

A Christmas Carol: A Ghost Story of Christmas

by Charles Dickens
(edited version)

Preface

I have endeavored in this Ghostly little book, to raise the Ghost of an Idea, which shall not put my readers out of humour with themselves, with each other, with the season, or with me. May it haunt their houses pleasantly, and no one wish to lay it.

Part One:

Marley's Ghost

Marley was dead: to begin with. There is no doubt whatever about that. The notice of his burial was signed by the clergyman, the clerk, the undertaker, and the chief mourner—Scrooge. Scrooge signed the death certificate and Scrooge's name was good for anything he signed. Old Marley was as dead as a door-nail.

Listen! I don't mean to say that I know what makes a door-nail dead. I might have thought a coffin-nail as the deadest piece of metal in the funeral business. But the wisdom of our ancestors is in the simile¹; and I am not the person to change it. You will therefore permit me to repeat, with certainty, that Marley was as dead as a door-nail.

Scrooge knew he was dead? Of course he did. How could it be otherwise? Scrooge and he were partners for I don't know how many years. Scrooge was his sole business partner, his sole family, his sole friend, and his sole mourner. And even Scrooge was not so dreadfully upset by the sad event that he still found time to work and make money.

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 going to relate. If we were not perfectly convinced that Hamlet's Father died before the play began, there would be nothing more remarkable in Hamlet's Father taking a stroll at night in the castle than walking along the street.¹

Scrooge never painted out Old Marley's name. There it stood, years afterwards, above the warehouse door: Scrooge and Marley. The firm was known as Scrooge and Marley. Sometimes people new to the business called Scrooge "Scrooge" and sometimes they called him "Marley," but he answered to both names: it was all the same to him.

Oh! But he was a cheap man at work, Scrooge! a squeezing, wrenching, grasping, scraping, clutching, greedy, old sinner! Hard and sharp as flint, from which no steel had ever struck out generous fire²; secret, and self-contained, and solitary as an oyster. The cold within him froze his old features, nipped his pointed nose, shriveled his cheek, stiffened his walk; made his eyes red, his thin lips blue and spoke out shrewdly in his grating voice. A film of ice was on his head, and on his eyebrows, and his wiry chin. He

¹ Using "like" or "as" to compare items. *The cold water felt like needles stabbing my skin.*

¹ From *Hamlet* by William Shakespeare. Hamlet's father was murdered and walked the castle as a ghost.

² Striking flint caused sparks that could be used to start a fire.

carried his own low temperature always about with him; he iced his office in the dogdays³; and didn't thaw it one degree at Christmas.

External heat and cold had little influence on Scrooge. No warmth could warm, no wintry weather chill him. No wind that blew was worse than he. Foul weather didn't know where to have him. The heaviest rain, and snow, and hail, and sleet, could only boast one advantage over Scrooge: they gave way to warmth at the appropriate season.

Nobody ever stopped him in the street to say with honest concern, "My dear Scrooge, how are you? When will you come to see me?" No beggars asked for a handout, no children asked him for the time, no man or woman ever once in all his life asked Scrooge the way to such and such a place. Even the blind men's dogs appeared to know him; and when they saw him coming on, would tug their owners into doorways and up streets; and then would wag their tails as though they said, "Anything is better than the harsh look of Scrooge!"

But what did Scrooge care? Being left alone was the very thing he liked. To edge his way along the crowded paths of life, warning all human sympathy to keep away.

Once upon a time -- of all the good days in the year, on Christmas Eve -- old Scrooge sat busy in his counting-house. It was cold, bleak, biting weather: foggy everywhere: and he could hear the people in the street outside go wheezing up and down, beating their hands upon their chests, and stamping their feet upon the pavement stones to warm themselves. The city clocks had only just gonged three, but it was quite dark already -- it had not been light all day: candles were burning in the windows of the neighbouring offices, like ruddy smears upon the dirty brown air. The fog came pouring in at every crevice and keyhole, and was so dense throughout, that although the street was narrow, the houses on the opposite side were mere shadows. To see the dingy cloud come drooping down, hiding everything, one might have thought that Nature lived nearby and was brewing a heavy mist.

