

A Christmas Carol

by Charles Dickens
Adapted for the stage by Michael Ranieri

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A Christmas Carol
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The Setting: Victorian London, December 24–25, 1843

THE CHARACTERS (in order of appearance):

Carolers/Townspeople	townspeople singing carols (m and f)
Narrator	one (or two) Dicken's type narrator (m/f)
Ebenezer Scrooge	a miserly businessman (m)
Bob Cratchit	Scrooge's clerk (m)
Fred	Scrooge's nephew (m)
Charity Solicitor 1	raising money for the poor (f)
Charity Solicitor 2	raising money for the poor (f)
Jacob Marley's Ghost	the ghost of Scrooge's old business partner (m)
Ghost of Christmas Past	wispy candle-light spirit (f)
Schoolboys (non-speaking)	Boy Scrooge's classmates (m)
Boy Scrooge	Scrooge as a schoolboy (m)
Fan	Scrooge's younger sister (f)
Mr. Fezziwig	Scrooge's former employer (m)
Young Scrooge	Scrooge as a young man (m)
Fezziwig's Party (non-speaking)	employees and friends at the party (m/f)
Mrs. Fezziwig (non-speaking)	Fezziwig's wife (non-speaking) (f)
Fiddler (non-speaking)	the violin fiddler at Fezziwig's party (m/f)
Belle	Scrooge's young former fiancée (f)
Ghost of Christmas Present	large jovial spirit (m)
Mrs. Cratchit	Bob's wife (f)
Peter Cratchit	Bob's 13-year-old son (m)
Tiny Tim Cratchit	Bob's crippled 6-year-old son (m)
Cratchit Children	Bob's 3 daughters and another son (m/f)
Rose	Scrooge's niece and Fred's wife (m)
Topper	Fred's good friend (m)
Lily	Rose's sister (f)
Ignorance (non-speaking)	spirit boy creature (m)
Want (non-speaking)	spirit girl creature (f)
Ghost of Christmas Future	(Ghost Yet to Come) phantom of death spirit (m/f)
Businessman 1	Scrooge's fellow business associate (m)
Businessman 2	Scrooge's fellow business associate (m)
Businessman 3	Scrooge's fellow business associate (m)
Old Joe	a junk salesman (m)
Charwoman	poor woman (f)
Laundress	poor woman (f)
Street Boy (Girl)	who buys the turkey (m/f)
Vicar	minister of the local church (m)

PROLOGUE. The Streets of London

ACT 1

- SCENE 1. Scrooge's Counting House (Christmas Eve, 1843)
- SCENE 2. Scrooge's Parlour
- SCENE 3. Scrooge's Bedchamber
- SCENE 4. Scrooge's Boyhood Neighbourhood (1783)
- SCENE 5. Scrooge's Boyhood Schoolroom (1783)
- SCENE 6. Fezziwig's Warehouse (1791)
- SCENE 7. A Park Bench

ACT 2

- SCENE 1. Scrooge's Bedchamber
- SCENE 2. Cratchit Home
- SCENE 3. Fred's Parlour
- SCENE 4. In the Night Mist
- SCENE 5. The Street Outside the London Stock Exchange
- SCENE 6. Old Joe's Rag-and-Bones Shop
- SCENE 7. The Cratchit Home
- SCENE 8. A Church Graveyard
- SCENE 9. Scrooge's Bedchamber (Christmas morning)
- SCENE 10. The Streets of London (Christmas morning)
- SCENE 11. Outside a Church Door
- SCENE 12. Scrooge's Counting House (the next day)

EPILOGUE. The Streets of London

SONGS & MUSIC

1. "Carol of the Bells" with "Ring, Christmas Bells" lyrics
2. Fezziwig's Christmas Party music: "Sir Roger de Coverley"*
3. "God Rest Ye Merry, Gentlemen" (1833)

* Mentioned by Charles Dickens in *A Christmas Carol* (1843), Roger de (or of) Coverley (also Sir Roger de Coverley or ...Coverly) is the name of an English country dance and a Scottish country dance (also known as The Haymakers). An early version was published in *The Dancing Master*, 9th edition (1695). – *Wikipedia*.

