A Christmas Carol Summary

A mean-spirited, miserly old man named Ebenezer Scrooge sits in his counting-house on a frigid Christmas Eve. His clerk, Bob Cratchit, shivers in the anteroom because Scrooge refuses to spend money on heating coals for a fire. Scrooge's nephew, Fred, pays his uncle a visit and invites him to his annual Christmas party. Two portly gentlemen also drop by and ask Scrooge for a contribution to their charity. Scrooge reacts to the holiday visitors with bitterness and venom, spitting out an angry "Bah! Humbug!" in response to his nephew's "Merry Christmas!"

Later that evening, after returning to his dark, cold apartment, Scrooge receives a chilling visitation from the ghost of his dead partner, Jacob Marley. Marley, looking haggard and pallid, relates his unfortunate story. As punishment for his greedy and self-serving life his spirit has been condemned to wander the Earth weighted down with heavy chains. Marley hopes to save Scrooge from sharing the same fate. Marley informs Scrooge that three spirits will visit him during each of the next three nights. After the wraith disappears, Scrooge collapses into a deep sleep.

He wakes moments before the arrival of the Ghost of Christmas Past, a strange childlike phantom with a brightly glowing head. The spirit escorts Scrooge on a journey into the past to previous Christmases from the curmudgeon's earlier years. Invisible to those he watches, Scrooge revisits his childhood school days, his apprenticeship with a jolly merchant named Fezziwig, and his engagement to Belle, a woman who leaves Scrooge because his lust for money eclipses his ability to love another. Scrooge, deeply moved, sheds tears of regret before the phantom returns him to his bed.

The Ghost of Christmas Present, a majestic giant clad in a green fur robe, takes Scrooge through London to unveil Christmas as it will happen that year. Scrooge watches the large, bustling Cratchit family prepare a miniature feast in its meager home. He discovers Bob Cratchit's crippled son, Tiny Tim, a courageous boy whose kindness and humility warms Scrooge's heart. The specter then zips Scrooge to his nephew's to witness the Christmas party. Scrooge finds the jovial gathering delightful and pleads with the spirit to stay until the very end of the festivities. As the day passes, the spirit ages, becoming noticeably older. Toward the end of the day, he shows Scrooge two starved children, Ignorance and Want, living under his coat. He vanishes instantly as Scrooge notices a dark, hooded figure coming toward him.

The Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come leads Scrooge through a sequence of mysterious scenes relating to an unnamed man's recent death. Scrooge sees businessmen discussing the dead man's riches, some vagabonds trading his personal effects for cash, and a poor couple expressing relief at the death of their unforgiving creditor. Scrooge, anxious to learn the lesson of his latest visitor, begs to know the name of the dead man. After pleading with the ghost, Scrooge finds himself in a churchyard, the spirit pointing to a grave. Scrooge looks at the headstone and is shocked to read his own name. He desperately implores the spirit to alter his fate, promising to renounce his insensitive, avaricious ways and to honor Christmas with all his heart. Whoosh! He suddenly finds himself safely tucked in his bed.

Overwhelmed with joy by the chance to redeem himself and grateful that he has been returned to Christmas Day, Scrooge rushes out onto the street hoping to share his newfound Christmas spirit. He sends a giant Christmas turkey to the Cratchit house and attends Fred's party, to the stifled surprise of the other guests. As the years go by, he holds true to his promise and honors Christmas with all his heart: he treats Tiny Tim as if he were his own child, provides lavish gifts for the poor, and treats his fellow human beings with kindness, generosity, and warmth.

Stave 1: Marley’s Ghost

**Summary**

On a frigid, foggy Christmas Eve in London, a shrewd, mean-spirited cheapskate named Ebenezer Scrooge works meticulously in his counting-house. Outside the office creaks a little sign reading "Scrooge and Marley"--Jacob Marley, Scrooge's business partner, has died seven years previous. Inside the office, Scrooge watches over his clerk, a poor diminutive man named Bob Cratchit. The smoldering ashes in the fireplace provide little heat even for Bob's tiny room. Despite the harsh weather Scrooge refuses to pay for another lump of coal to warm the office.

Suddenly, a ruddy-faced young man bursts into the office offering holiday greetings and an exclamatory, "Merry Christmas!" The young man is Scrooge's jovial nephew Fred who has stopped by to invite Scrooge to Christmas dinner. The grumpy Scrooge responds with a "Bah! Humbug!" refusing to share in Fred's Christmas cheer. After Fred departs, a pair of portly gentlemen enters the office to ask Scrooge for a charitable donation to help the poor. Scrooge angrily replies that prisons and workhouses are the only charities he is willing to support and the gentlemen leave empty-handed. Scrooge confronts Bob Cratchit, complaining about Bob's wish to take a day off for the holiday. "What good is Christmas," Scrooge snipes, "that it should shut down bus iness?" He begrudgingly agrees to give Bob a day off but insists that he arrive at the office all the earlier the next day.

