A Christmas Carol

by Charles Dickens

Retold by Kieran McGovern

[Before Reading Activity](#)

1.1 Humbug

December 24, 1843 - London

Marley was dead to begin with. There was no doubt about that. Old Marley was as [dead as a door-nail](#).

Did Scrooge know he was dead? Of course he did. Scrooge and he were partners for many years. Scrooge was his only friend and only [mourner](#). And even Scrooge did not mourn much when he died.

Scrooge never painted out Old Marley's name. There it stood, years afterwards, above the door: Scrooge and Marley.

Sometimes people new to the business called him Scrooge, and sometimes Marley. He answered to both names: it was all the same to him.

Oh! But he was [tight-fisted](#)!

The cold within him froze his old features. He carried his own low temperature always about with him; and didn't thaw it one degree at Christmas.

Nobody ever stopped him in the street to say, 'My dear Scrooge, how are you? When will you come to see me?'

But what did Scrooge care?

A very small fire

That Christmas Eve old Scrooge sat busy in his [counting house](#). It was cold, bleak, biting weather: and he could hear the people outside, stamping their feet upon the pavement stones to warm them.

The city clocks had only just gone three, but it was quite dark already. The door of Scrooge's counting-house was open that he could see Bob Cratchit, his [clerk](#). Cratchit was in a [dismal](#) little [cell](#) beyond, copying letters.

Scrooge had a very small fire, but the clerk's fire was very much smaller. Scrooge kept the coal-box in his own room.

'A Merry Christmas, Uncle! God save you!' cried a cheerful voice. It was the voice of Scrooge's nephew, Fred.

'Bah!' said Scrooge, '[Humbug!](#)'

'Christmas a humbug, uncle!' said Scrooge's nephew. 'You don't mean that, I am sure.'

'I do,' said Scrooge. 'Merry Christmas! What reason have you to be merry? You're poor enough.'

'Come, then,' said the nephew. 'What reason have you to be morose? You're rich enough.'

'Bah!' said Scrooge, 'Humbug!'

Fools

'Don't be [cross](), uncle!' said the nephew.

'What else can I be,' said the uncle, 'when I live in such a world of fools as this?

'Merry Christmas! Out upon merry Christmas! What's Christmas time to you but a time for paying [bills]() without money? For finding yourself a year older, but not an hour richer?'

'Uncle!' said the nephew.

'Nephew!' replied the uncle. 'Keep Christmas in your own way, and let me keep it in mine.'

'Keep it!' repeated Scrooge's nephew. 'But you don't keep it.'

'Let me leave it, then,' said Scrooge. 'Much good may it do you! Much good it has ever done you!'

A Charitable Time

'I have always thought of Christmas time as a good time: a kind, forgiving, charitable time.'

'I believe that it has done me good, and will do me good. I say, God bless it!'

The clerk involuntarily applauded

'Let me hear another sound from you,' said Scrooge, 'and you'll keep your Christmas by losing your [situation]().'

You're quite a powerful speaker, sir,' he added, turning to his nephew. 'I wonder you don't go into [Parliament]().'

'Don't be angry, uncle. Come! Dine with us tomorrow.'

'No!'

'I am sorry, with all my heart. Merry Christmas, uncle!'

'Good afternoon,' said Scrooge.

His nephew left the room without an angry word.

Charity

Soon after two other gentlemen came in. They stood in Scrooge's office, with their hats off and books and papers in their hands.

'*Scrooge and Marley's,* I believe,' said one of the gentlemen, referring to his

list. 'And you are Mr. Scrooge? Or Mr. Marley?'

'Mr. Marley has been dead seven years,' Scrooge replied. 'He died seven years ago, this very night.'

'At this festive season of the year, Mr. Scrooge,' said the gentleman, taking up a pen, 'We should give a little to the Poor and Destitute, who suffer greatly at the present time.'

'Are there no prisons?' asked Scrooge.

'Plenty of prisons,' said the gentleman, laying down the pen again.

'And the workhouses?' asked Scrooge. 'Are they still in operation?'

'They are,' said the gentleman, 'I wish they were not. A few of us are trying to raise money to buy the Poor some meat and drink and means of warmth. What shall I put you down for?'

'Nothing!' Scrooge replied.

'You wish to be anonymous?'

'I wish to be left alone,' said Scrooge. 'I don't make merry myself at Christmas and I can't afford to make idle people merry. I help to pay for the workhouses and they me cost enough.'

'Many can't go there and many would rather die.'

'That will decrease the surplus population,' said Scrooge.

'But Mr Scrooge-'

'Besides, it's not my business. It's enough for a man to understand his own business and not interfere with other people's. Good afternoon, gentlemen!'

Only Once a Year

At last it was time for the clerk to go home.

'You'll want all day tomorrow, I suppose?' said Scrooge.

'If its convenient, sir.'

'It's not convenient,' said Scrooge, 'and it's not fair. I pay a day's wages for no work.'

'It's only once a year, sir.'

'A poor excuse for picking a man's pocket every twenty-fifth of December!' said Scrooge, buttoning his great-coat to the chin.

Quick Check
1. Who was as 'dead as a doornail' *Marley*
2. Who was Marley's 'only mourner'?
3. Whose name(s) are on the sign above the counting shop?
4. What did Scrooge think about the sign? '
5. When did Jacob Marley die?
6. What 'didn't thaw one degree at Christmas'? What does this mean?
7. What does Scrooge not care about?
8. Describe Scrooge's attitude to life.

Glossary/Vocabulary

address - speak to

anonymous - unnamed, private

bills - invoices/demands for payment

cell - office without light, like a prison cell

convenient - does not create a problem

clerk - office worker

counting house - accounts office

dead as doornail - dead without doubt

dismal - sad, without hope

destitute - without money to live

humbug - rubbish, nonsense

involuntary - without meaning to

morose - gloomy, miserable,

mourner - friendfamily of dead person

Parliament - where elected politicians attend

picking a pocket - stealing money

situation - job

tight-fisted - hates spending money

surplus - more than needed

workhouse/poorhouse - prison-like institutions for the destitute (see above)

Characters:

Scrooge - owner of an accountancy practice.

Bob Cratchit - Scrooge's clerk. A kind, very poor man with a large family.

Tiny Tim - very sick son of Bob Cratchit.

Jacob Marley - Scrooge's dead partner.

Fred - Scrooge's nephew. Fred is the son of Fan - Scrooge's beloved sister.

Quick Check Answers