

STAVE ONE: MARLEY'S GHOST

Marley was dead, to begin with – there's no doubt about that. He was as dead as a doornail.

Marley and Scrooge were business partners once. But then Marley died and now their firm belonged to Scrooge, who was a stingy and heartless old man. Once upon a time, on Christmas Eve, old Scrooge sat busy in his office. It was very cold outside and in Scrooge's office it was not much warmer either. Suddenly, a cheerful person entered the office. It was Scrooge's nephew.

"A merry Christmas, uncle! God save you!" Fred said.

"Bah!" said Scrooge, "Humbug!"

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

"I do," said Scrooge. "What's Christmas time to you? You have to pay bills without money! You're a year older but not an hour richer! Keep Christmas in your way, and let me keep it in mine."

"Keep it? But you don't keep it," said Scrooge's nephew, who was a very friendly young man. He even tried to cheer Scrooge up and invited him for dinner on Christmas Day. But Scrooge said no and sent him out.

When Scrooge's nephew left, two gentlemen came in to collect money for the poor who had no place they could go. Stingy Scrooge, however, didn't give the gentlemen any money.

"Are there no prisons? Are there no workhouses?" he asked sarcastically and told them to leave the office.

When it was time to close the office, Scrooge talked to his clerk, Bob Cratchit.

"You want all day off tomorrow, don't you?" said Scrooge.

"If that is okay, Sir," answered the clerk.

"It's not okay," said Scrooge, "and it is not fair. After all, I have to pay you for the day although you don't work. But if it must be, I want you to start work even earlier the following morning."

Cratchit promised that he would; and the two went home.

Scrooge lived all alone in an old house. The yard was very dark and scary that night and when Scrooge wanted to unlock the door, he had the feeling that he saw Marley's face there. This was rather spooky, but Scrooge was not frightened easily. "Humbug," he said, opened the door and walked in. He locked himself in, however, which he usually didn't do. But then he felt safe again and sat down before the fire.

Suddenly, Scrooge heard a noise, deep down below, as if somebody was dragging a heavy chain. The noise came nearer and nearer, and then Scrooge saw a ghost coming right through the heavy door. It was Marley's ghost, and his chains were long; they were made of cash-boxes, keys and heavy purses.

"Who are you?" said Scrooge

"In life I was your partner, Jacob Marley."

"But why do you come to me now?"

"I must wander through the world and I wear the chains because I was so stingy in life. I only cared about business but not about the people around me. Now, I am here to warn you. You still have a chance, Ebenezer. Three spirits will come to you. Expect the first tomorrow, when the bell tolls one."

When he had said these words, Marley's ghost disappeared; and the night became quiet again. Scrooge went straight to bed, without undressing, and fell asleep immediately.

STAVE TWO: THE FIRST OF THE THREE SPIRITS

When Scrooge awoke, it was still very foggy and extremely cold, and there was no noise of people in the streets.

Marley's ghost bothered him. He didn't know whether it was a dream or not. Then he remembered that a spirit should visit him at one o'clock. So Scrooge decided to lie awake and wait what happens.

Suddenly, the clock struck one. Light flashed up in the room and a small hand drew back the curtains of his bed. Then Scrooge found himself face to face with the visitor. It was a strange figure – like a child: yet not so like a child as like an old man. Its hair, which hung about its neck and down its back, was white as if with age; and yet the face had not a wrinkle in it.

"Who, and what are you?" Scrooge asked the ghost.

“I am the Ghost of Christmas Past. Rise and come with me.”

The ghost took Scrooge back in time, to a place where Scrooge was a boy. There Scrooge could see his younger self playing with other children. They were cheerfully running around the Christmas tree; and although they were poor, they had lots of fun.

The spirit also took Scrooge to a warehouse, where Scrooge was an apprentice. Scrooge saw the merry Christmas Eve they spent in the office with their boss Mr Fezziwig and his family. There was food and music and dancing and everybody was happy.

Then the spirit took Scrooge to yet another place. Scrooge was older now. He was not alone, but sat by the side of a beautiful young girl, Belle. There were tears in her eyes.

“It is sad to see,” she said, softly. “that another love has displaced me – the love of gold. Your heart was full of love once, but now ...? I think it is better for us to part. May you be happy in the life you have chosen.”

“Spirit,” said Scrooge, “show me no more. Take me home. Why do you torture me?”

