

# A CHRISTMAS CAROL

a Charles Dickens' story

## Synopsis

*Christmas Carol* is a novella about Ebenezer Scrooge, an aging and selfish businessman.

On Christmas Eve, Scrooge is visited by the ghost of Marley, his former business partner. Marley's selfishness condemned him to misery in the afterlife, and he warns that Scrooge faces a similar fate.

Scrooge is visited by the Ghosts of Christmas Past, Christmas Present, and Christmas Yet to Come. They force Scrooge to examine his life, reminding him of those he once loved and opening his eyes to the suffering caused by his lack of sympathy.

Scrooge emerges from this experience a transformed man, committed to living with generosity and love.

## Summary

### CHAPTER 1 – Marley's ghost

Seven years to the day after the death of his business partner, Jacob Marley, Ebenezer Scrooge is still running their company from the same building. A greedy and heartless man, Scrooge is counting his money in his office on Christmas Eve, reluctant to let his employee, Bob Cratchit, go home. When Scrooge's nephew, Fred, arrives to invite him to Christmas dinner, Scrooge responds that he has no interest in Christmas or love and rejects the invitation. Later, he responds similarly to a pair of men collecting money for charity, suggesting that poor people deserve to find themselves in the workhouse. Scrooge's only concession to Christmas is to allow his clerk the day off for Christmas, on half pay.

After Cratchit leaves, Scrooge is confronted by an apparition: the face of Marley in the door knocker. Scrooge convinces himself that he is seeing things, and he is sitting down to eat when all the bells in his house begin ringing, after which Marley's ghost bursts forth from the cellar, draped in chains.

Scrooge conducts himself in very collected fashion with the ghost, demanding to know who he is and then asking him to sit down. He declares the apparition to be "humbug"—that is, until the phantom begins unwinding the bandage from around its head, and its lower jaw becomes detached. At this point, Scrooge demands "mercy" from the ghost and asks what he wants.

Marley says that because he was a bad person in life, he is forced to spend his afterlife making up for it. He has come to Scrooge in order to offer him a chance to reform his life before it is too late. He tells Scrooge that three ghosts will come to visit him, and that he must expect the first tomorrow. If Scrooge does not heed their advice, he too will be forced to wander the world in chains, as Marley does. Exhausted, Scrooge goes to sleep.

## CHAPTER 2 – The first of the three spirits

When Scrooge wakes up, he is confused, because it seems that he has slept for more than twenty-four hours—it is almost one o'clock the following morning, the time at which Marley told him to expect the first ghost.

The ghost pulls apart the curtains on Scrooge's bed, revealing itself to be something between an old man and a child. It tells Scrooge that it is the Ghost of Christmas Past. The spirit emits a light which is painful to Scrooge; it says that Scrooge has tried to "bonnet" this light all his life. The ghost takes Scrooge's hand and leads him through the wall.

The two alight on a country road that Scrooge recognizes from his childhood. The ghost leads Scrooge to a small school in which the young Scrooge is reading alone. The sight makes Scrooge weep. His young self is reading fantastical stories, such as *Robinson Crusoe* and the tale of Ali Baba. Clearly, he is filled with imagination.

Next, Scrooge's sister, Fan, appears to tell Scrooge he may return home from school for good. Fan is now dead; Fred, who came to invite Scrooge for Christmas dinner, is her son.

Next, the ghost brings Scrooge to see himself as a young adult, celebrating at Christmas with Mr. and Mrs. Fezziwig. Scrooge realizes that they are treating the neighbourhood children with a charity and goodwill Scrooge himself has never shown. After this, Scrooge is shown with his fiancée, who protests that Scrooge is fonder of money than he is of her, and then breaks their engagement.

Finally, Scrooge sees his one-time beloved with her husband, who remarks that Scrooge has been alone since Marley's death. Scrooge, unable to bear this scene or the ghost's light, "seize[s] the extinguisher-cap, and by a sudden action presses it down upon its head." However, Scrooge is unable to extinguish the spirit's glow, and he again falls asleep.

## CHAPTER 3 – The second of the three spirits

When Scrooge wakes next, it is once again one o'clock in the morning. The Ghost of Christmas Present arrives, holding a cornucopia, wearing a green mantle, and giving off an air of jollity. The spirit takes Scrooge on a tour of London as it currently is, filled with snowball fights, food, gatherings, and Christmas cheer. Next, he shows Scrooge the home of his clerk, Bob Cratchit, whose family is poor but loving. His youngest child, Tiny Tim, walks with a limp but does not pity himself and is grateful for what he has. Bob even toasts Scrooge, although his wife observes that Scrooge is a heartless man.

The ghost shows Scrooge two further scenes of groups celebrating Christmas in a hut and in a lighthouse, as if to indicate that Christmas cheer can be enjoyed anywhere. He next takes Scrooge to Fred's home, where a group at a party are joking about Scrooge and his miserable nature.

The ghost, however, is growing older; he can live only one night. Scrooge sees something emerging from beneath its robe: two children, a boy and a girl. The boy is

Ignorance; the girl is Want. When Scrooge asks if they have nobody to help them, the Spirit taunts Scrooge with his own words: "Are there no workhouses?"

At this, the bell strikes twelve, the jolly ghost disappears, and Scrooge sees a dark phantom gliding towards him.

## CHAPTER 4 – The last of the spirits

The third ghost is silent; Scrooge recognizes that it is the Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come. The phantom shows Scrooge a group of businessmen discussing the funeral of an unpopular man. Scrooge does not realize that it is his own funeral. Next, the phantom shows Scrooge a rag-and-bone merchant. A charwoman approaches him with a collection of stolen goods, and a laundress arrives with sheets and towels. All have been stolen from the dead man.

Next, the phantom shows Scrooge that Tiny Tim is dead, and Bob Cratchit is devastated. Scrooge asks to be shown himself in this vision; the phantom takes him to a cemetery and indicates a grave. Scrooge realizes that the dead man in this extended vision has been himself all along. He asks the phantom whether this is the future that will actually happen, or whether it is only a possibility. He clutches at the phantom, but it disappears, turning into Scrooge's bedpost.

## CHAPTER 5 – The end of it

Scrooge finds himself once more in his own room. He hears a boy outside shouting that it is Christmas Day. In an unusually cheery mood, determined to rectify the path of his life, Scrooge tells the boy to go and buy a huge turkey and take it to the Cratchits. He then also gives money to the charity collectors he had seen earlier and determines that he will go to his nephew's house after all. He enjoys himself at the party he had seen in the vision earlier.

The following day, when Bob Cratchit arrives at work, Scrooge at first behaves in his ordinary gruff way. Soon, though, he surprises Cratchit by offering him a raise and purchasing some coal to keep the office warm. Following this incident, Scrooge becomes "a second father" to Tiny Tim, who survives. It is remarked about town that if any man alive knows how to "keep Christmas well," it is Scrooge.

### Key quotes

#### About Scrooge:

- *"As solitary as an oyster."*
- *"External heat and cold had little influence on Scrooge."*
- *"Darkness was cheap, and Scrooge liked it."*

#### About Christmas (before the visits)

- *"... a poor excuse for picking a man's pocket every twenty-fifth of December!"*
- *"Since you ask me what I wish, gentlemen, that is my answer. I don't make merry myself at Christmas and I can't afford to make idle people merry."*

#### About Christmas (after the visits)

- *"I will honour Christmas in my heart, and try to keep it all the year. I will live in the Past, the Present, and the Future. The Spirits of all Three shall strive within me. I will not shut out the lessons that they teach!"*