The door of Scrooge's counting-house was open so that he could keep his eye upon his clerk, who in a dismal little cell beyond, a sort of cubicle, was copying letters. Scrooge had a very small fire, but the clerk's fire was so very much smaller that it looked like one coal burning. But the clerk couldn't replenish it, for Scrooge kept the coal-box in his own room and refused to part with the black nuggets except upon the most dire circumstances. Instead, the clerk put on his white comforter, and tried to warm himself at the candle; but the candle gave off little heat.

"A merry Christmas, uncle! God save you!" cried a cheerful voice. It was the voice of Scrooge's nephew, who came upon him so quickly that this was the first warning Scrooge had of his approach.

"Bah!" said Scrooge, "Humbug!"

In the door entered the nephew of Scrooge. He carried in with him a friendly, warm glow; his face was ruddy and handsome; his eyes sparkled, and his breath smoked in the cold.

"Christmas a humbug, uncle!" said Scrooge's nephew. "You don't mean that, I am sure."

"I do," said Scrooge. "Merry Christmas! What right have you to be merry? What reason have you to be merry? You're poor enough."

³ The period between early July and early September when the hot sultry weather of summer usually occurs in the northern hemisphere.

"Come, then," returned the nephew happily. "What right have you to be dismal? What reason have you to be depressed? You're rich enough."

Scrooge having no better answer ready on the spur of the moment, said "Bah!" again; and followed it up with "Humbug."

"Don't be irritated, uncle!" said the nephew.

"What else can I be," returned the uncle, "when I live in such a world of fools as this? Merry Christmas! Get rid of merry Christmas! What's Christmas time to you but a time for paying bills without money; a time for finding yourself a year older, but not an hour richer; a time for balancing your books and having every item in them working against you? If I could have my way," said Scrooge indignantly, "every idiot who goes about with 'Merry Christmas' on his lips, should be boiled with his own pudding, and buried with a stake of holly through his heart. He should!"

"Uncle!" pleaded the nephew.

"Nephew!" returned the uncle, sternly, "keep Christmas in your own way, and let me keep it in mine."

"Keep it!" repeated Scrooge's nephew. "But you don't keep it."

"Let me leave it alone, then," said Scrooge. "Much good may it do you! Much good it has ever done you!"

"I have done many good things in my life by which I have not profited, I dare say," returned the nephew. "Christmas among the rest. I have always thought of Christmas, when it comes around, as a good time—a time of forgiving, charity—a pleasant time. It is the only day on the calendar when people agree to open their closed hearts to everyone—even the memories of the dead buried below them. Therefore Uncle, even though there is no profit in it, I say to you and everyone, Merry Christmas."

The clerk in the cubicle involuntarily applauded: becoming immediately aware of Scrooge's disdain; he poked the fire, and extinguished the last frail spark for ever.

"Let me hear another sound from *you*," said Scrooge to the clerk, "and you'll keep your Christmas by losing your job. You're quite a powerful speaker, sir," he added, turning to his nephew. "I wonder you don't go into politics."

"Don't be angry, uncle. Come! Dine with us tomorrow."

Scrooge huffed and said that he would rather see his nephew in a hot place where ice was a foreign word.

"But why?" cried Scrooge's nephew. "Why?"

"Why did you get married?" said Scrooge.

"Because I fell in love."

"Because you fell in love!" growled Scrooge, as if that were the only one thing in the world more ridiculous than a merry Christmas. "Good afternoon!"

"No, Uncle, you never came to see me before I married, why give it as a reason for not coming now?"

"Good afternoon," said Scrooge.

"I want nothing from you, Uncle; I ask nothing of you; why cannot we be friends?"

"Good afternoon," said Scrooge.

"I am sorry, with all my heart, to find you so stubborn. We have never had any quarrel, to which I have been a party. Even though you reject my offer to come by for dinner, I'll keep my Christmas humour to the last. So A Merry Christmas, uncle!"

"Good afternoon," said Scrooge.

"And A Happy New Year!"

"Good afternoon!" said Scrooge.