SOUND EFFECTS

church bells (“Carol of the Bells”)
clock bells (Big Ben)
creepy clock bells
chains dragging and Marley’s ghost
thunder crack!
church bell tolling one
ghostly flight (wind)

ghostly flight (magic bells)
wind chime
clock church bells ring
ghostly graveyard background
bell tolls
church Christmas bells

PROPS LIST

1 candle with holder
2 feather pens (and inkwells)
2 ledger books to write in
charity list
torch (for Ghost of Xmas Present)
masks (for Ignorance and Want)
Tiny Tim’s crutch
carolers’ hymnals
Marley’s chains with cashboxes, keys
and padlocks, ledgers and purses
attached (we have the chains but will
need to make boxes, keys, etc.)
bedding for Scrooge’s bed

bowl of gruel (Victorian looking bowl)
fiddle (violin)
Boy Scrooge’s storybook
6 cups (Victorian looking for Cratchits)
turkey on serving tray
punchbowl and 4 cups (Victorian looking)
for toasting
corncob pipe (Old Joe)
oil lamp (Old Joe)
flannel money bag (Old Joe)
burlap bag with duplicate of Scrooge’s bed
curtains with rings (Charwoman)
sewing black cloth (Mrs. Cratchit)

SET PIECES

large Victorian clock backdrop
painted fireplace façade (Scrooge’s
home, and Cratchit’s home)
street lamppost
2 Christmas trees
Christmas decorations
large wreath(s)
standing coat rack
gravestones
park bench

large chair (Scrooge’s home)
Scrooge’s 4-poster bed with curtains
side table (Scrooge’s and Fred’s parlour)
Scrooge’s desk
Bob Cratchit’s desk
Fezziwig’s desk
3 stools for the desks
dining table (Cratchits) (flat board with a
tablecloth attached that is laid across the
2 desks)

PROLOGUE. The Streets of London

(At rise the play begins amid a swirl of street life in Victorian London. Happy groups greet each other as they pass by while CAROLERS and families call out to one another—all singing “Carol of the Bells” with “Ring, Christmas Bells” lyrics. The NARRATOR steps out from CAROLERS and the stands in a spot down stage to address the audience.)

NARRATOR. Once upon a time there lived a man named Ebenezer Scrooge. Oh, but he was a tight-fisted hand at the grindstone, was Scrooge! A squeezing, wrenching, grasping, scraping, clutching, covetous old sinner! Now, of all the good days in the year, on Christmas Eve, old Scrooge sat busy in his counting-house.

(NARRATOR exits.)

ACT 1

SCENE 1. Scrooge’s Counting House (Christmas Eve, 1843)

(The scene changes to the inside of Scrooge’s counting-house. SCROOGE and BOB CRATCHIT sit at desks working as Scrooge’s nephew FRED enters.)

FRED. A merry Christmas, Uncle! God save you!

SCROOGE. Bah! humbug!

FRED. Christmas a humbug, Uncle! You don’t mean that, I am sure?

SCROOGE. I do. Merry Christmas! What reason have you to be merry? You’re poor enough.

FRED. Come, then. What reason have you to be morose? You’re rich enough.

SCROOGE. Bah! Humbug.

FRED. Don’t be cross, Uncle!

SCROOGE. What else can I be when I live in such a world of fools as this? Out upon merry Christmas! What’s Christmas time to you but a time for paying bills without money; a time for finding yourself a year older, but not an hour richer. If I could work my will, every idiot who goes about with ‘Merry Christmas’ on his lips, should be boiled with his own pudding, and buried with a stake of holly through his heart!

FRED. Uncle!

SCROOGE. Nephew! Keep Christmas in your own way and let me keep it in mine.

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

SCROOGE. Never!

FRED. But why? Why?

SCROOGE. Why did you get married?

FRED. Because I fell in love.

SCROOGE. Because you fell in love! Good afternoon!

FRED. Nay, Uncle, but you never came to see me before that happened. Why give it as a reason for not coming now?

SCROOGE. Good afternoon.

FRED. I want nothing from you. I ask nothing of you. Why cannot we be friends?

SCROOGE. Good afternoon.

FRED. I am sorry, with all my heart, to find you so resolute. But I'll keep my Christmas humour to the last. So, a merry Christmas, Uncle! And a happy New Year!

SCROOGE. Good afternoon!

FRED. Merry Christmas, Bob Cratchit! *(Exits.)*

BOB. Thank you, sir. And to you!