Scrooge follows the same old routine, taking dinner in his usual tavern and returning home through the dismal, fog-blanketed London streets. Just before entering his house, the doorknocker on his front door, the same door he has passed through twice a d ay for his many years, catches his attention. A ghostly image in the curves of the knocker gives the old man a momentary shock: It is the peering face of Jacob Marley. When Scrooge takes a second re-focused look, he sees nothing but a doorknocker. With a disgusted "Pooh-pooh," Scrooge opens the door and trudges into his bleak quarters. He makes little effort to brighten his home: "darkness is cheap, and Scrooge liked it." As he plods up the wide staircase, Scrooge, in utter disbelief, sees a locomotive hearse climbing the stairs beside him.

After rushing to his room, Scrooge locks the door behind him and puts on his dressing gown. As he eats his gruel before the fire, the carvings on his mantelpiece suddenly transform into images of Jacob Marley's face. Scrooge, determined to dismiss the strange visions, blurts out "Humbug!" All the bells in the room fly up from the tables and begin to ring sharply. Scrooge hears footsteps thumping up the stairs. A ghostly figure floats through the closed door--Jacob Marley, transparent and bound in chains.

Scrooge shouts in disbelief, refusing to admit that he sees Marley's ghost--a strange case of food poisoning, he claims. The ghost begins to murmur: He has spent seven years wandering the Earth in his heavy chains as punishment for his sins. Scrooge loo ks closely at the chains and realizes that the links are forged of cashboxes, padlocks, ledgers, and steel purses. The wraith tells Scrooge that he has come from beyond the grave to save him from this very fate. He says that Scrooge will be visited by three spirits over the next three nights--the first two appearing at one o'clock in the morning and the final spirit arriving at the last stoke of midnight. He rises and backs toward the window, which opens almost magically, leaving a trembling Scrooge white with fear. The ghost gestures to Scrooge to look out the window, and Scrooge complies. He sees a throng of spirits, each bound in chains. They wail about their failure to lead honorable, caring lives and their inability to reach out to others in need as they and Marley disappear into the mist. Scrooge stumbles to his bed and falls instantly asleep.

Stave 2: The first of the three spirits

**Summary**

Scrooge awakes at midnight, which leaves him baffled--it was well after two a.m. when he went to bed. Initially, he thinks he has slept through an entire day or that it's actually noon and the sun has merely gone under some sort of cover. He suddenly reme mbers the words of Marley's ghost. The first of the three spirits will arrive at one o'clock. Frightened, Scrooge decides to wait for his supernatural visitor.



At one o'clock, the curtains of Scrooge's bed are blown aside by a strange, childlike figure emanating an aura of wisdom and a richness of experience. The spirit uses a cap to cover the light that glows from its head. The specter softly informs Scroog e that he is the Ghost of Christmas Past and orders the mesmerized man to rise and walk with him. The spirit touches Scrooge's heart, granting him the ability to fly. The pair exits through the window.

The ghost transports Scrooge to the countryside where he was raised. He sees his old school, his childhood mates, and familiar landmarks of his youth. Touched by these memories, Scrooge begins to sob. The ghost takes the weeping man into the school where a solitary boy--a young Ebenezer Scrooge--passes the Christmas holiday all alone. The ghost takes Scrooge on a depressing tour of more Christmases of the past--the boy in the schoolhouse grows older. At last, a little girl, Scrooge's sister Fan, runs into the room, and announces that she has come to take Ebenezer home. Their father is much kinder, she says. He has given his consent to Ebenezer's return. The young Scrooge, delighted to see his sister, embraces her joyfully. The aged Scrooge regretfully tells the ghost that Fan died many years ago and is the mother of his nephew Fred.

The ghost escorts Scrooge to more Christmases of the past including a merry party thrown by Fezziwig, the merchant with whom Scrooge apprenticed as a young man. Scrooge later sees a slightly older yet still boyish version of himself in conversation with a lovely young woman named Belle. She is breaking off their engagement crying that greed has corrupted the love that used to impassion Scrooge's heart. The spirit takes Scrooge to a more recent Christmas scene where a middle-aged Belle remini sces with her husband about her former fiance, Scrooge. The husband says that Scrooge is now "quite alone in the world." The older Scrooge can no longer bear the gripping visions. He begs the Ghost of Christmas Past to take him back, back to his home. Tormented and full of despair, Scrooge seizes the ghost's hat and pulls it firmly over top of the mystical child's head, dimming the light. As the inextinguishable, luminous rays flood downward onto the ground, Scrooge finds himself zipped back in his b edroom, where he stumbles to bed yet again and falls asleep immediately.

Stave 3: The second of the three spirits

#### Summary

The church clock strikes one, startling Scrooge, who awakes in mid-snore. Glad to be awake, he hopes to confront the second spirit just as it arrives. The echoes of the church bell fade, however, and no ghost appears. Somewhat disappointed, Scrooge waits for 15 minutes after which a bright light begins to stream down upon him. Curious and a bit befuddled, Scrooge pads into the other room where he finds the second spirit waiting for him.