His nephew left the room without an angry word. He only stopped at the outer door to wish the clerk a merry Christmas. As cold as the clerk was, he was still warmer than Scrooge; for the clerk wished the nephew a merry Christmas in return.

"There's another fellow," muttered Scrooge; who overheard him: "my clerk, with fifteen shillings a week, and a wife and family, talking about a merry Christmas. I'll retire to Bedlam⁴."

As Scrooge's nephew exited into the street, two other people came in. They were portly gentlemen, pleasant to behold, and now stood, with their hats off, in Scrooge's office. They had books and papers in their hands, and bowed to him.

"Scrooge and Marley's, I believe," said one of the gentlemen, referring to his list. "Have I the pleasure of addressing Mr. Scrooge or Mr. Marley?"

"Mr. Marley has been dead these seven years," Scrooge replied. "He died seven years ago, this very night."

"We have no doubt your generosity is as good as your former partner," said the gentleman.

It certainly was for Scrooge and Marley had been two kindred spirits, birds of a feather, brothers. And the ominous word "generosity," Scrooge frowned, and shook his head.

"At this festive season of the year, Mr. Scrooge," said the gentleman, taking up a pen, "it is the best time to try to collect donations for the Poor and Destitute, who suffer greatly at the present time. Many thousands are in want of common necessities; hundreds of thousands are in want of common comforts, sir."

"Are there no prisons?" asked Scrooge.

⁴ A scene or place of confusion and chaos.

"Plenty of prisons," said the gentleman, laying down the pen again.

"And the Union workhouses?" demanded Scrooge. "Are they still in operation?"

"They still are," returned the gentleman, "I wish I could say they were not."

"Well then, if they cannot pay their bills, send them off to a cell. If they need work, they should find it."

"I am not under the impression that Christian cheer is supplied at the prisons or the unemployment offices," returned the gentleman. "However, a few of us are trying to raise money to buy the Poor some meat and drink and means of warmth. We choose this time, because it is a time, beyond all others, when Want is greatest felt, and Abundance is given away so freely. What shall I put you down for?"

"Nothing!" Scrooge replied.

"You wish to be an anonymous donor?"

"I wish to be left alone," said Scrooge. "Since you ask me what I wish, gentlemen, that is my answer. I don't make myself merry at Christmas and I can't afford to make lazy people merry. I already pay my taxes—they cost enough. So there."

"Many can't get work; and many may die."

"If they would die," said Scrooge, "they had better do it, and decrease the excess population."

"But it's your business to help the less fortunate," observed the gentleman.

"It's not my business," Scrooge returned. "It's enough for a man to understand his own business, and not to interfere with other people's. Mine occupies me constantly. Good afternoon, gentlemen!"

Seeing clearly that it would be useless to pursue their point, the gentlemen left. Scrooge returned to his labours with an improved opinion of himself, and found himself in a better mood than usual.

Meanwhile the fog and darkness thickened so that people ran about with lanterns, offering to lead carriages through the streets. The ancient tower of a church, whose gruff old bell was always peeping slyly down at Scrooge out of a Gothic window in the wall, became invisible, and struck the hours and quarters in the clouds. The cold became intense. In the main street at the corner of the court, some labourers were repairing the gas-pipes, and had lighted a great fire. There, ragged men and boys were gathered: warming their hands and winking their eyes before the blaze in delight. Moisture on the street turned to ice.

Foggier yet, and colder! Piercing, searching, biting cold. A caroler who was making his way along the sidewalks, stooped down at Scrooge's keyhole to entertain him with a Christmas carol, but at the first sound of—

"God bless you, merry gentleman!
May nothing you dismay!"

Scrooge seized his ruler with such energy of action, that the singer fled in terror, leaving the keyhole to the fog and even more frost.

Finally, the hour of shutting up the countinghouse arrived. With an ill-will, Scrooge dismounted from his stool and admitted the fact to the expectant clerk in the cubicle, who instantly snuffed his candle out and put on his hat.

"You'll want to take off all day to-morrow, I suppose?" said Scrooge.

"If quite convenient, sir."

"It's not convenient," said Scrooge, "and it's not fair! If I cut your wages in half, you'd complain."

The clerk smiled faintly.

