

A Christmas Carol

By Charles Dickens

Episode 9: The end of it



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The bedpost was his own! The bed was his own, the room was his own. But best and happiest of all, the time before him was his own, to make amends in!

'I will live in the Past, the Present, and the Future!' Scrooge repeated, as he scrambled out of bed. 'The Spirits of all Three shall strive within me. Oh Jacob Marley! Heaven, and the Christmas Time be praised for this!'

He folded one of his bed-curtains in his arms, and cried: 'They are not torn down, they are not torn down, rings and all. They are here...I am here...the shadows of the things that would have been, may be dispelled. They will be. I know they will!'

His hands were busy with his garments all this time: turning them inside out, putting them on upside down, tearing them, mislaying them.

'I don't know what to do!' cried Scrooge, laughing and crying in the same breath. 'I'm as light as a feather, I'm as happy as an angel, I'm as merry as a school-boy. I'm as giddy as a drunken man. A merry Christmas to every-body! A happy New Year to all the world! Hallo here! Hallo!'

He had frisked into the sitting-room, and was now standing there: completely winded.

‘There's the door, by which the Ghost of Jacob Marley entered!’ cried Scrooge, starting off again. ‘There's the corner where the Ghost of Christmas Present, sat! There's the window where I saw the wandering Spirits! It's all right, it's true, it all happened. Ha, ha, ha!’

Really, for a man who'd been out of practice for so many years, it was a splendid laugh, a most illustrious laugh. The father of a long, long line of brilliant laughs!

‘I don't know what day of the month it is!’ said Scrooge. ‘I don't know how long I've been among the Spirits. I don't know anything. Never mind. I don't care. Hallo! Hallo here!’

He was checked by the churches ringing out the lustiest peals he had ever heard. Clash, clang, hammer, ding, dong! Oh, glorious!

Running to the window, he opened it: golden sunlight; heavenly sky; sweet fresh air; merry bells. Oh, glorious. Glorious!

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

‘Eh?’ returned the boy, in wonder.

‘What's today, my fine fellow?’ said Scrooge.

‘Today?’ replied the boy. ‘Why, it's Christmas Day.’

‘It's Christmas Day!’ said Scrooge to himself. ‘I haven't missed it. The Spirits have done it all in one night. They can do anything they like. Of course they can. Of course they can. Hallo, my fine fellow!’

‘Hallo!’ returned the boy.

‘Do you know the Poulterer's, in the next street but one, at the corner?’ Scrooge inquired.

‘I should hope I did,’ replied the lad.

‘An intelligent boy!’ said Scrooge. ‘A remarkable boy!’ Do you know whether they've sold the prize turkey that was hanging up there? Not the little prize turkey; the big one?’

‘What, the one as big as me?’ returned the boy.

‘What a delightful boy!’ said Scrooge. ‘It's a pleasure to talk to him.’

‘It's hanging there now,’ said the boy.

‘Is it?’ said Scrooge. ‘Go and buy it. Go and buy it, and tell them to bring it here, that I may give them the directions where to take it. Come back with the man, and I'll give you a shilling. Come back with him in less than five minutes, and I'll give you half-a-crown!’

‘I'll send it to Bob Cratchit's!’ whispered Scrooge, rubbing his hands, and splitting with a laugh. ‘He shan't know who sends it. It's twice the size of Tiny Tim!’

The hand in which he wrote the address was not a steady one, but write it he did, somehow, and went down stairs to open the street door, ready for the coming of the poulterer's man. As he stood there, waiting his arrival, the knocker caught his eye.

‘I shall love it, as long as I live!’ cried Scrooge, patting it with his hand. ‘I scarcely ever looked at it before. What an honest expression it has in its face! It's a wonderful knocker! Here's the turkey. Hallo! How are you! Merry Christmas!’

It **was** a turkey!

'Why, it's impossible to carry that,' said Scrooge. 'You must have a cab.'

The chuckle with which he said this, and the chuckle with which he paid for the turkey, and the chuckle with which he paid for the cab, and the chuckle with which he recompensed the boy, were only to be exceeded by the chuckle with which he sat down breathless in his chair again, and chuckled till he cried.

Shaving was not an easy task, for his hand continued to shake very much and shaving requires attention, even when you don't dance while you're at it. But if he had cut the end of his nose off, he would have put a piece of sticking-plaster over it, and been quite satisfied.

He dressed himself all in his best, and at last got out into the streets. The people were by this time pouring forth, as he'd seen them with the Ghost of Christmas Present; and walking with his hands behind him, Scrooge regarded every one with a delighted smile. He looked so irresistibly pleasant, in a word, that three or four good-humoured fellows said, 'Good morning, sir! A merry Christmas to you!' And Scrooge said often afterwards, that of all the happy sounds he'd ever heard, those were the happiest of all in his ears.

