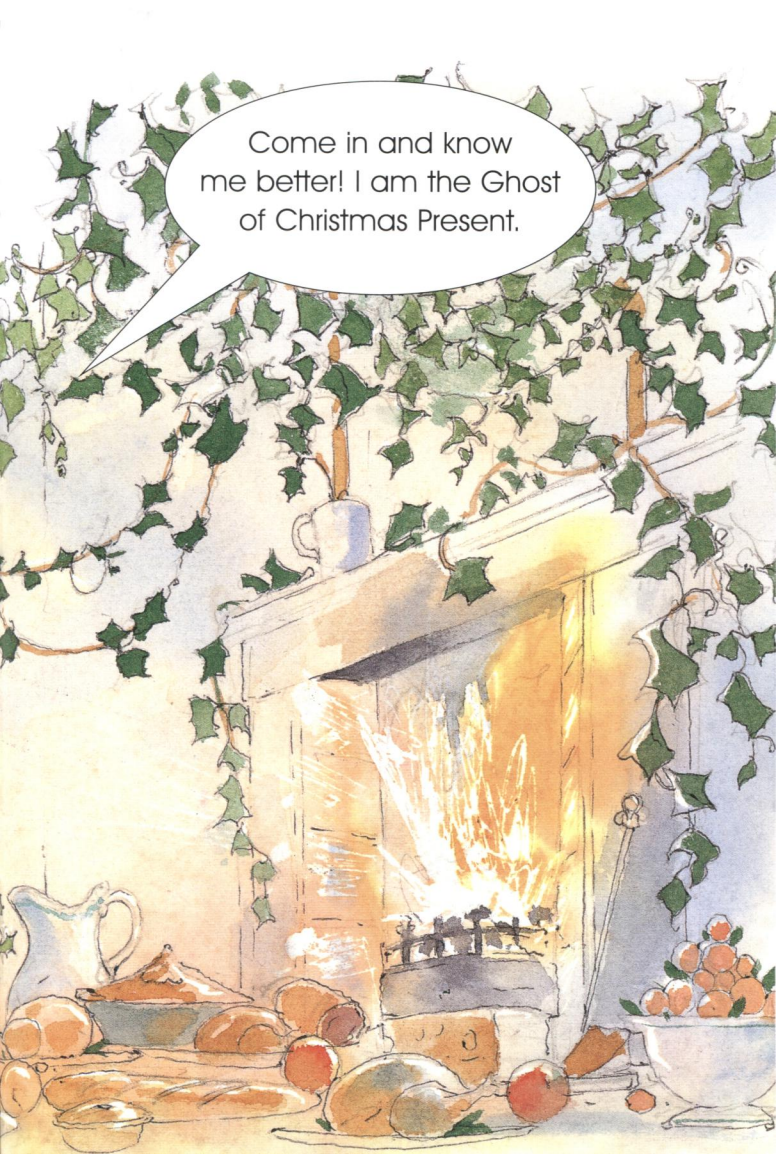
Scrooge woke up, back in bed, as a clock struck one. He sat up nervously but nothing happened. He flung back his curtains. No one was there.



Finally, Scrooge got up and went into the next room. He could hardly recognize it. And right in the middle sat the second spirit.



Come in and know
me better! I am the Ghost
of Christmas Present.



Scrooge followed the ghost, through streets full of people preparing for Christmas. Finally, they came to Bob Cratchit's house, where Mrs. Cratchit was getting the Christmas dinner ready.



“Here’s father!”
cried the two
youngest, as Bob
came in, carrying
his invalid son.



Soon, everyone was enjoying the feast. It was a small meal for such a large family but no one would have dreamed of saying so.

A Merry Christmas
to us all!

God bless us,
every one!



“Spirit,” said Scrooge suddenly, “tell me if Tiny Tim will live.”

“I see an empty seat,” said the ghost. “If things stay as they are, he will die.”



Scrooge felt terrible, but then he heard his name.

“To Mr. Scrooge, who provided our feast!” cried Bob.