"And yet," said Scrooge, "you don't think me ill-used, when I pay a day's wages for no work."

The clerk observed that it was only once a year.

"A poor excuse for picking a man's pocket every twenty-fifth of December!" said Scrooge, buttoning his great-coat to the chin. "But I suppose you must have the whole day. Be here earlier on the twenty-six."

The clerk promised that he would and Scrooge walked out with a growl. The office was closed in moments, and the clerk, with the long ends of his white comforter dangling below his waist (for he had no great-coat) happily home.

Scrooge took his melancholy⁵ dinner in his usual melancholy tavern; and having read all the newspapers and spent the rest of the evening with his banker's-book, went home to bed. He lived in rooms which had once belonged to his deceased partner, Marley. They were a gloomy suite of rooms, old enough now, and dreary enough, for nobody lived in it but Scrooge, the other rooms were rented out as offices. The area was so dark that even Scrooge, who knew its every stone, was pleased to feel his way with his hands. The fog and frost so hung about the black old gateway of the house.

Now, it is a fact, that there was nothing at all particular about the knocker on the door, except that it was very large. It is also a fact, that Scrooge had seen it, night and morning, during his whole residence in that place; also that Scrooge had as little of what is called imagination about him as any man in the city of London. Let it also be made clear that Scrooge had not given one thought on Marley, since he had mentioned that his partner had died earlier that afternoon. And then let any man explain to me, if he can, how it happened that Scrooge, having his key in the lock of the door, saw in the knocker, the face of Marley.

Marley's face was not hidden in shadow as the other objects in the yard were, but had a dismal light about it. It was not angry or ferocious, but looked at Scrooge as Marley used to look: with ghostly spectacles turned up on its ghostly forehead. The hair was curiously stirred, as if by breath or hot air; and, though the eyes were wide open, they were perfectly motionless. That, and its livid colour, made it horrible; but its horror seemed to be in spite of the face and beyond its control, rather than a part or its own expression.

As Scrooge stared at this strange occurrence, it returned to looking like a knocker again.

To say that he was not startled, or that his heart did not beat faster, would be untrue. But he put his hand upon the key and turned it sturdily, walked in, and lighted his candle.

⁵ Depressing.

He did pause, with a moment's indecision, before he shut the door; and he did look cautiously behind it first, as if he half-expected to be terrified with the sight of Marley's pigtail sticking out into the hall. But there was nothing on the back of the door, except the screws and nuts that held the knocker on, so he said "Bah, bah!" and closed the door with a bang.

The sound resounded through the house like thunder. Every room above, and every barrel in the wine-merchant's cellars below, appeared to have an echo of its own. Scrooge was not a man to be frightened by echoes. He fastened the door, and walked across the hall, and up the stairs; slowly too: lighting his candle as he went.

Up Scrooge went. Darkness is cheap, and Scrooge liked it. But before he shut his heavy door, he walked through his rooms to see that all was right. He had just enough remembrance of the face to desire to do that.

Sitting-room, bedroom, lumber-room. All as they should be. Nobody under the table, nobody under the sofa; a small fire in the grate; spoon and basin ready; and the little saucepan of gruel⁶ (Scrooge had a cold in his head) upon the hob⁷. Nobody under the bed; nobody in the closet; nobody in his dressing-gown, which was hanging up in a suspicious attitude against the wall. Lumber-room as usual. Old fire-guards, old shoes, two fish-baskets, washing-stand on three legs, and a poker.

Quite satisfied, he closed his door, and locked himself in; double-locked himself in, which was not his custom. Thus secured against surprise, he took off his necktie; put on his dressing-gown and slippers, and his nightcap; and sat down before the fire to take his gruel.

It was a very low fire indeed. He was forced to sit close to it, before he could extract the least sensation of warmth from such a handful of fuel. The fireplace was an old one, built by some Dutch merchant long ago, and paved all round with quaint Dutch tiles, designed to illustrate scenes from the Bible. There were Cains and Abels, Pharaohs' daughters; Queens of Sheba, Angelic messengers descending through the air on clouds like feather-beds, Abrahams and Apostles putting off to sea in butter-boats, hundreds of figures to attract his thoughts—and yet that face of Marley, seven years dead, came like the ancient Prophet's rod, and swallowed up the whole. If each smooth tile had been a blank at first, with power to shape some picture on its surface from the disjointed fragments of his thoughts, there would have been a copy of old Marley's head on every one.