The figure, a majestic giant clad in green robes, sits atop a throne made of a gourmet feast. In a booming voice, the spirit announces himself as the Ghost of Christmas Present. He tells Scrooge that he has more than 1800 brothers and his lifespan is a mere single day. The spirit orders Scrooge to touch his robe. Upon doing so, the feast and the room vanish instantly and Scrooge finds himself alongside the spirit in the midst of the bustling city on Christmas morning. Blissful passersby take pleasure in the wondrous sights and smells abounding through the shop doors. People merrily shovel snow, tote bags of presents, and greet one another with a cheery "Merry Christmas!"

The spirit then takes Scrooge to the meager home of Bob Cratchit, where Mrs. Cratchit and her children prepare a Christmas goose and savor the few Christmas treats they can afford. The oldest daughter, Martha, returns from her job at a milliner's. The oldest son, Peter, wears a stiff-collared shirt, a hand-me-down from his father. Bob comes in carrying the crippled young tyke, Tiny Tim, on his shoulders. The family is more than content despite its skimpy Christmas feast. Scrooge begs to know whether Tiny Tim will survive. The spirit replies that given the current conditions in the Cratchit house, there will inevitably be an empty chair at next year's Christmas dinner.

The spirit takes Scrooge to a number of other Christmas gatherings, including the festivities of an isolated community of miners and a party aboard a ship. He also takes Scrooge to Fred's Christmas party, where Scrooge looses himself in the numerous party games and has a wildly entertaining time, though none of the party guests can actually see him. As the night unfolds, the ghost grows older. At last, Scrooge and the ghost come to a vast and desolate expanse. Here, the ghost shows Scrooge a pair of starving children who travel with him beneath his robes--their names are Ignorance and Want. Scrooge inquires if nothing can be done to help them. Mockingly, the ghost quotes Scrooge's earlier retort, "Are there no prisons? Are there no workhouses ?"

The spirit disappears as the clock strikes midnight and Scrooge eyes a hooded phantom coming toward him.

Stave 4: The last of the spirits

**Summary**

The phantom, a menacing figure clad in a black hooded robe, approaches Scrooge. Scrooge involuntarily kneels before him and asks if he is the Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come. The phantom does not answer, and Scrooge squirms in terror. Still reeling from the revelatory experiences with the last two spirits, Scrooge pleads with the ghost to share his lesson, hopeful that he may avoid the fate of his deceased partner.



The ghost takes Scrooge to a series of strange places: the London Stock Exchange, where a group of businessmen discuss the death of a rich man; a dingy pawn shop in a London slum, where a group of vagabonds and shady characters sell some personal effects stolen from a dead man; the dinner table of a poor family, where a husba nd and wife express relief at the death of an unforgiving man to whom they owed money; and the Cratchit household, where the family struggles to cope with the death of Tiny Tim. Scrooge begs to know the identity of the dead man, exasperated in his attempts to understand the lesson of the silent ghost. Suddenly, he finds himself in a churchyard where the spirit points him toward a freshly dug grave. Scrooge approaches the grave and reads the inscription on the headstone: EBENEZER SCROOGE.

Appalled, Scrooge clutches at the spirit and begs him to undo the events of his nightmarish vision. He promises to honor Christmas from deep within his heart and to live by the moralizing lessons of Past, Present, and Future. The spirit's hand begins to tremble, and, as Scrooge continues to cry out for mercy, the phantom's robe shrinks and collapses. Scrooge, again, finds himself returned to the relative safety of his own bed.

Stave 5: The End of It

**Summary**

Scrooge, grateful for a second chance at his life, sings the praises of the spirits and of Jacob Marley. Upon realizing he has been returned to Christmas morning, Scrooge begins shouting "Merry Christmas!" at the top of his lungs. Genuinely over joyed and bubbling with excitement, Scrooge barely takes time to dress and dances while he shaves. In a blur, Scrooge runs into the street and offers to pay the first boy he meets a huge sum to deliver a great Christmas turkey to Bob Cratchit's. He meets one of the portly gentlemen who earlier sought charity for the poor and apologizes for his previous rudeness, promising to donate huge sums of money to the poor. He attends Fred's Christmas party and radiates such heartfelt bliss that the other guests can hardly manage to swallow their shock at his surprising behavior.



The following morning, Scrooge arrives at the office early and assumes a very stern expression when Bob Cratchit enters eighteen and a half minutes late. Scrooge, feigning disgust, begins to scold Bob, before suddenly announcing his plans to give Cratchi t a large raise and assist his troubled family. Bob is stunned, but Scrooge promises to stay true to his word.

As time passes, Scrooge *is* as good as his word: He helps the Cratchits and becomes a second father to Tiny Tim who does not die as predicted in the ghost's ominous vision. Many people in London are puzzled by Scrooge's behavior, but Scrooge merely laughs off their suspicions and doubts. Scrooge brings a little of the Christmas spirit into every day, respecting the lessons of Christmas more than any man alive. The narrator concludes the story by saying that Scrooge's words and thoughts should be shared by of all of us ... "and so, as Tiny Tim observed, God bless us, Every one!"