Charles Dickens' A Christmas Carol

as told by CHARLES LAUGHTON

the beloved story of SCROOGE and TINY TIM
FULLY DRAMATIZED with SOUND EFFECTS and MUSIC
Hello. This is Charles Laughton, and we’re going to act out a story for you. The story is called “A CHRISTMAS CAROL”, and it was written by Charles Dickens, and every time you hear the sound of Christmas bells . . .

. . . that’s your signal to turn the page. You ready? Now listen.

Marley was dead to begin with. Ebenezer Scrooge and Marley had been partners for I don’t know how many years, but old Marley was dead—as dead as a doornail.

It was Christmas Eve. Old Scrooge was in his counting house, counting out his money. The door of the counting house was open so that he might keep his eye upon his clerk. Oh, yes, he was a tight-fisted hand at the grindstone, Scrooge! A squeezing, wrenching, grasping, clutching, scraping, covetous old sinner!

FRED: God bless you, Uncle!

This was the voice of Scrooge’s nephew. He was all in a glow.

FRED: A Merry Christmas, Uncle.

SCROOGE: BAH! HUMBUG!

FRED: Christmas a humbug, Uncle? You don’t mean that, I’m sure!

SCROOGE: BAH!

“Every idiot who goes about with Merry Christmas on his lips,” said Scrooge, “should be boiled with his own pudding and buried with a stake of holly in his heart.”

. . .

Did you turn that page?
Scrooge’s nephew had always thought of Christmas time as a kind, forgiving, charitable, pleasant time. The only time he knew of in the long calendar of the year, when men and women seemed by one consent to open their shut-up hearts freely.

FRED: And I say “God Bless It,” Uncle Scrooge.

CRATCHIT: Hurrah!

Scrooge’s clerk, Bob Cratchit, in the other office, clapped his hands.

SCROOGE: What right have you, Bob Cratchit, on fifteen shillings a week, with a wife and six children, thinking about Christmas?

CRATCHIT: Sorry, sir.

SCROOGE: I suppose you’ll want the whole day off tomorrow?

CRATCHIT: Yes, sir.

This, to Scrooge, was not fair. It was like picking a man’s pocket every twenty-fifth of December...

SCROOGE: Mind you’re here all the earlier the next morning, Cratchit!

And Scrooge stumped off to his home.
Now it is a fact that there was nothing at all particular about the knocker on Scrooge’s front door. It is also a fact that Scrooge had seen it night and morning for many years. Then you explain to me, if you can, how Scrooge saw in the knocker, not a knocker, but his dead partner’s face.

Marley’s face. It had a dismal light about it, like a bad lobster in a dark cellar.

Scrooge fled into the house, but before him stood the ghost . . .

SCROOGE: Who are you?

MARLEY: Ask me who I was! In life, I was your partner, Jacob Marley.

The ghost was chained. The chains were hung with cash boxes, keys, padlocks, letters and deeds.

SCROOGE: You’re chained. Tell me why?
MARLEY: I wear the chain I forged in life—a life mis-spent.

SCROOGE: But you were always a good man of business.

MARLEY: Oohhh!

Business? But was not mankind your business, Jacob Marley? The common welfare your business? Charity, mercy, forbearance and benevolence your business?

MARLEY: Oh, Scrooge, I’m here to warn you that you will be haunted—haunted by Three Spirits. And without their visits you cannot hope to escape my fate. Expect the first tomorrow, when the clock strikes ONE.

And Marley’s ghost was gone.

Scrooge tried to say “Humbug”, but stopped at the first syllable. And being, from the emotions he had undergone, much in need of repose, went straight to bed without undressing, and fell asleep upon the instant.
When Scrooge awoke it was dark. The clock was striking ONE.

Light flashed up in the room. The curtains of his bed were drawn. The curtains of his bed were drawn aside, I tell you, by a hand, and Scrooge was face to face with the unearthly visitor who drew them. It wore a tunic of the purest white; it held a branch of fresh green holly in its hand.

SCROOGE: What are you?

SPIRIT: The Ghost of Christmas Past.

SCROOGE: Long past?

SPIRIT: Your past. Rise and walk with me.

They passed through the wall. They were in the busy thoroughfare. Shadowy people passed and re-passed. By the dressing of the shops it was Christmas time. The ghost stopped at a certain warehouse door.

SCROOGE: I was apprenticed here, to old Fezziwig.

They went in.

SCROOGE: There IS old Fezziwig—alive again!

FEZZIWIG: Yo ho there, Ebenezer Scrooge! Christmas Eve! No more work tonight! Clear away!