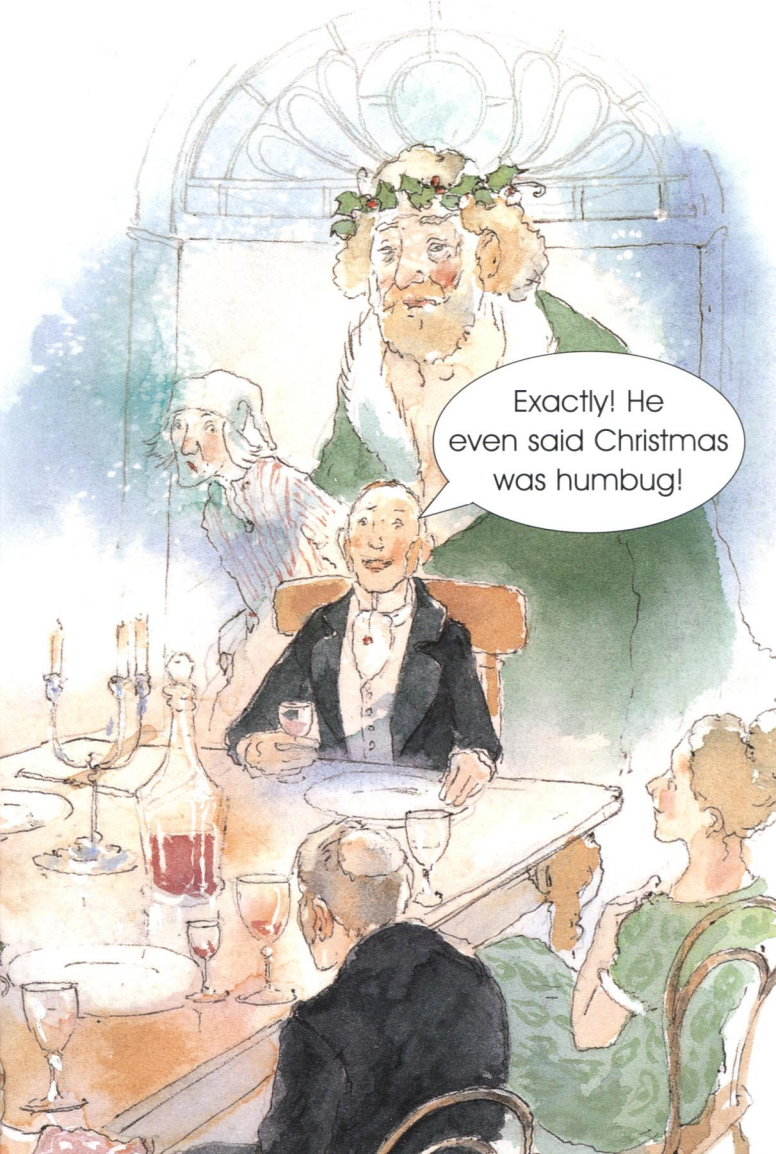
“Provided our feast, indeed!” snorted his wife. “I wish he was here. I’d give him a piece of my mind to feast upon.”



By now, it was getting dark. The ghost led Scrooge back outside, into the bustling streets. They flew to quieter, emptier places... but everywhere Scrooge saw people full of Christmas spirit.

In the midst of the gloom,
Scrooge heard a hearty laugh. It
was his nephew Fred. They had
arrived in the middle of Fred's
Christmas dinner party.





Exactly! He even said Christmas was humbug!

“I feel sorry for Scrooge,” said Fred. “Now, how about a game of blind man’s buff?”

One game followed another. Scrooge grew so excited, he joined in, though no one could see or hear him.



Scrooge wanted to stay until the last guest left, but the ghost said no. “Just one more game then,” Scrooge pleaded. “It’s a new one called ‘Yes and No’.”

Is it an
animal?



Yes!



Does it
live in the
country?



No!



Does it
growl?



Yes!



Shame
on him!



Yes!



I know! It's
your uncle
Scrooooooge!



Yes!