"Humbug!" said Scrooge; and walked across the room.

After several turns, he sat down again. As he threw his head back in the chair, his glance happened to rest upon a bell, a disused bell, that hung in the room, and communicated for some purpose now forgotten with a chamber in the highest story of the building. It was with great astonishment, and with a strange, inexplicable dread, that as he looked, he saw this bell begin to swing. It swung so softly in the outset that it scarcely made a sound; but soon it rang out loudly, and so did every bell in the house.

This might have lasted half a minute, or a minute, but it seemed an hour. All the bells ceased as they had begun. They were followed by a clanking noise, deep down below; as if some person were dragging a heavy chain over the barrels in the wine merchant's cellar. Scrooge then remembered to have heard that ghosts in haunted houses were described as dragging chains.

⁶ A thin cereal.

⁷ Stove.

The cellar-door flew open with a booming sound, and then he heard the noise much louder, on the floors below; then coming up the stairs; then coming straight towards his door.

"It's still humbug!" said Scrooge. "I won't believe it."

His colour changed though, when, without a pause, it came on through the heavy door, and passed into the room before his eyes. Upon its coming in, the dying flame leaped up, as though it cried, "I know him; Marley's Ghost!" and fell again.

The same face: the very same. Marley in his pigtail, usual waistcoat, tights and boots; the tassels on the latter bristling, like his pigtail, and his coat-skirts, and the hair upon his head. The chain he drew was clasped about his middle. It was long and wound about him like a tail; and Scrooge observed it was made of cash-boxes, keys, padlocks, ledgers, deeds, and heavy purses wrought in steel. His body was transparent, so that Scrooge, observing him, and looking through his waistcoat, could see the two buttons on his coat behind.

Scrooge had often heard it said that Marley had no guts, but he had never believed it until now.

No, this cannot be happening. Though Marley looked like a phantom through and through, and Scrooge saw it standing before him and felt the chilling influence of its death-cold eyes; and saw a folded bandana bound about its head and chin, Scrooge was still unbelieving and fought against his senses.

"What's this!" said Scrooge, sharp and cold as ever. "What do you want with me?"

"Much!"—Marley's voice, no doubt about it.

"Who are you?"

"Ask me who I *was*."

"Who *were* you then?" said Scrooge, raising his voice. "You're familiar."

"In life I was your partner, Jacob Marley."

"Can you -- can you sit down?" asked Scrooge, looking doubtfully at him.

"I can."

"Do it then."

Scrooge asked the question, because he didn't know whether a ghost so transparent might find himself in a condition to take a chair; and felt that in the event of its being impossible, it might involve the necessity of an embarrassing explanation. But the ghost sat down on the opposite side of the fireplace, as if he were quite used to it.

"You don't believe in me," observed the Ghost.

"I don't." said Scrooge.

"What evidence would you have of my reality, beyond that of your senses?"

"I don't know," said Scrooge.

"Why do you doubt your senses?"

"Because," said Scrooge, "something affects them. A slight disorder of the stomach, perhaps. You may be an undigested bit of beef, a blot of mustard, a crumb of cheese, a fragment of an underdone potato. There's more of gravy than of grave about you, whatever you are!"

Scrooge was not much in the habit of cracking jokes. The truth is, that he tried to be smart, as a means of distracting his own attention, and keeping down his terror; for the spectre's voice disturbed the very marrow in his bones.

To sit, staring at those fixed glazed eyes, in silence for a moment, would play, Scrooge felt, with his mind. There was something very awful, too, in the spectre's being provided with an infernal atmosphere of its own. Scrooge could not feel it himself, but this was clearly the case; for though the Ghost sat perfectly motionless, its hair, and skirts, and tassels, were still blurred as by the hot vapour from an oven.

"You see this toothpick?" said Scrooge, returning quickly to the offensive; and wishing, though it were only for a second, to divert the ghost's stony gaze from himself.