And Scrooge saw his former self, a young man, polishing the warehouse into a ballroom.
And in came the men and women employed in the business. In came the housemaid—the cook—and the boy from across the way. There were dances and forfeits and more dances. But the great effect of the evening came when old Fezziwig danced the Sir Roger de Coverley with Mrs. Fezziwig.

“Advance and retire!”—(A positive light appeared to issue from Fezziwig’s calves)—“Both hands to your partner!”—(Fezziwig’s calves shown in every part of the dance like moons)—“Bow and curtsey!”—(Old Fezziwig dipped—dipped so deftly that he appeared to wink with his legs and came up upon his feet again without a stagger.)

**SPIRIT:** A small matter to make these silly folks so full of gratitude.

**SCROOGE:** Small!

Small? But hadn’t Old Fezziwig the power to make their service a pleasure or a toil? . . . And as Scrooge watched his former self go to his bed which was under a counter in the back shop, he wept to see himself as he used to be.

**SPIRIT:** My time grows short. Quick!

Now Scrooge saw himself, grown to manhood, by the side of a fair young girl, in whose eyes there were tears.
GIRL: Another idol has displaced me, and I trust it can cheer and comfort you in time to come, as I would have tried to do.

“What idol?” asked the young Scrooge.

GIRL: Gold!

SCROOGE: Spirit, I remember. She was to have been my wife. Show me no more! Why do you torture me?

And then Scrooge was alone, and further, in his own bed. He sank into a heavy sleep.

Awakening in the middle of a tough snore, Scrooge sat up. The clock was striking “ONE”.

SCROOGE: Oh, I must have slept through a whole day and into another night!

Scrooge began to wonder which of the curtains the new specter would draw back. But nothing came. Nothing but a ghostly light. He began to think it might be from the adjoining room. He shuffled in his slippers to the door. . . . A strange voice called him by his name.

VOICE: Scrooge! Ho-ho-ho-ho-ho.
Scrooge entered. It was his own room.

But it had undergone a transformation. The walls and ceiling were so hung with living green, that it looked a perfect grove. Such a mighty blaze went roaring up the chimney! Heaped up on the floor, to form a sort of throne, were turkeys, geese, sausages, mince pies, plum puddings, juicy oranges, luscious pears. In easy state upon this throne there sat a jolly giant, glorious to see!

**JOLLY GIANT:** *Come in, and know me better, man!*

Scrooge hung his head.

**JOLLY GIANT:** *I am the Ghost of Christmas Present.*

**SCROOGE:** *Spirit, tonight if you have aught to teach me, let me profit by it.*

**JOLLY GIANT:** *Touch my robe.*

Holly, mistletoe, turkeys, geese vanished instantly, and they stood in the city streets on Christmas morning.
The sky was gloomy, but there was an air of cheerfulness in the streets, as if filled with the clearest summer air.

The customers in the shops were all so hurried and so eager that they tumbled up against each other. And if there were angry words, their good humor was restored directly, for they said it was a shame to quarrel upon Christmas day.

Now perhaps it was the sympathy the good Spirit had with all poor men that led him to Scrooge’s clerk’s house. For there he went.

“There’s Father coming,” cried five of the six young Cratchits. And there was Bob Cratchit, coming home from church, to his Christmas dinner, and Tiny Tim upon his shoulder. Alas, poor Tiny Tim, he bore a little crutch and had his limbs supported by an iron frame.

“How did little Tim behave?” asked Mrs. Cratchit.

CRATCHIT: As good as gold, and better.

And then Tiny Tim said... he hoped people saw him in the church because he was a cripple, and it might be pleasant to them to remember upon Christmas who made lame beggars walk, and blind men see... Poor Bob Cratchit trembled when he heard this, and his voice trembled when he said that Tiny Tim was growing strong and hearty.
“There’s such a goose!” said Mrs. Cratchit. And such a bustle ensued! Mrs. Cratchit made the gravy, hissing hot; Master Peter Cratchit mashed the potatoes; Miss Belinda Cratchit sweetened up the applesauce; Martha Cratchit dusted the hot plates. The two young Cratchits set chairs for everybody, and crammed spoons into their mouths lest they should shriek for goose before their turn came to be helped. And then there was a breathless pause as Mrs. Cratchit, looking slowly all along the carving knife, prepared to plunge it in the breast. But when she did, and when the long expected gush of stuffing issued forth, even Tiny Tim beat on the table with the handle of his knife and feebly cried . . . Hurrah!

BOB: A Merry Christmas to us all, my dears! God Bless us!

FAMILY: GOD BLESS US!

TINY TIM: God bless us . . . everyone!

