Marley was dead, to begin with – there’s no doubt about that. He was as dead as a doornail. This must be distinctly understood, or nothing wonderful can come of the story I am going to tell.

Marley and Scrooge were business partners once. But then Marley died and now their business belonged to Scrooge, who was a stingy and heartless old man. Oh! But he was a tight-fisted hand at the grindstone, Scrooge! a squeezing, wrenching, grasping, scraping, clutching, covetous old sinner! He was secret, and self-contained, and solitary as an oyster. The cold within him froze his old features, nipped his pointed nose, shriveled his cheek, stiffened his gait; made his eyes red, his thin lips blue; and spoke out shrewdly in his grating voice. A frosty rime was on his head, and on his eyebrows, and his wiry chin. He carried his own low temperature always about with him; he iced his office in the dog-days; and didn't thaw it one degree at Christmas.

Once upon a time -- of all the good days in the year, on Christmas Eve -- old Scrooge sat busy in his business. It was cold, bleak, biting weather, 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 bless 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 reason have you to be merry? You're poor enough.”

“Come, then,” returned the nephew. “What right have you to be dismal? You're rich enough.”

If I could work my will,” said Scrooge indignantly, “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!”

“Uncle!” pleaded the nephew.

“Nephew!” returned the uncle, sternly, “keep Christmas in your own way, and let me keep it in mine.”

“Keep it? But you don’t keep it,” said Fred, who was a very friendly young man. He even tried to cheer Scrooge up and invited him for dinner on Christmas Day with his wife and friends, 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.

“Many thousands are in want of common necessaries; hundreds of thousands are in want of common comforts, sir,” they said.

Stingy Scrooge, however, didn’t give the gentlemen any money.

“Are there no prisons? Are there no workhouses?” he asked sarcastically. “I don't make merry myself at Christmas and I can't afford to make idle people merry.” Scrooge told them to leave the office.

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

“You’ll want all day off tomorrow, I suppose?” 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. A poor excuse for picking a man’s pocket every twenty-fifth of December! But if it must be, I want you to start work even earlier the following morning.”

Cratchit promised that he would; and Scrooge walked out with a growl.

Scrooge lived all alone in an old house that had once belonged to his deceased business partner, Marley. 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 in the knocker. It was not angry or ferocious, but looked at Scrooge as Marley used to look: with ghostly spectacles turned up upon its ghostly forehead.

As Scrooge looked closer at this phenomenon, it was a knocker again. To say that has was not startled would be untrue, but Scrooge was not frightened easily.

“Humbug,” he said. He 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 clanking noise, deep down below, as if somebody was dragging a heavy chain through the cellar. The noise came nearer and nearer, and then Scrooge saw a ghost coming right through the heavy door. It was Marley’s ghost - the same face: the very same! - 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. Do you believe in me?” asked Marley, the ghost.

“I don’t,” said Scrooge.

“Why do you doubt your senses?”

“Because,” said Scrooge, “a little thing affects them. A slight stomach ache could give make my imagination run wild. You may be an undigested bit of beef, a blot of mustard, a crumb of cheese, a fragment of an underdone potato. There's more of gravy than of the grave about you, whatever you are!”

Scrooge was not much in the habit of cracking jokes, but he was trying to distract himself and keep down his terror; for the specter's voice disturbed the very marrow in his bones.

The spirit raised a frightful cry, and shook its chain with such a dismal and appalling noise, that Scrooge held on tight to his chair, to save himself from fainting. He clasped his hands before his face.

“Mercy!” he said. “Dreadful ghost, why do you trouble me?”

“I must wander through the world unhappily because I was so awful in life. I wear these chains because I made them myself, link by link, when I never walked beyond our counting house! I only cared about business but not about the people around me.”

“But you were always a good man of business, Jacob,” faltered Scrooge, who now began to apply this to himself.

“Business!” cried the Ghost, wringing its hands again. “Mankind was my business. Charity, mercy, kindness and friendship were all my business. Yet I ignored them all to count money and deal with other business!”

Marley held up his chain at arm's length, as if that were the cause of all his grief, and flung it heavily upon the ground again.

“I -- I think I'd rather not,” said Scrooge.

“When they visit you, you cannot hope to escape the path I tread. Expect the first tomorrow, when the bell tolls One.”

When he had said these words, Marley's ghost disappeared through the window; when Scrooge looked out curiously, he saw the air was filled with restless phantoms, moaning as they went. Every one of them wore chains like Marley's ghost. The misery of them all was clear.