“One shadow more,” said the ghost.

They were in another scene and place; a room, not very large or handsome, but full of comfort. There was a happy family celebrating Christmas with all their warmth and heartiness. Scrooge recognised Belle, his former girlfriend. She was married now and had children.

“Belle,” said her husband with a smile, “I saw an old friend of yours this afternoon. Mr Scrooge it was. I passed his office window; and as it was not shut up, and he had a candle inside, I could see him there. His partner is dying, I hear; and there he sat alone. Quite alone in the world, I do believe.”

“Spirit,” said Scrooge in a broken voice, “Take me back! I cannot bear it any longer.”

He struggled with the ghost to take him back. And finally Scrooge found himself in his own bed again. He was very exhausted and sank into a heavy sleep.

STAVE THREE: THE SECOND OF THE THREE SPIRITS

Scrooge woke up in the middle of a snore, just before the clock struck one again. He sat up in his bed and waited for the second ghost to come. And there it was – the Ghost of Christmas Present. It had curly brown hair, sparkling eyes and it wore a simple green robe with white fur. Its feet were bare and on its head it wore a holly wreath.

The ghost took Scrooge to Bob Cratchit's house – a very poor little dwelling. In the kitchen you could see Mrs Cratchit preparing Christmas dinner. Her children were cheerfully running around. Then the door opened and Bob Cratchit came in with Tiny Tim upon his shoulders. Tiny Tim was Bob Cratchit's youngest son. He bore a little crutch and had an iron frame around his limbs.

“On our way home, Tiny Tim told me that he hoped the people saw him in the church, because he was a cripple. It might be pleasant to them to remember on Christmas Day, who made lame beggars walk and blind men see.” Bob's voice trembled when he said this.

Then Christmas dinner was ready, and everyone sat down at the table. As the Cratchits were very poor, it was not much they had for Christmas dinner. But still everyone was joyful and you could feel that they all had the Christmas Spirit in their hearts.

“A Merry Christmas to us all, my dears! God bless us!” said Bob Cratchit.

“God bless us every one!” said Tiny Tim.

He sat very close to his father's side upon his little stool. Bob held his little hand, as if he feared to lose him.

“Spirit,” said Scrooge, who felt sorry for the boy, “tell me if Tiny Tim will live.”

“I see an empty seat,” replied the ghost, “and a crutch without an owner. If these shadows don't change in the future, the child will die.”

This made Scrooge very sad, but the spirit went on and took Scrooge to his nephew's house. Fred and his friends had a very cheerful party and played games. Scrooge really enjoyed their party and wanted to stay for another while but in a second it all faded and Scrooge and the spirit were again on their travels.

They visited many homes in many places: they saw sick people who were cheerful; people in foreign lands who were close at home, poor people who felt rich that day – all because of the Christmas Spirit.

Suddenly, Scrooge noticed something strange about the ghost. Two children-like figures were at the ghost's feet – a boy and a girl. But, they looked old and dreadful, like little monsters. Scrooge was shocked.

“Spirit, are they your creatures?” Scrooge asked.

“They are Man's creatures,” said the spirit “The boy is Ignorance. The girl is Want. Beware them both, but most of all beware this boy” said the spirit.

“Have they no place they can go?” asked Scrooge.

“Are there no prisons? Are there no workhouses?” the spirit turned on Scrooge with his own words.

The bell struck twelve. The Ghost of Christmas Present disappeared. And at the last stroke of the bell, Scrooge saw the third ghost coming towards him.

STAVE FOUR: THE LAST OF THE SPIRITS

Slowly and silently the ghost came nearer. It was very tall and wore a deep black piece of clothing, which covered its whole body and left nothing of it visible but one outstretched hand.

“Are you the Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come?” asked Scrooge, “I fear you more than any other spirit.”

The ghost did not say a word, and Scrooge was really scared. They wandered through the city and Scrooge heard some men talking about a person who had died. Scrooge knew the men and wanted to find out, whom they were talking about. But the spirit moved on.

They next stopped in an area where thieves and liars lived. They had stolen things with them and made fun of the person who once owned those things.

“Ha, ha!” laughed a woman, “He frightened everybody away from him when he was alive, to profit us when he was dead! Ha, ha, ha!”