. . . said Tiny Tim, the last of all.

SCROOGE: Spirit, tell me—will Tiny Tim live?

But the Ghost took Scrooge away, and much they saw and far they went. The Spirit stood beside sickbeds, and they were cheerful; by poverty, and it was rich. In hospital and jail he left his blessing.

. . . But upon the stroke of “ONE”, without a word of warning, Scrooge was alone. And in place of the Jolly Giant of Christmas Present, he beheld a solemn Phantom, draped and hooded, coming like a mist along the ground, towards him.
The solemn Phantom slowly, gravely, silently approached.

SCROOGE: Are you the Ghost of Christmas Yet-to-Come?

The Spirit answered not . . . but pointed onward with its hand. Scrooge saw dimly a little knot of businessmen.

MAN: When did he die?

SECOND MAN: Last night, I believe.

Scrooge knew the men, but could not think of anyone they could be discussing.

MAN: Why wasn't he a human being?

SECOND MAN: If he had been, he'd have had somebody to look after him . . .

MAN: . . . instead of gasping out his last there . . .

SECOND MAN: . . . alone by himself.

SCROOGE: Spirit, I see, I see! The case of this unhappy man might be my own!

The scene had changed. A dark room—too dark to be observed. On a bed beneath a ragged sheet there lay a something covered up, without a man or a woman, or a child, to say that he was kind to me, and for that memory of one kind word, I will be kind to him.

SCROOGE: Let me see some tenderness connected with a death, or this dark chamber, Spirit, will be forever present with me!

The Phantom spread its dark robe like a wing, and they were in poor Bob Cratchit's house.
The Cratchit family was quiet, but surely they were very quiet. And where was Tiny Tim? Bob Cratchit said, *When we recollect how patient and how mild he was, we shall not quarrel easily among ourselves.* Spirit of Tiny Tim . . . thy childish essence came from God.

SCROOGE: *Specter . . . what kind of man was that whom we saw lying dead?*

The Phantom conveyed him to a churchyard, stood among the graves and pointed down to ONE.

SCROOGE: *Phantom, are these the shadows of the things that will be, or are these the shadows of things that may be, only?*

Still the Ghost pointed downward. Scrooge read upon the stone, his own name . . . EBENEZER SCROOGE.

SCROOGE: *Good Spirit! . . . May I yet change these shadows you’ve shown me, by an altered life?*

The Phantom was immovable. Scrooge caught the spectral hand.

SCROOGE: *I will honor Christmas in my heart!*
The Phantom shrank, collapsed, dwindled down into a bedpost.

Yes, and the bedpost was his own, the room was his own, best and happiest of all, the time was his own, to make amends in!

He opened the window and put out his head.

SCROOGE: What's today?

BOY: EH ???

SCROOGE: What's today, my fine fellow?

BOY: Today? Why, Christmas Day!

SCROOGE: The Spirits did it all in one night! The spirits can do anything they like, of course!

So he sent a turkey twice the size of Tiny Tim to Bob Cratchit's . . .

SCROOGE: And they shan't know who sent it . . .

...he went to church, walked about the streets, patted children upon the head, and found that everything could yield him pleasure!
But he was early at the office next morning. Oh, he was early! If he could only be there first and catch Bob Cratchit late! And he did, yes, he did! A full eighteen minutes late!

SCROOGE: *Hallo!!!*

CRATCHIT: *I'm sorry, sir, it's only once a year . . . and . . .*

SCROOGE: *I'm not going to stand for this any longer . . . and therefore, I'm going to raise your salary!*

Bob had a momentary idea of knocking Scrooge down and calling for a strait jacket.

SCROOGE: A *Merry Christmas, Bob! Merrier than I've given you for many a year*! And *I'm going to discuss your affairs this very afternoon!*

And 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, as good a man, as the good old city knew. He knew how to keep Christmas well. And may that be truly said of us, and all of us. And so, as Tiny Tim observed . . .

TIM: *GOD BLESS US . . . EVERYONE!*

God Bless Us . . . Everyone!
A CHRISTMAS CAROL—Part 1
(Charles Dickens)
Charles Laughton
Music composed and conducted by Frank Worth
A CHRISTMAS CAROL—Part 2
(Charles Dickens)
Charles Laughton
Music composed and conducted by
Frank Worth

SIDE 2
A CHRISTMAS CAROL—Part 3
(Charles Dickens)
Charles Laughton
Music composed and conducted by
Frank Worth
A CHRISTMAS CAROL—Concl.
(Charles Dickens)
Charles Laughton
Music composed and conducted by
Frank Worth