Scrooge closed the window, and examined the door by which the Ghost had entered. It was double-locked, as he had locked it with his own hands, and the bolts were undisturbed. He tried to say “Humbug!” but stopped at the first syllable. He was so tired from the strange evening he had experienced that he went straight to bed, without undressing, and fell asleep in an instant.
Chapter 2 – The First of the Three Spirits

When Scrooge awoke, it was so dark, that looking out of bed, he could scarcely distinguish the window from the walls of his room. He was endeavoring to pierce the darkness with his ferret eyes, when the chimes of a neighboring church struck twelve.

“Why, it isn't possible,” said Scrooge, “that I can have slept through a whole day and far into another night.”

Scrooge went to be again, and thought, and thought, and thought it over and over, and could make nothing of it. The more he thought, the more perplexed he was; and the more he endeavored not to think, the more he thought Marley's Ghost bothered him exceedingly. 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 resolved to lie awake until the hour was past; and, considering that he could no more go to sleep than go to Heaven, this was perhaps the wisest solution in his power.

The time felt so long, that he was more than once convinced he must have sunk into a doze unconsciously, and missed the clock. At length it broke upon his listening ear.

“The hour itself,” said Scrooge, triumphantly, “and nothing else!”

He spoke before the hour bell sounded, which it now did with a deep, dull, hollow, melancholy ONE. Light flashed up in the room upon the instant, and the curtains of his bed were drawn aside, I tell you, by a hand.

Then Scrooge found himself face to face with the unearthly 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. It held a branch of fresh green holly in its hand. But the strangest thing about it was, that from the crown of its head there sprung a bright clear jet of light, by which all this was visible; and which was doubtless the occasion of its using, in its duller moments, a great extinguisher for a cap, which it now held under its arm.

“Are you the Spirit, sir, whose coming was foretold to me?” asked Scrooge.

“I am!”

The voice was soft and gentle. Singularly low, as if instead of being so close beside him, it were at a distance.

“Who, and what are you?” Scrooge demanded.

“I am the Ghost of Christmas Past.”

“Long past?” inquired Scrooge.

“No, your past. Rise and come with me.”

Scrooge could not plead that the weather was cold and that he was wearing only his slippers, dressing-gown an nightcap. The ghost’s grasp, though gentle as a woman’s hand, was not to be resisted. The ghost took Scrooge back in time, to a familiar place.

“Good Heaven!” said Scrooge, clasping his hands together, as he looked about him. “I was bred in this place. I was a boy here!”

“You recollect the way?” inquired the Spirit.

“Remember it!” cried Scrooge with fervor; “I could walk it blindfold.”

“Strange to have forgotten it for so many years!” observed the Ghost. “Let us go on.”

They walked along the road; Scrooge recognizing every gate, and post, and tree; until a little market-town appeared in the distance, with its bridge, its church, and winding river. Some shaggy ponies now were seen trotting towards them with boys upon their backs, who called to other boys in country gigs and carts, driven by farmers. All these boys were in great spirits, and shouted to each other, until the broad fields were so full of merry music, that the crisp air laughed to hear it.

“These are but shadows of the things that have been,” said the Ghost. “They have no consciousness of us.”

Why was he rejoiced beyond all bounds to see them! Why did his cold eye glisten, and his heart leap up as they went past! Why was he filled with gladness when he heard them give each other Merry Christmas, as they parted at cross-roads and bye-ways, for their several homes! What was merry Christmas to Scrooge? Out upon merry Christmas! What good had it ever done to him?

“The school is not quite deserted,” said the Ghost. “A solitary child, neglected by his friends, is left there still.”

They went, the Ghost and Scrooge, inside the house across the way, and to a door at the back of the house. It opened before them, and disclosed a long, bare, sad room, made barer still by lines of desks. At one of these a lonely boy was reading near a feeble fire; and Scrooge wept to see his poor forgotten self as he used to be.

“I wish,” Scrooge muttered, putting his hand in his pocket, and looking about him, after drying his eyes with his cuff: “but it's too late now.”

“What is the matter?” asked the Spirit.

“Nothing,” said Scrooge. “Nothing. There was a boy singing a Christmas Carol at my door last night. I should like to have given him something: that's all.”

The Ghost smiled thoughtfully, and waved its hand: saying as it did so, “Let us see another Christmas!”

Although they had but that moment left the school behind them, they were now in the busy thoroughfares of a city, where shadowy passengers passed and re-passed; where shadowy carts and coaches battle for the way, and all the strife and tumult of a real city were. It was made plain enough, by the dressing of the shops, that here too it was Christmas time again; but it was evening, and the streets were lighted up.

