

Narrator: Once upon a time--of all the good days in the year, on Christmas Eve--old Scrooge sat busy in his counting-house. It was cold, bleak, biting weather: foggy withal: and he could hear the people in the court outside, go wheezing up and down, beating their hands upon their breasts, and stamping their feet upon the pavement stones to warm them. The city clocks had only just gone three, but it was quite dark already-- it had not been light all day--and candles were flaring in the windows of the neighbouring offices, like ruddy smears upon the palpable brown air. The fog came pouring in at every chink and keyhole, and was so dense without, that although the court was of the narrowest, the houses opposite were mere phantoms. To see the dingy cloud come drooping down, obscuring everything, one might have thought that Nature lived hard by, and was brewing on a large scale.

The door of Scrooge's counting-house was open that he might keep his eye upon his clerk, who in a dismal little cell beyond, a sort of tank, was copying letters. Scrooge had a very small fire, but the clerk's fire was so very much smaller that it looked like one coal. But he couldn't replenish it, for Scrooge kept the coal-box in his own room; and so surely as the clerk came in with the shovel, the master predicted that it would be necessary for them to part. Wherefore the clerk put on his white comforter, and tried to warm himself at the candle; in which effort, not being a man of a strong imagination, he failed.

Fred: A merry Christmas, uncle! God save you!

Narrator: It was the voice of Scrooge's nephew, who came upon him so quickly that this was the first intimation he had of his approach.

Scrooge: Bah Humbug!

Narrator: He had so heated himself with rapid walking in the fog and frost, this nephew of Scrooge's, that he was all in a glow; his face was ruddy and handsome; his eyes sparkled, and his breath smoked again.

Fred: Christmas a humbug, uncle? You don't mean that, I am sure?

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

Fred: Come, then. What right have you to be dismal? 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? Merry Christmas! 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; a time for balancing your books and having every item in 'em through a round dozen of months presented dead against you? 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. He should!"

Fred: Uncle!

Scrooge: Keep Christmas in your own way, and let me keep it in mine.

Fred: Keep it! But you don't keep it."

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

Fred: There are many things from which I might have derived good, by which I have not profited, I dare say Christmas among the rest. But I am sure I have always thought of Christmas time, -as a good time; a kind, forgiving, charitable, pleasant time; the only time I know of when men and women seem by one consent to open their shut-up hearts freely, and to think of people below them as if they really were fellow-passengers to the grave, and not another race of creatures bound on other journeys. And therefore, uncle, though it has never put a scrap of gold or silver in my pocket, I believe that it has done me good, and will do me good; and I say, God bless it!

Narrator: The clerk in the Tank involuntarily applauded. Becoming immediately sensible of the impropriety, he poked the fire, and extinguished the last frail spark for ever.

Scrooge: Let me hear another sound from you and you'll keep your Christmas by losing your situation! You're quite a powerful speaker, Sir. I wonder you don't go into Parliament.

Fred: Don't be angry, uncle. Come! Dine with us to-morrow.

Scrooge: I will see you indeed I do.
did. He went the whole length of the expression,
and said that he would see him in that extremity first.

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. We have never had any quarrel, to which I have been a party. But I have made the trial in homage to Christmas, and I'll keep my Christmas humour to the last. So A Merry Christmas, uncle!

Scrooge: Good afternoon!

Fred: And A Happy New Year!

Scrooge: Good afternoon!

Narrator: His nephew left the room without an angry word, notwithstanding. He stopped at the outer door to bestow the greetings of the season on the clerk, who, cold as he was, was warmer than Scrooge; for he returned them cordially.

Scrooge: There's another fellow, my clerk, with fifteen shillings a week, and a wife and family, talking about a merry Christmas. I'll retire to Bedlam.

Narrator: This lunatic, in letting Scrooge's nephew out, had let two other people in. They were portly gentlemen, pleasant to behold, and now stood, with their hats off, in Scrooge's office. They had books and papers in their hands, and bowed to him.

Gent1: Scrooge and Marley's, I believe. Have I the pleasure of addressing Mr. Scrooge, or Mr. Marley?

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

Gent2: We have no doubt his liberality is well represented by his surviving partner.

Narrator: It certainly was; for they had been two kindred spirits. At the ominous word "liberality," Scrooge frowned, and shook his head.

Gent1: 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. Many thousands are in want of common necessities; hundreds of thousands are in want of common comforts, sir.

Scrooge: Are there no prisons?

Gent1: Plenty of prisons.

Scrooge: And the Union workhouses. Are they still in operation?

Gent1: They are. Still I wish I could say they were not.

Scrooge: The Treadmill and the Poor Law are in full vigour, then?

Gent2: Both very busy, sir.

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.

Gent2: 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!

Gent1: You wish to be anonymous?

Scrooge: I wish to be left alone. 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. I help to support the establishments I have mentioned--they cost enough; and those who are badly off must go there.

Gent2: 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--excuse me--I don't know that.

Gent1: But you might know it.

Scrooge: It's not my business. It's enough for a man to understand his own business, and not to interfere with other people's. Mine occupies me constantly. Good afternoon, gentlemen!

Narrator: Seeing clearly that it would be useless to pursue their point, the gentlemen withdrew. Scrooge resumed his labours with an improved opinion of himself, and in a more facetious temper than was usual with him.