(Two ladies, CHARITY SOLICITORS, enter. They carry papers, lists, and a quill.)

SOLICITOR 1. Scrooge and Marley's, I believe. *(referring to her list)* Have I the pleasure of addressing Mr. Scrooge or Mr. Marley?

SCROOGE. Mr. Marley died seven years ago, this very night.

SOLICITOR 1. At this festive season of the year, Mr. Scrooge, it is more than usually desirable that we should make some slight provision for the poor and destitute, who suffer greatly at the present time.

SOLICITOR 2. Many thousands are in want of common necessities; hundreds of thousands are in want of common comforts, sir.

SCROOGE. Are there no prisons?

SOLICITOR 1. Plenty of prisons.

SCROOGE. And the Union workhouses? Are they still in operation?

SOLICITOR 2. They are. Still, I wish I could say they were not.

SCROOGE. Oh! I was afraid, from what you said at first, that something had occurred to stop them in their useful course. I'm very glad to hear it.

SOLICITOR 1. Under the impression that they scarcely furnish Christian cheer of mind or body to the multitude, a few of us are endeavouring to raise a fund to buy *the poor* some meat and drink and means of warmth. We choose this time, because it is a time, of all others, when *want* is keenly felt, and abundance rejoices. What shall I put you down for?

SCROOGE. Nothing!

SOLICITOR 1. You wish to be anonymous?

SCROOGE. I wish to be left alone. I don't make merry myself at Christmas and I can't afford to make idle people merry. My taxes help to support the establishments I have mentioned—they cost enough—and those who are badly off must go there.

SOLICITOR 2. Many can't go there; and many would rather die.

SCROOGE. If they would rather die, they had better do it, and decrease the surplus population. Besides it's none of *my* business!

SOLICITOR 1. Surely it is the business of all of us.

SCROOGE. It's enough for a man to conduct his own business. He is not required to be concerned about other people. Good afternoon!

(The CHARITY SOLICITORS exit. SCROOGE resumed his labours with an improved opinion of himself, and in a more facetious temper than was usual with him. A bell chimes indicating the hour for shutting up the counting-house. With an ill-will SCROOGE dismounted from his stool. BOB CRATCHIT snuffs his candle out and put on his hat.)

SCROOGE. You'll want all day tomorrow off work, I suppose?

BOB. If quite convenient, sir.

SCROOGE. It's not convenient, and it's not fair. If I was to dock your wages, you'd think yourself ill-used, I'll be bound?

BOB. Well, sir, I—

SCROOGE. And yet, you don't think *me* ill-used, when I pay you a day's wages for no work.

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

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

BOB. Oh yes, sir. I will, sir.

(Lights go down on the scene and the NARRATOR enters downstage into a spot.)

NARRATOR. The office was closed in a twinkling. Scrooge walked out with a growl and went home to his gloomy suite of rooms.

(NARRATOR exits.)

SCENE 2. Scrooge's Parlour

(Lights up on SCROOGE, sitting in front of a fireplace in his dressing-gown, slippers, night-cap, eating his gruel, mumbling occasionally. His bed is nearby. Suddenly clock bells begin to ring, startling SCROOGE. It begins slowly at first, then becomes faster and louder, more insistent. It stops just as suddenly, leaving SCROOGE momentarily frozen. He goes back to his gruel, mumbling. We hear the sound of heavy chains being dragged across a floor. SCROOGE looks up, spooked.)

SCROOGE. Humbug!

(The sound of heavy chains increases and so does every bell in the house. The bells suddenly cease. Now the clanking noise increases as if some person were dragging a heavy chain over the casks in the wine-merchant's cellar.)

SCROOGE. It's humbug still! I won't believe it.

(JACOB MARLEY'S GHOST comes on through the heavy door and passed into the room before SCROOGE'S eyes.)

MARLEY. *(Ghostly sounding.)* Ebenezer Scrooge! Ebenezer Scrooge!

SCROOGE. *(Shivers and shudders in fear.)* How now! What do you want with me?

MARLEY. Much!

SCROOGE. Who are you?

MARLEY. Ask me who I was.

SCROOGE. Who were you then?

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

SCROOGE. *(Skeptical.)* Jacob Marley! But you're dead.

MARLEY. You don't believe in me.

SCROOGE. I don't.

MARLEY. Why do you doubt your senses?