The Ghost stopped at a certain warehouse door, and asked Scrooge if he knew it.
“Know it!” said Scrooge. “Was I apprenticed here!”

They went in. At sight of an old gentleman in a Welch wig, sitting behind such a high desk, that if he had been two inches taller he must have knocked his head against the ceiling, Scrooge cried in great excitement:

“Why, it's old Fezziwig! Bless his heart; it's Fezziwig alive again! This must be one of the merry Christmas Eves we spent with his family and friends.”

The doors opened and in came all the guests, one after another; some shyly, some boldly, some gracefully, some awkwardly, some pushing, some pulling; in they all came, anyhow and everyhow. Away they all went, twenty couples dancing at once; hands half round and back again the other way; down the middle and up again; round and round in various stages of affectionate grouping; always a couple turning up in the wrong place, amid laughter.

During the whole of this time, Scrooge had acted like a man out of his wits. His heart and soul were in the scene, and with his former self. He corroborated everything, remembered everything, enjoyed everything, and underwent the strangest agitation. It was not until now, when the bright faces of his former self and Dick were turned from them, that he remembered the Ghost, and became conscious that it was looking full upon him, while the light upon its head burnt very clear.

“What is the matter?” asked the Ghost.

“Nothing particular,” said Scrooge.

“Something, I think?” the Ghost insisted.

“No,” said Scrooge, “No. I should like to be able to say a word or two to my clerk just now! That's all.”

“My time grows short,” observed the Spirit. “Quick!”

This was not addressed to Scrooge, or to any one whom he could see, but it produced an immediate effect. For again Scrooge saw himself. He was older now; a man in the prime of life. His face had not the harsh and rigid lines of later years; but it had begun to wear the signs of care and avarice. There was an eager, greedy, restless motion in the eye, which showed the passion that had taken root, and where the shadow of the growing tree would fall.

He was not alone, but sat by the side of a fair young girl in a mourning-dress: in whose eyes there were tears, which sparkled in the light that shone out of the Ghost of Christmas Past.

“It matters little,” she said, softly, “to you, very little. Another love has displaced me; and if it can cheer and comfort you in time to come, as I would have tried to do, I have no reason to grieve.”

“What love has displaced you?” he asked.

“A golden one. You fear the world and love money too much,” she answered, gently. “I have seen all your nobler dreams fall off one by one, until the only passions left – gain and greed - engross you. Is it not true?”

“What does it matter?” Scrooge retorted. “Even if I have grown so much wiser, what then? I still love you.”

She shook her head.

“If we had never met, and you were to meet me tomorrow, you would not pursue me. We met when we were both poor, and now you are rich and I’m not good enough. I release you. I hope you will be happy with 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 recognized Belle, his former girlfriend, and felt the rush of love he had once felt for her, but forgotten. She was married now and had children and they were opening presents together. The shouts of wonder and delight with which the development of every package was received!

“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 conscious of being exhausted, and overcome by an irresistible drowsiness, had barely time to reel to bed before he sank into a heavy sleep.
Chapter 3 – The Second of the Three Spirits

Scrooge woke up in the middle of a snore, just before the clock struck one again. He felt like he had woken right in the nick of time, for the special purpose of holding a conference with the second messenger. A ghostly light led him to the next room, and with his hand upon the lock, he heard a strange voice call him by name and bid him enter. He obeyed.

It was his own room – there was no doubt about that – but it had undergone a surprising transformation; it was decorated with sprigs of holly, mistletoe and ivy, and a roasting fire that blazed brightly up the chimney. Heaped up on the floor, to form a kind of throne, were turkeys, geese, game, poultry, brawn, great joints of meat, long wreaths of sausages, mince-pies, plum puddings, red-hot chestnuts, cherry-cheeked apples, juicy oranges and luscious pears. In easy state upon this couch, there sat a jolly giant, glorious to see; it was clothed in one simple green robe, boarded with white fur. On its head it wore a holly wreath, set here and there with shining icicles. Its brown curls were long and free: free as its kind voice, its sparkling eye, its open hand, its joyful air.

“Come in! Come in, and know me better, man! I am the Ghost of Christmas Present.”

“Spirit,” said Scrooge submissively, “conduct me where you will. I went forth last night through force, and I learnt a lesson which is working now. So tonight, if you have anything to teach me, let me profit by it.”

The room vanished instantly and they stood in the city streets on Christmas morning, where people were shoveling the snow from in front of their houses. Despite the gloomy skies and their obvious poverty, the people were jovial and full of glee; they were calling out to one another, and now and then exchanging a flying snowball.