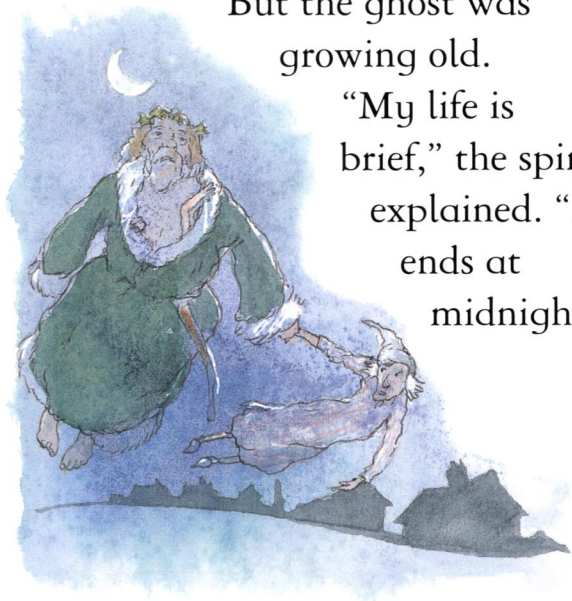


“Scrooge it is!” cried Fred. “And I wish him a Merry Christmas, whatever he is.”

Before Scrooge could wish Fred the same, the ghost had whisked him away. They went all over the world, finding rejoicing and hope.

But the ghost was growing old.

“My life is brief,” the spirit explained. “It ends at midnight.”



Already the clock was chiming three quarters past eleven.

“Forgive me for asking,” said Scrooge, “but is something hidden in your robes?”

“Look,” the ghost replied, revealing two miserable children. “The boy is Ignorance, the girl is Want. Beware of them both, but especially the boy!”



“Have they nowhere to go?”
asked Scrooge.

“Are there no prisons? No
workhouses?” the spirit replied,
using Scrooge’s own words.

The clock struck twelve and the
spirit vanished. As the last chime
died away, Scrooge saw a hooded
phantom coming closer.





Chapter 5

The last spirit



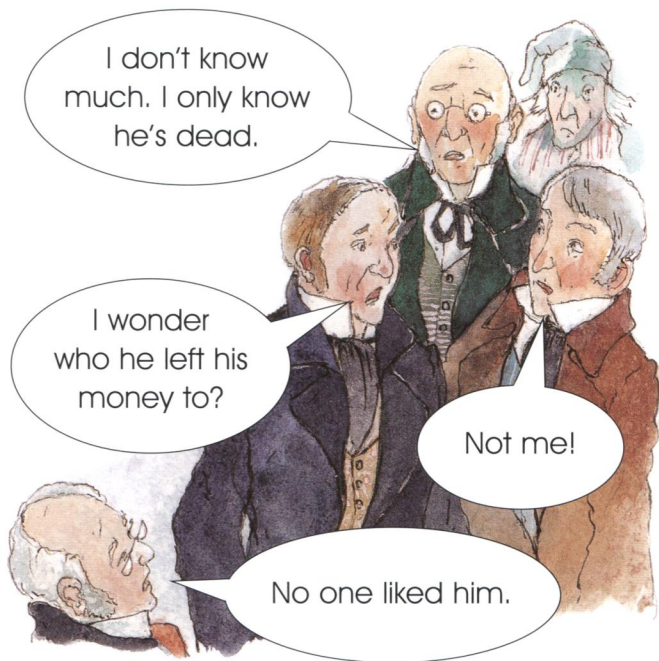
The phantom floated silently up to Scrooge.

“Are you the Ghost of Christmas Yet To Come?” he asked.

The phantom said nothing, but pointed its ghostly hand.

“Ghost of the future,” cried Scrooge, “I fear you more than any other, but I shall go with you.”

Staying silent, the ghost glided off. As Scrooge followed, a city seemed to spring up around them.



I don't know much. I only know he's dead.

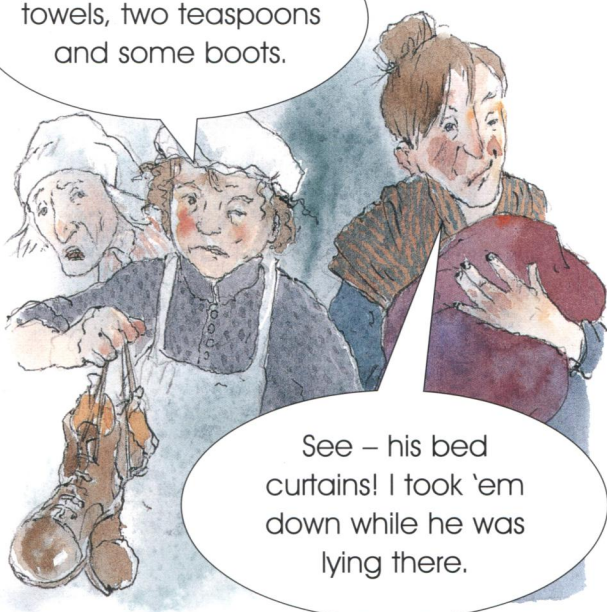
I wonder who he left his money to?

