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opening extract from

A Christmas Carol (with an introduction by Anthony Horowitz)

written by

Charles Dickens

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Sample extract includes:

Extract from *A Christmas Carol*

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THE MAN WHO HATED CHRISTMAS

This story begins just after Queen Victoria came to the throne. Jacob Marley had been dead for seven years. His business partner, Ebenezer Scrooge, was the meanest man in London. He would not even pay for a coat of paint to remove Marley's name from the office sign. It still read SCROOGE AND MARLEY.

It was a cold, foggy Christmas Eve. Outside the office a small boy was singing a carol:

'God rest you merry gentlemen,

Let nothing you dismay!'

Scrooge rushed out with a wooden ruler, to take a crack at the boy's head. Just in time, the boy scurried off.

Scrooge hated Christmas and everything to do with it. He was a tightfisted old miser, who never did a kind deed nor gave a penny away. He looked as if the cold had got right inside him. His thin lips were blue. His eyebrows, wiry hair and stubbly chin looked silver with frost.

Coldest of all was Scrooge's heart. It made his office feel chilly, even in summer. At Christmas, it was freezing. The fire was tiny, and Scrooge kept the coal bucket by his desk. His clerk couldn't fetch a piece of coal without asking.

The clerk's name was Bob Cratchit. He sat on a high stool in the outer office, writing in a huge account book. Though he wore mittens, his fingers were so cold he could hardly hold his quill pen. He wore a long scarf he called his 'comforter' wrapped three times round his neck for warmth. His wife had knitted it, for Bob could not afford an overcoat. Scrooge only paid him fifteen shillings a week.

It was dark and foggy outside the office, but the people walking past were cheerful. The next day was Christmas, and the shops were blazing with lights and full of Christmas cheer. There were turkeys and geese, piles of oranges and apples, nuts, cakes and sweets – though not everyone had the money to buy them.

Suddenly Scrooge's office door opened and a cheery voice cried, 'Merry Christmas, Uncle!'

It was Scrooge's nephew, Fred. His face glowed with the cold, and his eyes sparkled.

'Bah!' said Scrooge. 'Humbug! What reason have you to be merry? You're poor enough!'

His nephew laughed. 'What reason have you to be miserable? You're rich enough!'

'Merry Christmas!' growled Scrooge. 'Down with Christmas! If I had my way, every idiot that goes about saying "Merry Christmas" should be boiled with his own pudding and buried with a stake of holly through his heart!'

'You don't mean that, I'm sure, Uncle!' said Fred. 'Come and have Christmas dinner with us tomorrow, and let's be friends!'

But Scrooge refused.

'I'm going to wish you a merry Christmas in spite of your bad temper, Uncle,' said Fred. '*And* a Happy New Year!'

'Bah!' Scrooge snapped as his nephew left.

As Fred went out, he let in two gentlemen. They were collecting money for the poor, to give them a bit of comfort at Christmas time.

Scrooge refused to give the men anything at all. 'Are there no prisons?' he demanded. 'Are there no workhouses? I support those with my taxes. Let the poor go there!'

'Many can't go there,' said one of the men, 'and many would rather die.'

'Let them die, then!' said Scrooge. 'There are far too many poor people!'

The gentlemen went away, disappointed.



Scrooge refused to give... anything at all

The fog got deeper and the afternoon darker. Soon it was time to shut the office. Bob Cratchit got ready to leave.

'I suppose you want the day off tomorrow,' Scrooge grumbled.

'If it's convenient, sir,' said Bob timidly.

'I shall have to pay you a whole day's wages for no work!'

'It's only once a year,' said Bob.

'And that's once too often!' growled Scrooge, but he knew he had to let the clerk go. 'Just be sure to come earlier the following day, to make up for it!' he barked, as Bob left.

Bob ran off like a lad let out of school. He slid down a frozen hill twenty times, at the end of a line of boys. Then he hurried home to play Blind Man's Buff with his family.

Scrooge ate a lonely supper in a miserable inn, and read the financial papers.



MARLEY'S GHOST

Scrooge lived alone in rooms in a gloomy old house that had belonged to Jacob Marley. He was putting his key in the door when he noticed the big, old-fashioned knocker. There was something different about it tonight. It was... *Marley's face!*

Marley's face was a dismal shade of green. Ghostly spectacles were perched on its forehead, and its hair moved gently, as if a breeze were stirring it. As Scrooge stared, it turned back into a knocker again.

Scrooge was not frightened. He did not believe in ghosts. He entered the house, lit his candle and went up the wide staircase. He told himself firmly that Marley had been dead for seven years.

Upstairs everything was as usual. A saucepan of porridge was on the hob, by a small coal fire. Scrooge put on his slippers, dressing gown and nightcap, and sat down to eat his porridge. But first he made sure the door was locked.

There were pictures of Bible characters on the tiles around the fireplace – Cain and Abel, the Queen of Sheba, Abraham and Isaac. To Scrooge, they all bore the eerie look of Jacob Marley.

'Humbug!' said Scrooge.

Just then a bell high above the fireplace began to swing to and fro. It had not been used for years, but now it began to ring loudly. Then came a clanking noise, deep in the house, as if someone were dragging a heavy chain up from the cellar.

'Humbug!' said Scrooge. 'I won't believe it!'

But the cellar door opened and the noise came up the stairs and into the room. The flame in the

fire leapt up, as if to cry out in alarm, 'I know him! *Marley's ghost!*'

And there was Marley, wearing his usual waistcoat and tight trousers. A chain was wound round his waist, made of cash boxes, keys, padlocks, account books and metal purses. Scrooge could see right through Marley's body to the two buttons on the back of his coat.

'You don't believe in me, do you?' said the Ghost.

'I don't,' said Scrooge. 'You could be the result of an upset stomach. Perhaps you're a crumb of cheese, or an undigested bit of beef!'

The Ghost took no notice of Scrooge's feeble joke. Instead, it gave a frightful cry and rattled its chain. 'I made this chain in life, link by link and yard by yard,' it said. 'You have one too, just as heavy as mine. But you have had seven years more, so yours is much longer.'

Scrooge looked down, but saw nothing.

'I only thought about money. I lost so many chances to do good,' sighed the Ghost.

'But you were a good businessman, Jacob!'

'Business! Human beings were my business! I neglected them, and this is my punishment.'

'Why have you come to me?' asked Scrooge.

'To warn you, so that you can escape my fate. You will be visited by three Spirits. The first will come to you as the church clock strikes one.'

And then the Ghost wrapped its chain round its arm and walked backwards towards the window, which opened wide. The Ghost floated out into the night air.

Scrooge heard sad cries, and saw that the sky was full of figures like Marley. They were crying out and trying to reach the suffering human beings they had not helped while they were alive.

Suddenly Scrooge felt very tired. He crept into bed and fell asleep right away.



'Why have you come to me?' asked Scrooge