The ghost took Scrooge to Bob Cratchit’s house – a very poor little dwelling. On the threshold of the door, the spirit blessed the house with a little of his magic. In the kitchen you could see Mrs Cratchit preparing Christmas dinner, with potatoes bubbling merrily on the stove. Her children were cheerfully running around. Mrs Cratchit was watching the clock. 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. As the children ran off to play and to sneak a look at the boiling Christmas pudding, Mrs Cratchit came close to her husband.

“And how did little Tim behave?”

“As good as gold,” said Bob, “and better. Somehow he gets thoughtful, sitting by himself so much, and thinks the strangest things you ever heard. He told me, coming home, that he hoped the people saw him in the church, because he was a cripple, and it might be pleasant to them to remember upon Christmas Day, who made lame beggars walk, and blind men see.”

Bob’s voice trembled as he said that Tim was growing strong and hearty. His crutches could be heard upon the stone floor, and he was led by his siblings to sit at the table before another word was spoken. Bob turned up his cuffs – as if, poor fellow, they were capable of being made more shabby – and began to help with the preparations. The goose was fetched and brought in with high procession. Such a bustle ensued that you might have thought a goose the rarest of all birds, like a feathered phenomenon, and in truth, it was a rarity in the Cratchits’ house. Finally, the dishes were set and grace was said. As the family joyfully ate and felt of the Christmas Spirit, Scrooge turned to the Ghost of Christmas Present.

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.

“When do you care? If he is going to die, he had better do it quickly, and decrease the surplus population!”

Scrooge hung his head to hear his own words quoted by the Spirit, and was overcome with regret and grief.

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.

“And to the founder of the feast,” said Bob. “To Mr Scrooge!”

“Founder of the feast? Ha!” said Mrs Cratchit. “If Scrooge were here, I’d give him a piece of my mind! I’m sure he’s very comfortable today, no doubt! I’ll drink to his health for your sake, but not for his.

Scrooge was the Ogre of the family. The mention of his name cast a dark shadow on the party, which was not dispelled for full five minutes. This made Scrooge very sad, but the spirit began to lead him away from the house; Scrooge had his eye upon the family – and especially Tiny Tim – to the last.

The spirit took Scrooge to his nephew’s house. It is a truth well-known that while there is infection in disease and sorrow, there is nothing in the world so irresistibly contagious as laughter and good-humor. When Scrooge's nephew laughed, his wife laughed as heartily as he. And their assembled friends, too, roared out loudly. When Scrooge and the spirit arrived, all of them were laughing merrily, holding their sides.
“He said that Christmas was a humbug, as I live!” cried Scrooge’s nephew. “He believed it too!”

“More shame for him, Fred!” said his wife, indignantly. “He’s a comical old fellow, and not so pleasant as he might be. Didn’t you say he was very rich?”

“What of it?” replied Fred. “His wealth is of no use to him, because he does no good with it.”

“Who suffers from his ill whims? Himself, always. Here, he has decided to dislike us and won’t come and dine with us. What’s the consequence? Only he is alone and miserable on Christmas.”

“He loses some pleasant moments, by not making merry with us, and loses pleasant companions. I mean to give him the same chance every year, whether he likes it or not, for I pity him. He may rail at Christmas every year, but if he finds me always in a good mood then perhaps he may be reached.”

The guests all joined in with blind man’s bluff, singing as Fred’s wife played the harp, and making guesses in games. Scrooge even made his own guesses, though none of them could see or hear him. Then Fred toasted to his Uncle Scrooge’s health, wherever he was, and Scrooge felt light of heart and wistful. The Ghost was greatly pleased to find him in this mood, and looked upon him with much favor. He led Scrooge away, and they were on their travels again.

Much they saw, and far they went, and many homes they visited, but always with a happy end. The Spirit stood beside sick beds, and they were cheerful; he showed Scrooge struggling men, and they were made patient; they saw the poor, but they felt rich. The Ghost blessed each place with the joy of Christmas, and Scrooge was touched.

Scrooge did not change outwardly, but the Ghost did; he grew older, clearly older, with every passing minute. Scrooge noticed the Ghost’s hair had turned gray.

“Are spirits’ lives so short?” asked Scrooge.

“My life upon this globe, is very brief,” replied the Ghost. “It ends tonight.”

Suddenly, Scrooge noticed something else strange about the ghost. Two child-like figures were at the ghost’s feet – a boy and a girl – but they looked old and dreadful, like little monsters. Where graceful youth should have filled their features out, and touched them with its freshest tints, a stale and shriveled hand, like that of age, had pinched, and twisted them, and pulled them into shreds. 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, for I see doom written upon him.”