"I do," replied the Ghost.

"You are not looking at it," said Scrooge.

"But I see it," said the Ghost.

"Well!" returned Scrooge, "I have but to swallow this, and be for the rest of my days persecuted by a legion of goblins, all of my own creation. Humbug, I tell you! Humbug!"

At this the spirit raised a frightful cry, and shook its chain with such a dismal and appalling noise, that Scrooge held on tight to his chair, to save himself from fainting. But his horror was greater, when the phantom, taking off the bandage round its head, he saw the jaw drop down upon its chest!

Scrooge fell upon his knees, and clasped his hands before his face.

"Mercy!" he said. "Dreadful apparition, why do you trouble me?"

"Man of the worldly mind!" replied the Ghost, "do you believe in me or not?"

"I do," said Scrooge. "I must. But why do spirits walk the earth, and why do they come to me?"

"It is required of every man," the Ghost returned, "that the spirit within him should walk among his fellowmen, and travel far and wide; and if that spirit does not go forth in life, it is condemned to do so after death. It is doomed to wander through the world—oh, woe is me!—and witness what it cannot share, but might have shared on earth, and turned to happiness!"

Again the spectre raised a cry, and shook its chain and wrung its shadowy hands.

"You are bothered," said Scrooge, trembling. "Tell me why?"

"I wear the chain I forged in life," replied the Ghost. "I made it link by link, and yard by yard; I created it of my own free will, and of my own free will I wore it. Is its pattern strange to you?"

Scrooge trembled more and more.

"Or would you know," pursued the Ghost, "the weight and length of the strong chain you bear yourself? It was full as heavy and as long as this, seven Christmas Eves ago. You have laboured on it, since. It is a heavy chain you are making for yourself!"

Scrooge glanced about him on the floor, in the expectation of finding himself surrounded by some fifty or sixty links of iron cable: but he could see nothing.

"Jacob," he said, imploringly. "Old Jacob Marley, tell me more. Speak comfort to me, Jacob!"

"I have none to give," the Ghost replied. "Nor can I tell you what I would. I only have a little time remaining. I cannot rest, I cannot stay, I cannot linger anywhere. My spirit never walked beyond our counting-house—mark me!—in life my spirit never roamed beyond the narrow limits of our money-changing business and now tiring journeys lie before me!"

It was a habit with Scrooge, whenever he became thoughtful, to put his hands in his breeches' pockets. Pondering on what the Ghost had said, he did so now, but without lifting up his eyes, or getting off his knees.

"You must have been very slow about it, Jacob," Scrooge observed, in a business-like manner, though with humbleness and respect.

"Slow!" the Ghost repeated.

"Seven years dead," joked Scrooge. "And travelling all the time!"

"The whole time," said the Ghost. "No rest, no peace. Never ending torture of guilt."

"You travel fast?" said Scrooge.

"On the wings of the wind," replied the Ghost.

"You might have traveled a lot in seven years," said Scrooge.

The Ghost, on hearing this, set up another cry, and clanked its chain so hideously in the dead silence of the night, that the neighborhood would have been justified in charging it with breaking the peace.

"Oh! captive, bound, and double-ironed," cried the phantom, "not to know, that any Christian spirit working kindly in its little world, whatever it may be, will find its mortal life too short to do all the good it is capable of doing. Not to know that all of the regret in the world cannot make up for a misused life! Yet such was I! Oh! such was I!"

"But you were always a good man of business, Jacob," faltered Scrooge, who now began to apply this to himself.

"Business!" cried the Ghost, wringing its hands again. "Mankind was my business. The common welfare was my business; charity, mercy, forbearance, and benevolence were all my business. My job at the counting-house was but a drop of water in the ocean!"

It held up its chain at arm's length, as if that were the cause of all its unending grief, and flung it heavily upon the ground again.

"At this time of the year," the spectre said, "I suffer most. Why did I walk through crowds of fellow-beings with my eyes turned down, avoiding those I could have helped!"

Scrooge was very much dismayed to hear the spectre going on at this rate, and began to quake exceedingly.

"Hear me!" cried the Ghost. "My time is nearly gone."

