

When Scrooge woke up, it was very dark in the room. He heard the church clock start striking, and listened to see what the time was. To his great surprise, the heavy bell went on striking up to twelve, then stopped. Twelve o'clock! It was past two in the morning when he had gone to bed. The clock must be wrong! He looked at his watch. It said twelve o'clock too!

'Have I slept all day? Is it the next night already?' Scrooge asked himself. 'Or has something happened to the sun? Perhaps it's midday, not midnight! But that's impossible!'

He climbed out of bed, and felt his way to the window. But there was nobody outside in the dark, foggy streets, and he realized it must be night-time. He went back to bed again, but could not sleep. He was worried, because he could not understand what was happening. 'Was Marley's ghost a dream?' he wondered. 'But it *seemed* very real ...'

He lay awake until he heard the clock striking a quarter to the hour. Suddenly he remembered. The ghost had warned him that a spirit would visit him at one o'clock.

He decided to stay awake until one o'clock had passed. The quarter of an hour passed very slowly, but at last he heard the clock striking the four quarters.

'It's one o'clock!' cried Scrooge delightedly, 'and nothing has happened!' But he spoke before the hour bell had sounded. The clock now struck a deep, sad ONE, and immediately light shone into Scrooge's bedroom. The curtains round his bed were pulled open. Scrooge sat up in bed, and stared at his ghostly visitor.

A strange figure, half like a child, half like an old man, looked back at him. It had long, white hair, but its skin was soft and young. It wore a short, white robe, covered with both summer and winter flowers. But the strangest thing about it was that from the top of its head shone a bright, clear light. Perhaps this light was sometimes too bright, because under one arm it carried a hat, which looked like a large extinguisher.

'Who and what are you, sir?' asked Scrooge.

'I am the ghost of Christmas Past,' replied the spirit, in a soft, gentle voice.

'Do you mean long ago in the past?' asked Scrooge.

'No. *Your* past.'

'Spirit, please tell me why you are here.'

'I am here for your own good,' answered the ghost.

'Thank you,' replied Scrooge politely. But secretly he thought, 'Bah! A night of unbroken sleep is a more useful thing to have!'

The spirit seemed to hear him thinking, and said at once,



*Scrooge stared at his ghostly visitor.*

‘I am here to help you change your life! Watch and listen!’ It put out a strong hand, and held Scrooge by the arm. ‘Get up, and come with me!’

It was dark and cold outside. Scrooge did not want to go anywhere, and for a moment he thought about pretending to be too ill to go out. But he did not like to refuse, so he said nothing, and got out of bed. Together they passed through the wall of the house out into the darkness.

Suddenly Scrooge realized they were standing on an open country road, with fields on each side. London, the fog, and the darkness had all disappeared, and it was a clear, cold, winter day, with snow on the ground.

‘Good Heavens!’ cried Scrooge. ‘I was born near here! I remember it well!’

The spirit looked kindly at the old man. ‘How strange that you’ve forgotten it for so many years! What is that on your face? Are you crying?’

Scrooge put a hand over his eyes. ‘It’s nothing – I’ve got a cold, that’s all. Take me where you want, spirit!’

Scrooge recognized every field, post, and tree, as they walked along the road towards a little market town. All around them were young schoolboys on horses and in farmers’ carts, laughing and wishing each other a merry Christmas, as they travelled to their homes for the Christmas holiday.

‘They are only shadows from the past,’ said the spirit. ‘They cannot see us.’

Scrooge knew and named all of them. Why was he so