Not me!

No one liked him.

They left the crowds and went to a part of town Scrooge had never visited. As they entered a junk store, three people came in with things to sell.





I've sheets,
towels, two teaspoons
and some boots.

See - his bed
curtains! I took 'em
down while he was
lying there.

Scrooge was horrified. These things had been stolen from a dead man's house.

“Spirit, I see!” he cried. “This poor man might be me.”

As he spoke, the scene changed. Now, they were in a bedroom. A dead man lay on the bed, alone but for a cat and some rats. The phantom pointed to the man's face, but Scrooge couldn't look.

“Is no one moved by this man's death?” he begged.



The phantom spread out his dark robe for a second. When he drew it back, Scrooge saw a room where a man and wife were talking.

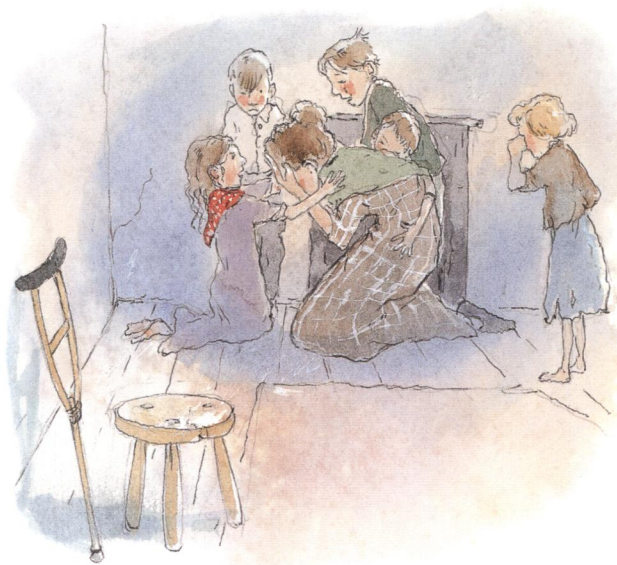
“We owe him so much money,” the woman said. “It would take a miracle to soften his heart.”

“It’s past softening,” replied her husband, cheerfully. “He’s dead!”



“But they are happy!” said Scrooge. “Let me see some sorrow for a death, spirit, please.”

The phantom took him to the Cratchits’ house. Mrs. Cratchit and her children were by the fire. An air of sadness hung over them.



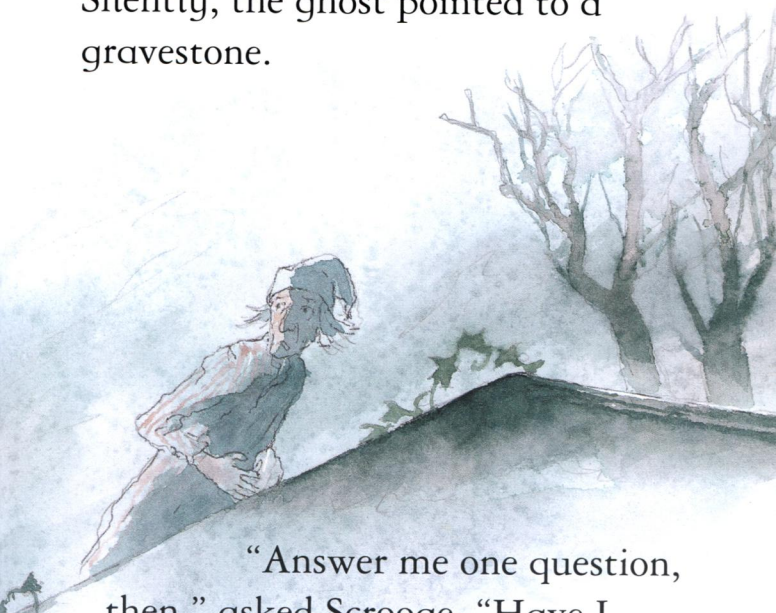
As Scrooge watched them, he had the feeling that the phantom was about to leave.

“Before you go, tell me, who was the man on the bed?” he begged.