He'd not gone far, when coming on towards him he beheld the portly gentleman, who'd walked into his counting-house the day before, and said, 'Scrooge and Marley's, I believe?' It sent a pang across his heart to think how this old gentleman would look upon him when they met; but he knew what path lay straight before him, and he took it.

'My dear sir,' said Scrooge, quickening his pace, and taking the old gentleman by both his hands. 'How do you do? I hope you succeeded yesterday. It was very kind of you. A merry Christmas to you, sir!'

'Mr Scrooge?' wondered the old gentleman.

'Yes,' said Scrooge. 'That is my name, and I fear it may not be pleasant to you. Allow me to ask your pardon. And will you have the goodness...' Here Scrooge whispered in his ear.

'Lord bless me!' cried the gentleman, as if his breath were gone. 'My dear Mr Scrooge, are you serious?'

'If you please,' said Scrooge. 'Not a farthing less. A great many back-payments are included in it, I assure you. Will you do me that favour?'

'My dear sir,' said the other, shaking hands with him. 'I don't know what to say to such munificence!'

'Don't say anything, please,' retorted Scrooge. 'Come and see me. Will you come and see me?'

'I will!' cried the old gentleman. And it was clear he meant to do it.

'Thank 'ee,' said Scrooge. 'I am much obliged to you. I thank you fifty times. Bless you!'

He went to church, and walked about the streets, and watched the people hurrying to and fro, and patted children on the head, and questioned beggars, and looked down into the kitchens of houses, and up to the windows: and found that everything could yield him pleasure. He'd never dreamed that any walk - that anything - could give him so much happiness. In the afternoon he turned his steps towards his nephew's house.

He passed the door a dozen times, before he had the courage to go up and knock. But he made a dash, and did it:

'Is your master at home, my dear?' said Scrooge to the housekeeper.

'Yes, sir. He's in the dining-room, sir, along with mistress. I'll show you upstairs, if you please.'

'Thank 'ee. He knows me,' said Scrooge, with his hand already on the dining-room lock. I'll go in here...'

He turned it gently, and sidled his face in, round the door.

'Fred!' said Scrooge.

Dear heart alive, how his niece by marriage started! Scrooge had forgotten, for the moment, about her sitting in the corner with the footstool, or he wouldn't have done it, on any account.

'Well bless my soul!' cried Fred, 'who's that?'

'It is I. Your uncle Scrooge. I've come to dinner. Will you let me in, Fred?'

Let him in! It is a mercy he didn't shake his arm off. He was at home in five minutes. Nothing could be heartier. His niece looked just the same. So did the niece's sisters when they came in...so did every one else when **they** came. Wonderful party, wonderful games, wonderful unanimity, won-der-ful happiness!

But Scrooge was early at the office next morning. Oh, he was early there. If he could only be there first, and catch Bob Cratchit coming late! That was the thing he'd set his heart upon.

And he did it; yes he did! The clock struck nine. No Bob. A quarter past. No Bob. He was a full eighteen minutes and a half, behind his time. Scrooge sat with his door wide open, that he might see him come in.

Bob's hat was off, before he opened the door; he was on his stool in a jiffy; driving away with his pen, as if he were trying to overtake nine o'clock.

'Hallo!' growled Scrooge, in his accustomed voice, as near as he could feign it. 'What do you mean by coming here at this time of day.'

'I'm very sorry, sir,' said Bob. 'I **am** behind my time.'

'You are?' repeated Scrooge. 'Yes. I think you are. Step this way, if you please.'

'It's only once a year, sir,' pleaded Bob. 'It shall not be repeated. I was making rather merry yesterday, sir.'

'Now, I'll tell you what, my friend,' said Scrooge, 'I am not going to stand this sort of thing any longer. And therefore,' he continued, leaping from his stool, and giving Bob such a dig in the waistcoat that he staggered back, 'and therefore I am about to raise your salary!'

'A merry Christmas, Bob!' said Scrooge, with an earnestness that could not be mistaken, as he clapped him on the back. 'A merrier Christmas, Bob, my good fellow, than I have given you for many a year! I'll raise your salary, and endeavour to assist your struggling family, and we'll discuss your affairs this very afternoon, over a Christmas bowl of punch, Bob! Make up the fires, and buy another coal-scuttle before you dot another i, Bob Cratchit.'

Scrooge was better than his word. He did it all, and infinitely more; and to Tiny Tim, who did not die, he was a second father. He 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, town, or borough, in the good old world. Some people laughed to see the alteration in him, but he let them laugh, and little heeded them; for he was wise enough to know that nothing ever happened on this globe, for good, at which some people did not have their fill of laughter in the outset. His own heart laughed: and that was quite enough for him.

He had no further intercourse with Spirits, ever afterwards; and it was always said of him, that he knew how to keep Christmas well, if any man alive possessed the knowledge. May that be truly said of us, and all of us! And so, as Tiny Tim observed, God Bless Us, Every One!