

## A CHRISTMAS CAROL

### A Quick Refresher

Charles Dicken's classic *A Christmas Carol*, first published in 1843, begins on an ominous note, stating the fact that "Marley was dead: to begin with". The story takes place on Christmas Eve, Ebenezer Scrooge's least favorite time of the year. He glares at carolers and scolds his employee, Bob Cratchit, before turning down his nephew's invitation to Christmas dinner.

Arriving home, Scrooge is startled to find the ghostly face of Jacob Marley staring at him from the door knocker. It disappears, but soon he hears sounds like chains dragging on the floor. They creep closer and closer, until Jacob Marley appears as a ghostly apparition. He warns Scrooge that he must change his ways and that three ghosts will visit Scrooge over the next three days, offering him a chance at redemption from his awful fate.

Scrooge settles into his bed, thinking it all a horrible dream, but soon a bright light disturbs him. It is the Ghost of Christmas Past. The spirit transports Scrooge to his childhood hometown, where he is reminded of childhood loneliness, adolescent joy, and the pain of unrequited love. Scrooge, upset, takes the extinguisher-cap and tries to eliminate the ghost's light. He ends up back in his room and falls into a deep sleep.

Scrooge is awakened when the clock strikes one. He ventures to the adjacent room to see the Ghost of Christmas Present, who transports Scrooge to a dingy corner of London where, despite their surroundings, the people are filled with Christmas cheer. The ghost brings him to the home of his clerk, Bob Cratchit, where Bob's son Tiny Tim tugs at Scrooge's heartstrings. Scrooge's journey continues to the

home of his nephew, Fred, who proclaims that he will continue to invite the bad-tempered Scrooge to Christmas dinner every year. As they leave the scene, Scrooge notices that the ghost is aging rapidly. The ghost's life will end that night, but not before Scrooge notices two children hidden beneath the ghost's robes – a boy and a girl, dirty, with hands like claws. When Scrooge asks where their shelter is, the ghost repeats Scrooge's earlier words: "Are there no prisons? ... Are there no workhouses?"

With that, the bell strikes twelve, and the Ghost of Christmas Present is gone, replaced by a draped phantom moving toward Scrooge. This ghost is silent and only responds with a pointed skeletal finger when asked if he is the Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come. Scrooge is transported to depressing scenes foreshadowing his own demise. The scene moves to the Cratchits' home, where the once jolly family is now morose. Tim has died, and Bob has just returned from his grave, telling his wife how lovely and green a place it is. Scrooge, distraught from seeing his own grave, exclaims that he will change his ways and live with the spirit of Christmas in his heart in order to change this future. The ghost shrinks away, and Scrooge finds himself back in his familiar bedroom.

Indeed, after these visits, Scrooge wakes the next morning full of the Christmas spirit. He runs from the house, filled with the joy of the season, and is surprised and grateful to discover that he hasn't missed Christmas Day. Scrooge makes good on his promise, becoming like a second father to Tiny Tim, and a good friend, master, and man to the city he once scorned. It was said thereafter that he "knew how to keep Christmas well." The story ends with Tiny Tim's famous words: "God bless Us, Every one!"