The phantom said nothing but took Scrooge to a churchyard.

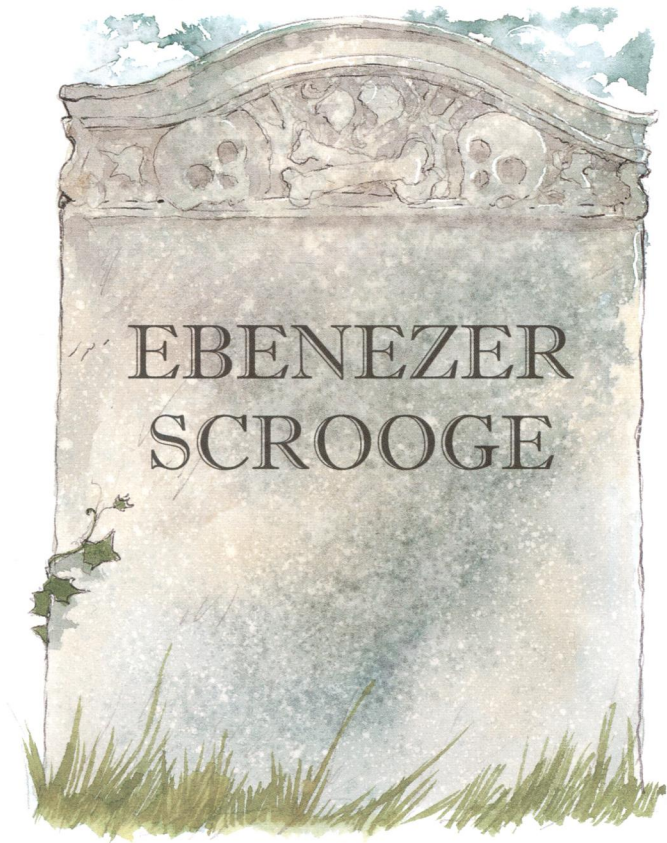
“He lies here?” said Scrooge. Silently, the ghost pointed to a gravestone.



“Answer me one question, then,” asked Scrooge. “Have I seen what will happen or what might happen?”

Still the ghost remained silent.

Trembling all over, Scrooge crept up to the gravestone and read the name upon it.



With a terrible cry, Scrooge grabbed the ghost's robe. "No, spirit. Oh no!"

But the phantom simply pointed to Scrooge and back to the grave.

"I'm not the man I was," Scrooge cried. "Let me change."



Scrooge closed his eyes to pray. When he opened them again, the phantom had become his bedpost.



Chapter 6


Merry Christmas!



He was back in his own bed.

“Ha!” he laughed. “I’m as light as a feather, as merry as a school boy. Thank you, Marley! From now on, I’ll keep Christmas in my heart all year round.”

“I don’t know what day it is. I don’t know what month it is! I don’t care,” he babbled. Just then, the church bells rang out. Scrooge raced to his window.

An illustration of a man with long, thinning hair looking out of a window. The scene is snowy and shows a building facade. A speech bubble is connected to the man.

What’s today, boy?

An illustration of a man wearing a dark coat, a red tie, and a brown checkered hat. He is looking towards the right. A speech bubble is connected to him.

Today? Why, Christmas Day!

The spirits had done all their work in one night.

Scrooge chuckled and sent the boy off to buy the butcher's prize turkey. "I'll send it to Bob Cratchit," he said to himself and rubbed his hands with glee. "It's twice the size of Tiny Tim!"



When the boy returned with the turkey, Scrooge gasped. The bird was huge. “Will you deliver it for me?” he asked, chuckling some more. “You’ll need a cab.”



