

Humbug....nothing but humbug....

And he goes to eat his gruel...All the time he is eating there are some signs and portents of all not being well. He hears faint footsteps in the distance...He hears a coach drive up and stop outside and waits fearfully...doors creek and slam..but still nothing particular happens in his own room...

Then a single door bell rings..his own..and then other bells in the house, picking up a great and terrifying cacophony of sounds..which suddenly cut out...and there is the single sound of the approach of the GHOST OF JACOB MARLEY. (Author's note: this sound, in Dicken's terms, is made by a long chain of keys and cash boxes and other symbols of the avariciousness of the two men; in production, such a chain can lead to laughter and might be more atmospherically replaced with a single chain and the dragging of feet.)

THE GHOST which in one sense fills SCROOGE with terror, and in another does no more than challenge his disbelief, slowly approaches - and then stops a little way from SCROOGE....

Start

SCROOGE	What do you want with me?
MARLEY	Much.
SCROOGE	Who are you?
MARLEY	Ask me who I was.
SCROOGE	You're mighty particular for a ghost. Who were you then?
MARLEY	In life, I was your partner, Jacob Marley..
SCROOGE	Yes. Yes, so you seem. Can you sit down?
MARLEY	I can.
SCROOGE	Do it then. You look more exhausted than you did seven years ago.
MARLEY	<i>(Sitting, after a moment.)</i> You don't believe in me?
SCROOGE	No, I don't.
MARLEY	What proof can I offer you, beyond that of your own senses?
SCROOGE	I - I don't know.
MARLEY	Why do you doubt your senses?

SCROOGE Because - well, because a little thing can affect them, a slight disorder of the stomach makes them cheats. You may be a bit of undigested beef - or a blot of mustard - or a crumb of cheese - or even a bit of an underdone potato. There's more of gravy than of grave about you, whatever you are. You see this toothpick?

MARLEY I do.

SCROOGE You're not looking at it.

MARLEY But I see it, all the same.

SCROOGE Well, I have but to swallow this to be tormented for the rest of my days by a whole legion of ghosts. Humbug, I tell you. Humbug.

At this, MARLEY sets up a terrible cry, which frightens SCROOGE so much that he falls on his knees....

SCROOGE Mercy. Mercy. Why do you trouble me?

MARLEY Do you believe in me or not?

SCROOGE I do. I must. But tell me, Jacob - why do you walk the earth? And why do you trouble me?

MARLEY Listen, and I will tell you.

SCROOGE Yes, yes, tell me, Jacob, tell me. Tell me.

MARLEY Listen! Be still - and listen.

SCROOGE'S cringing and whining subsides.

MARLEY It is required of every man that the spirit within him should walk abroad among his fellow-men, and travel far and wide; and any spirit that does not do so during life is condemned to do so after death - is condemned to wander through the world, as I am now, Ebenezer Scrooge; as I have been these seven years. As you have said, I am exhausted with restless wandering over seven whole years.

SCROOGE But the chains, Jacob? The chains. Why.....

MARLEY I forged them myself.

SCROOGE You?

MARLEY They are a heavy and a painful burden - and yet I made them myself during my own wretched life. The

chains you are forging, Ebenezer, will be no less heavy You are forging them yourself, link by link.

SCROOGE No, Jacob. No. Speak comfort to me, Jacob.

MARLEY I have none to give. Comfort comes from other Spirits, Ebenezer - and is given to other kinds of men. My spirit never moved beyond our counting house - and weary journeys lie before me...

SCROOGE But you were always a good man of business, Jacob.

MARLEY Business! Mankind was my business. The common welfare was my business. Charity, mercy, kindness were all my business. Making money was only a drop in the great ocean of my business. Why did I walk through crowds of fellow-beings with my eyes turned down, and never raise them to that blessed star which led the wise men to the poorest stable? Why? Why?

And as if in answer to his question the church clocks peel again.

MARLEY Hear me. My time is nearly gone.

SCROOGE I will, I will. But don't be hard upon me; don't be flowery, Jacob, please.

MARLEY How it is that I appear before you in a shape that you can see, I may not tell. I have sat beside you many, many times - invisible.

SCROOGE No, Jacob, no.

MARLEY Tonight I am here to warn you - to warn you that you have yet a chance and hope of escaping my fate; a chance and hope of my making, Ebenezer.

SCROOGE You were always a good friend to me. Thank 'ee.

MARLEY You will be haunted by three spirits.

SCROOGE Is - is that the hope and chance you mentioned, Jacob?

MARLEY It is.

SCROOGE I - I think I'd rather not.

MARLEY Without their visits, you cannot hope to escape the path I tread. Expect the first tomorrow, when the bell tolls one.