SCROOGE. Because a little thing affects them. A slight disorder of the stomach makes them cheats. You may be an undigested bit of beef, a fragment of an underdone potato. There's more of gravy than of grave about you, whatever you are!

(At this the spirit, MARLEY, raises a frightful cry, and shakes his chains with a dismal and appalling noise. SCROOGE holds on tight to his chair to save himself from falling in a swoon. SCROOGE falls upon his knees and clasps his hands before his face.)

SCROOGE. Mercy! Dreadful apparition, why do you trouble me?

MARLEY. I wear the chain I forged in life. I made it link by link, and yard by yard; I girded it on of my own free will, and of my own free will I wore it. Is its pattern strange to you?

SCROOGE. Cashboxes? Keys and padlocks? Ledgers and purses?

MARLEY. It is likened to the chain you are labouring on and will bear for yourself, Ebenezer!

SCROOGE. But you were always a good man of business, Jacob.

MARLEY. Business! *(Crying out and wringing his hands.)* Mankind was *my* business. The common welfare was *my* business; charity, mercy, forbearance, and benevolence, were, all, *my* business. Why did I walk through crowds of fellow-beings with my eyes turned down, and never raise them to that blessed Star which led the Wise Men to a poor abode! Now, hear me!

SCROOGE. I will, I will!

MARLEY. I am here tonight to warn you, that you have yet a chance and hope of escaping my fate, Ebenezer.

SCROOGE. You were always a good friend to me. Thank'ee!

MARLEY. You will be haunted by three spirits.

SCROOGE. I—I think I’d rather not.

MARLEY. Without their visits, you cannot hope to shun the path I tread. Expect the first tomorrow, when the bell tolls one. Expect the second on the next night at the same hour. The third upon the next night when the last stroke of twelve has ceased to vibrate. Look to see me no more. And look that, for your own sake, you remember what has passed between us!

(MARLEY backs up, exits. Lights dim and the NARRATOR comes on.)

NARRATOR. What had happened, thought Scrooge. The more he thought, the more perplexed he was. Was it all a dream? He went to bed, and whether it was from the emotion he had undergone or the fatigues of the day, he soon fell asleep.

(NARRATOR exits.)

SCENE 3. Scrooge’s Bedchamber

(A church bell chimes and then the deep sound of one. Ding, dong! Scrooge is in bed and is awakened by the sound.)

NARRATOR. Scrooge awoke to the chimes of a neighbouring church as it struck the hour. And he remembered the ghost had warned him of a visitation when the bell tolled one.

(A bright light floods the bed. The GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PAST appears.)

SCROOGE. Are you the Spirit whose coming was foretold to me?

PAST. I am!

SCROOGE. Who, and what are you?

PAST. I am the Ghost of Christmas Past.

SCROOGE. Long Past?

PAST. No. Your past.

SCROOGE. May I inquire what business brings you here?

PAST. Your welfare! Rise! and walk with me!

(SCROOGE gets out of bed. The GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PAST takes his hand. The lights flicker to indicate the passage of time. Set transforms to country scene in winter.)

SCENE 4. Scrooge's Boyhood Neighbourhood (1783)

NARRATOR. They stood upon an open country road, with fields on either hand. The city had entirely vanished. The darkness and the mist had vanished with it, for it was a clear, cold, winter day, with snow upon the ground.

SCROOGE. Good Heaven! I was bred in this place. I was a boy here! A thousand thoughts and hopes and joys and cares long, long forgotten, come flooding back to me!

PAST. Your lip is trembling, and what is that upon your cheek?

SCROOGE. It's nothing. *(Sniffing back tears.)* Lead me where you would, Spirit.

PAST. You recollect the way?

SCROOGE. Remember it! I would know it blindfolded! There's the bridge and my church and the winding river. Look, that's my schoolhouse! And those students; I know each one of them.

(Some students enter and laughing and shouted to each other, merry Christmas.)

SCROOGE. Hallo lads! Merry Christmas to you! They don't see me.

PAST. These are but shadows of the things that have been. They have no consciousness of us. But why do you remember it so happily? It is merry Christmas that they say to one another. What is merry Christmas to you, Ebenezer Scrooge? Out upon merry Christmas. What good it ever done for you?

(Scrooge bows his head in shame. The light dim and the scene changes to a schoolroom with a boy sitting alone at a desk reading a book.)