After that, the ghost led Scrooge through streets that were familiar to him; and as they went along, Scrooge looked here and there to find himself, but nowhere was he to be seen. They entered poor Bob Cratchit's house and found the mother and the children

by the fire. Quiet. Very quiet. The noisy little Cratchits were as still as statues. When Bob Cratchit came in, the children hurried to greet him. Then the two young Cratchits got upon his knees and laid their little cheeks against his face as if to say, "Don't mind it, father. Don't be sad."

"You went there today?" said his wife.

"Yes, my dear," returned Bob. "I wish you could have gone. It would have done you good to see how green the place is. But you'll see it often. I promised him that we would walk there every Sunday. My little, little child." cried Bob. "My little child."

He broke down in tears. He couldn't help it. If he could have helped it, he and his child would have been farther apart perhaps than they were.

The ghost moved on and took Scrooge to a churchyard. The spirit stood among the graves and pointed down to one. Scrooge slowly went towards it and following the ghost's finger read upon the stone of the grave his own name, Ebenezer Scrooge.

"Spirit!" Scrooge cried, "hear me. I am not the man I was! I will not be the man I must have been so far! Why show me this if I am past all hope? Good Spirit, 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 be within me. I will not ignore the lessons that they teach. Oh, tell me that I may change my fate!"

Full of fear, Scrooge caught the spirit's hand. But the spirit suddenly changed – it shrunk and faded and finally turned into a bedpost.

STAVE FIVE: THE END OF IT

Yes! And the bedpost was his own. The bed was his own, the room was his own. Best and happiest of all, the time before him was his own, and he could make the best of it.

"I will live in the past, the present, and the future." Scrooge repeated, as he got out of bed. "I don't know what to do! I am as happy as an angel! I don't know what day of the month it is. I don't know how long I've been among the spirits. Hallo! Hallo there!"

He ran to the window, opened it, and put out his head.

"What's today?" cried Scrooge, calling downward to a boy in Sunday clothes.

“Today?” replied the boy. “Why, Christmas Day!”

“It’s Christmas Day!” said Scrooge to himself. “I haven’t missed it! The spirits have done it all in one night. Hallo, my fine fellow! Do you know the poulterer’s at the corner? And do you know whether they’ve sold the big turkey that was hanging up there?”

“What, the one as big as me?” returned the boy. “It’s still hanging there now.”

“Is it!” said Scrooge. “Go and buy it! I am in earnest. Go and buy it and come back with the man that I may give them the direction where to take it. I’ll give you a shilling for it. Come back with the man in less than five minutes and I’ll give you half-a-crown!”

The boy was off like a shot.

“I’ll send it to Bob Cratchit,” whispered Scrooge cheerfully. “It’s twice the size of Tiny Tim.”

He dressed himself all in his best, and at last got out into the streets. He had not gone far, when he came towards the two gentlemen, who had walked into his office the day before.

“My dear Sir,” said Scrooge, “How do you do? I fear I wasn’t pleasant to you yesterday. Allow me to ask your pardon. And will you have the goodness to ...”, here Scrooge whispered in his ear.

“Lord bless me!” cried the gentleman, “My dear Mr Scrooge, are you serious? I don’t know what to say to such generosity.”

Scrooge then went to church, and walked through the streets, and watched the people. He had never dreamed that anything could give him so much happiness. In the afternoon he went to his nephew’s house.

“Fred,” said Scrooge, “It’s your uncle Scrooge. I have come to dinner. Will you let me in, Fred?”

Of course, Fred let him in; it was a very hearty welcome and they all had a wonderful party.

But Scrooge was early at the office next morning. Oh, he was early there. If he could only catch Bob Cratchit coming late. And he did it; yes, he did. Bob was full eighteen minutes and a half behind his time. Scrooge sat with his door wide open, that he might see him come in.

“Hallo!” growled Scrooge, in his usual way. “What do you mean by coming here at this time of day? I am not going to stand this sort of thing any longer. And therefore,” he

continued, jumping from his stool, “and therefore I am about to raise your salary. A merry Christmas, Bob.”

Bob Cratchit was very surprised, and so were many people who found Scrooge so changed. Scrooge became a better person. To Tiny Tim, who did not die, he was a second father. Scrooge became as good a friend, as good a master, and as good a man, as the good old city knew, or any other good old city or town in the good old world.

It was always said of Scrooge, that he knew how to keep Christmas well. May that be truly said of us, and all of us! And so, as Tiny Tim would say, God bless us, every one!