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

“Are there no prisons? Are there no workhouses?” the spirit said, turning Scrooge’s own words on him again.

The bell struck twelve. The Ghost of Christmas Present disappeared. On the last stroke of the bell, Scrooge saw the third ghost, draped and hooded, coming towards him list a mist along the ground.
Chapter 4 – The Last of the Spirits

The Phantom slowly, gravely, silently approached. When it came, Scrooge bent down upon his knee; for in the very air through which this Spirit moved it seemed to scatter gloom and mystery.

It was shrouded in a deep black garment, which hid its head, its face, its form, and left nothing of it visible save one outstretched hand. It was difficult to distinguish it from the black night and separate it from the darkness by which it was surrounded.

“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’s legs trembled beneath him; he found that he could hardly stand when he prepared to follow it.

“I know your purpose is to do me good,” said Scrooge. “Lead on!”

They wandered into the heart of the city amongst the merchants, and the Spirit stopped beside one little knot of business men. Observing that the hand was pointed to them, Scrooge advanced to listen to their talk.

“No,” said a large man with a monstrous chin, “I don't know much about it, either way. I only know he's dead.”

“Then did he die?” inquired another.

“Last night, I believe.”

“Why, what was the matter with him?” asked a third, “I thought he'd never die.”

“God knows,” said the first, with a yawn.

“What has he done with his money?” asked a red-faced gentleman with a pendulous excrescence on the end of his nose. “That’s what I want to know!”

“I haven't heard,” said the man with the large chin, yawning again. “I only know he's dead.”

This pleasantry was received with a general laugh. Speakers and listeners strolled away, and mixed with other groups. Scrooge knew the men, and looked towards the Spirit for an explanation.

The Phantom glided on into a street without a word. Following, Scrooge resolved to treasure up every word he heard and everything he saw, despite not knowing what all this meant. He especially resolved to observe the shadow of himself when it appeared, for he had an inkling that the conduct of his future self would give him the clue he was missing.

The Ghost led them away from the busy scene and into an obscure part of the town, where Scrooge had never been before, although he had heard of it bad reputation; the whole place reeked of crime, filth and misery.

Down one of the foul, narrow alleyways was a shop owned by an elderly crook, who was inviting in some of his fellow thieves into his den. As they talked, it became apparent to Scrooge that they had brought stolen objects with them and were making fun of the person who once owned those things.

“Ha, ha!” laughed a woman, “Why wasn’t he kinder in his lifetime? If he had been, he’d have had somebody to look after him when he was dying, instead of lying gasping out his last breath all alone!”

As each of the thieves presented their goods to the shop owner to sell, they kept making their taunts.

“Should I buy this? He didn’t die of anything catching, did he?”

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

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“Spirit!” said Scrooge, shuddering from head to foot. “I see, I see. The case of this unhappy man might be my own. If there is any person in the town, who feels emotion caused by my death, show that person to me, Spirit, I beseech you!”

The Phantom spread its dark robe before him for a moment and the scene changed. The Ghost led Scrooge through streets that were familiar to him; 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. He left the room, and went up-stairs into the room above, which was lighted cheerfully, and hung with Christmas.
“specter,” said Scrooge, “something tells me that our parting moment is at hand.”

The ghost moved on again, taking Scrooge through the iron gates of a churchyard. The spirit stood among the graves and pointed down to one. Scrooge slowly went towards it, trembling, and following the ghost’s finger read upon the stone of the grave his own name, Ebenezer Scrooge.

“Spirit!” Scrooge cried, “are these the shadows of the things that will be, or can this future be changed? 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 honor 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.
Chapter 5 – 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. He could hear the church bells ringing out several streets away.

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

“Eh?” returned the boy, confused.

“What’s today, my fine fellow?”

“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. They can do anything they like. Of course they can! Hallo, my fine fellow! Do you know the poulterer’s at the corner?”

“I sure do.”

“Excellant boy! 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 across 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.”

“If you please,” said Scrooge. “Not a farthing less. A great many back-payments are included in it, I assure you.”

Scrooge then went to the Christmas service at the 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 had 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:

“Fred,” said he implored, “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 very sorry, Sir,” said Bob. “I am behind time.”

“I am not going to stand this sort of thing any longer. And therefore,” he continued, jumping from his stool and poking Bob in the chest, “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 was better than his word. He did it all, and infinitely more; 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.

He had no further meetings with Spirits, but lived joyfully ever afterwards. 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, everyone!’