SCENE 5. Scrooge's Boyhood Schoolroom (1783)

PAST. Happy schoolboys going home for the holidays. But the school is not quite deserted. A solitary child is left there still. Do you know him?

SCROOGE. Yes, yes...*(Sobbing.)* It's myself as a boy.

PAST. Poor boy all alone, neglected by his friends and family.

SCROOGE. When mother died of the consumption, father became distant. Everything changed. No family at Christmas. And there was no longer a place for me at home. I was sent away to school. I was alone except for my storybooks: Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves, Aladdin and the Genii, Robinson Crusoe and Friday.

PAST. Let us see another Christmas!

(The lights flicker. The boy is older, alone again, when all the other boys have gone home for the holidays. He was not reading now but walking up and down despairingly. The door opens and a little girl, FAN, much younger than the boy, came darting in, and putting her arms about his neck.)

FAN. Dear, dear brother. I have come to bring you home, dear brother! *(laughing)* To bring you home, home, home!

BOY SCROOGE. Home, little Fan?

FAN. Yes! *(Brimming with glee.)* Home, for good and all. Home, for ever and ever. Father is so much kinder than he used to be! He spoke so gently to me one dear night when I was going to bed, that I was not afraid to ask him once more if you might come home. He said yes, you should, and sent me in a coach to bring you. And we're to be together all the Christmas long and have the merriest time in all the world.

BOY SCROOGE. You are quite a woman, little Fan!

(She claps her hands and laughs and embraces him. BOY SCROOGE and FAN exit.)

PAST. Always a delicate creature, whom a breath might have withered. But she had a large heart!

SCROOGE. So she had. You're right. I will not gainsay it, Spirit, God forbid!

PAST. She died when she was a woman, giving birth, I believe.

SCROOGE. Yes.

PAST. Giving birth to your nephew, Fred.

SCROOGE. *(Uneasy in his mind.)* Yes. It was that child, and providence, that took her from me.

PAST. Come, I have more to show you.

SCENE 6. Fezziwig's Warehouse (1791)

(Lights dim, and the scene changes and the light come up in a warehouse.)

PAST. This warehouse, do you know it?

SCROOGE. Know it! I was apprenticed here!

(OLD FEZZIWIG is sitting at a high desk, behind him YOUNG SCROOGE sits at a lower desk busy working.)

SCROOGE. Why, it's old Fezziwig! Bless his heart; it's Fezziwig alive again!

(OLD FEZZIWIG lays down his pen and looks at his pocket watch. He laughs and calls out in a jovial voice.)

FEZZIWIG. Yo ho, there! Ebenezer!

(YOUNG SCROOGE gets up from his desk.)

No more work tonight, my boy! It's Christmas Eve, Ebenezer! Let's have the shutters up, before a man can say Jack Robinson! *(With a sharp clap of his hands.)* Hilli-ho! Clear away, my lad, and let's have lots of room here! Chirrup, Ebenezer! Get those decorations up. It's time to play. Time to sing and make merry!

(YOUNG SCROOGE clears away the desks. PARTY GUESTS enter from all sides to create a bright Christmas party ballroom. MRS. FEZZIWIG enters and greets FEZZIWIG.)

(Laughs.) Welcome, welcome, everybody! Merry Christmas to you all! And now, where's the fiddler?

(A FIDDLER, with his fiddle, enters and plays the music of "Sir Roger de Coverley" for the Sir Roger de Coverley English country dance. The PARTY GUESTS perform the dance. When the dance is done FEZZIWIG claps his hands to stop the music and cries out—)

Well done, well done! Merry Christmas!

(The clock strikes eleven and the PARTY GUESTS begin to say their goodbyes. MR. AND MRS. FEZZIWIG shakes hands and wishes everyone a merry Christmas. Everyone is heaping praise and thanks on FEZZIWIG.)

PAST. A small matter to make these silly folks so full of gratitude.

SCROOGE. Small!

PAST. Is it not? He has spent but a few pounds of your mortal money. Three or four perhaps. Is that so much that he deserves this praise?

SCROOGE. It isn't that, Spirit. It's that he cared about making us happy. He didn't have to—he wasn't doing it for his own pride or ambition. It wasn't his business, but he made it his business. He took care to make it a pleasure for us to work for him, quite as if he considered us more important than himself.

PAST. My time grows short. Quick!



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