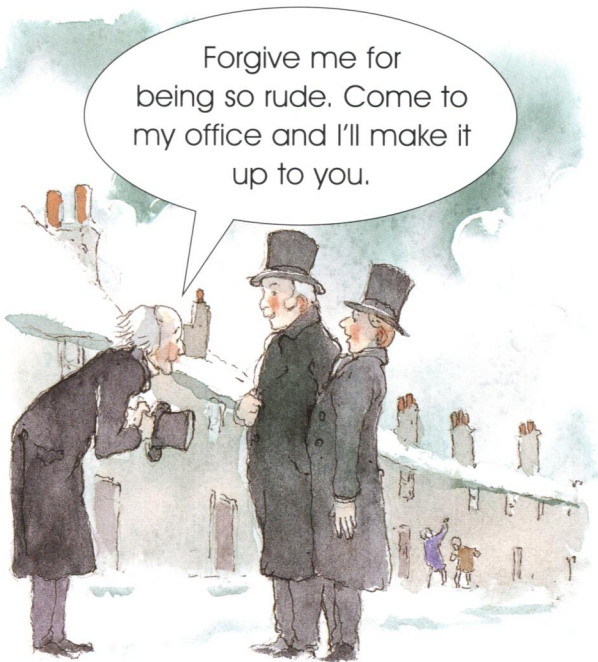
And he paid the boy, found a cab and went back inside, still chuckling. He chuckled until the tears rolled down his cheeks.

At last, he was dressed in his best and outside. He looked so cheerful that several people said, "Morning sir! Merry Christmas!" Scrooge thought those the most beautiful words he had ever heard.



He hadn't gone far when he met the men who had been collecting for the poor the day before.

"Merry Christmas!" he cried. The two men looked shocked. Was this Scrooge?



Feeling better, Scrooge went to church and then for a walk. He had never felt so happy.

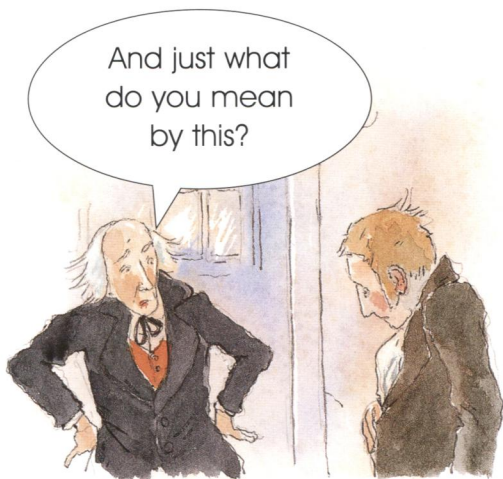
In the afternoon, he went to his nephew Fred's house. He went up to the door a dozen times before he dared knock.

Fred welcomed him to the party with such delight, Scrooge felt at home in five minutes.





It was a wonderful party. But Scrooge was at work early next day. He wanted to catch Bob Cratchit coming in late. And he did. Bob was nearly twenty minutes late.




Scrooge pretended to be furious. "I'm not going to stand for it any longer! Step into my office."

“It’s only once a year,” said Bob.
“I’ll tell you what I’m going to do,” Scrooge went on, poking him in the ribs, “I’m going to raise your salary. Merry Christmas, Bob! Now, put some more coal on the fire before you pick up your quill!”



Scrooge promised to take care of Bob and his family, and he was as good as his word. To Tiny Tim – who did not die – he was a second father. Not only that, he became a good friend to all who lived in his town.

An illustration of a town square scene. In the foreground, two figures are shown from the chest up. On the left, a man in a brown coat and a tall brown top hat. On the right, a woman in a yellow dress and a white bonnet with a red band. A large white speech bubble with a black outline is positioned above them, containing the text 'Hello Scrooge! Hello Tim! Lovely day!'. To the left of the figures is a tall green lamppost with a white lantern. In the background, there are buildings, including a church with a tall grey steeple, and a hazy, greenish-blue sky with soft white clouds.

Hello
Scrooge! Hello Tim!
Lovely day!

Some people laughed to see the change in him. Scrooge just let them laugh. He didn't care. He knew laughing was good for them and his own heart laughed with them.



He never saw the spirits again but it was always said of him that he knew how to have a jolly Christmas. May that be true of all of us. And so, in the words of Tiny Tim, “God bless us, every one!”



Charles Dickens

1812-1870

The writer Charles Dickens lived in London during the reign of Queen Victoria. Times were very hard for many people. Dickens' books are filled with descriptions of life in London – the good and the bad. As a 12-year-old boy, Dickens was sent to work in a factory for three months. He hated it and never forgot how miserable life was for the poor.

His first book, *The Pickwick Papers*, was published in 1836. *A Christmas Carol* was written in 1843. All of his books first appeared in weekly parts in magazines, so he wrote in lots of cliff-hangers, breaking each story off at an exciting point.

Dickens was buried in Westminster Abbey. Thousands of people still visit his grave every year.