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## Scrooge's Office

Marley was dead, to begin with. There is no doubt whatever about that. Old Marley was as dead as a doornail.

Of course Scrooge knew he was dead. How could it be otherwise? Scrooge and he were partners for I don't know how many years. Scrooge was his only friend and his only mourner. And even Scrooge was not so dreadfully cut up by the sad event.

The mention of Marley's funeral brings me back to the point I started from. There is *no doubt* that Marley was dead. This must be distinctly understood—or nothing wonderful can come of the story I am about to tell you.

Scrooge had never painted out Marley's name on the sign. Years afterward it still hung above the door: *Scrooge and Marley*. Sometimes people called Scrooge "Scrooge," and sometimes

“Marley.” He answered to both names. It was all the same to him.

Scrooge was a very tightfisted man! He was secret, and self-contained, and solitary as an oyster. The cold within him froze his old features and nipped his pointed nose. It shriveled his cheeks and stiffened his walk. It made his eyes red and his thin lips blue. The hair on his head, eyebrows, and chin was frosty white. He seemed to carry his own low temperature with him. He iced his coffee in the summer, and didn’t thaw it one degree at Christmas.

Outside heat and cold had little influence on Scrooge. No sun could warm him; no winter weather could chill him. No wind that blew was more bitter than he. No falling snow was colder. No pelting rain was less open to mercy. The heaviest rain, snow, hail, and sleet had only one advantage over him. They often “came down” handsomely—but Scrooge never did.

Nobody ever stopped him in the street to say, “My dear Scrooge, how are you? When will you come to see me?” No beggars asked him for anything. No children asked him

what time it was. No man or woman ever asked him directions. Even the blind men's dogs seemed to know him. When they saw him coming, they would tug their owners into doorways. Then they would wag their tails as if to say, "No eye at all is better than an evil eye, master!"

But what did Scrooge care! This was the very thing he liked.

One Christmas Eve, old Scrooge was busy in his counting house. It was cold, dark, biting weather. He could hear the people outside, stamping their feet upon the pavement stones to warm them. The city clocks said it was 3:00 P.M., but it was quite dark already. It had not been light all day. Candles were flaring in the windows of the nearby offices. The fog came pouring in at every chink and keyhole. It was so dense outside that, even though the street was very narrow, the houses on the other side were hard to see.

The door of Scrooge's office was open so he could keep an eye on his clerk. In a dismal little cell beyond, the clerk was copying letters. Scrooge had a small fire in his own fireplace.

The clerk's tiny fire was so much smaller that it looked like one coal. But he couldn't add to it, for Scrooge kept the coal box in his own room. The clerk had put on his white comforter and tried to warm himself at the candle. Not being a man of a strong imagination, he failed.

"A merry Christmas, Uncle! God save you!" cried a cheerful voice. It was Scrooge's nephew, who had just come in.

"Bah!" said Scrooge. "Humbug!"

Fred, Scrooge's nephew, was all in a glow from walking in the fog and frost. His face was ruddy and handsome. His eyes sparkled.

"Christmas a humbug, Uncle?" said the nephew. "You don't mean that, I am sure!"

"I *do*," said Scrooge. "Merry Christmas? Why be so merry? You're poor enough."

"Come, then," laughed the nephew. "Why be so dismal? You're rich enough."

Scrooge had no better answer than to say, "Bah!" again and then "Humbug!"

"Don't be cross, Uncle!"

"What else can I be," returned the uncle, "when I live in such a world of fools? Merry

Christmas! What's Christmas to you but a time for paying bills without money? You find yourself a year older, but not an hour richer. If I had my way, every idiot who goes about with 'Merry Christmas' on his lips would be boiled with his own pudding. Then he ought to be buried with a stake of holly through his heart!"

"Uncle!" pleaded the nephew.

"Fred! Keep Christmas in your own way. Let me keep it in mine."

"But you *don't* keep it."

"Allow me to leave it alone, then," said Scrooge. "Much good it may do *you!*"

"I have gotten some good from many things by which I have not made money," said the nephew. "Christmas is one of those. It is always a good time—a kind, forgiving, pleasant time. It is the only time I know that men and women seem to open their hearts freely. Maybe it has never put any gold or silver in my pocket. But Christmas has always done me good, and *will* do me good. So I say, God bless it! Please don't be so glum, Uncle. Come! Dine with us tomorrow."