"I will," said Scrooge. "But don't be hard upon me! Don't be complicated, Jacob!"

"How it is that I appear before you in a shape that you can see, I may not tell. I have sat invisible beside you many and many a day."

It was not an agreeable idea. Scrooge shivered, and wiped the perspiration from his brow.

"That is a heavy part of my self-punishment," pursued the Ghost. "I am here to-night to warn you, that you have yet a chance and hope of escaping my fate. I'm trying to help you, Ebenezer."

"You were always a good friend to me," said Scrooge. "Thank you!"

"You will be haunted," resumed the Ghost, "by Three Spirits."

Scrooge's countenance⁸ fell almost as low as the Ghost's chin had done.

"Is that the chance and hope you mentioned, Jacob?" he demanded, in a faltering voice.

"It is."

"I—I think I'd rather not," said Scrooge.

"Without their visits," said the Ghost, "you cannot hope to shun⁹ the path I tread. Expect the first Spirit tomorrow, when the bell tolls one."

"Couldn't I take `em all at once, and have it over with, Jacob?" hinted Scrooge.

"Expect the second ghost on the next night at the same hour. The third ghost upon the next night when the last stroke of twelve has ceased. Look to see me no more; and for your own sake, you remember what I've told you!"

⁸ Facial expression.

⁹ Avoid; reject

When it had said these words, the spectre took its wrapper from the table, and bound its head as before. Scrooge knew this, by the sharp sound its teeth made, when the jaws were brought together by the bandage. He ventured to raise his eyes again, and found his supernatural visitor confronting him with its chain wound over and about its arm.

The apparition walked backward from him; and at every step it took, the window raised itself a little, so that when the spectre reached it, it was wide open. It asked Scrooge to approach, which he did. When they were within two paces of each other, Marley's Ghost held up its hand, warning him to come no nearer.

Scrooge stopped. Not so much in obedience, but as in surprise and fear. For when the ghost raised its hand, Scrooge became aware of confused noises in the air and incoherent sounds of sorrow and regret. The spectre, after listening for a moment, joined in the mournful dirge¹⁰; and floated out the window upon the bleak, dark night.

Scrooge followed to the window: desperate in his curiosity. He looked out.

The air was filled with phantoms, wandering here and there in restless haste, and moaning as they went. Every one of them wore chains like Marley's Ghost; some few (they might be guilty governments) were linked together; none were free. Many had been personally known to Scrooge in their lives. He had been quite familiar with one old ghost in a white waistcoat, with a monstrous iron safe attached to its ankle, who cried piteously at being unable to assist a suffering woman with an infant, whom it saw below, upon a door-step. The misery with them all was, clearly, that they sought to interfere, for good, in human matters, and had lost the power for ever.

Whether these creatures faded into mist, or mist hid them, Scrooge could not tell. But they and their spirit voices faded together; and the night became as it had been when he walked home.

Scrooge closed the window, and examined the door by which the Ghost had entered. It was double-locked, as he had locked it with his own hands, and the bolts were undisturbed. He tried to say "Humbug!" but stopped at the first syllable. And being, from the emotion he had undergone, or the tiredness of the day, or his glimpse of the Invisible World, or the dull conversation of the Ghost, or the lateness of the hour, much in need of sleep; Scrooge went straight to bed, without undressing, and fell asleep in an instant.

¹⁰ A funeral song; a song celebrating the dead.

Part Two:

The First of the Three Spirits.

When Scrooge awoke, it was so dark, that looking out of bed, he could scarcely distinguish the transparent window glass from the solid walls of his room. He was trying to see through the darkness with his searching eyes, when the chimes of a neighbouring church struck the four quarters. So he listened for the hour.

To his great astonishment the heavy bell went on from six to seven, and from seven to eight, and regularly up to twelve; then stopped. Twelve. It was past two when he went to bed. The clock was wrong. An icicle must have got into the gears. Twelve.

He touched the spring of his clock, to correct this most preposterous clock. Its rapid little pulse beat twelve: and stopped.

"Why, it isn't possible," said Scrooge, "that I can have slept through a whole day and far into another night. It isn't possible that anything has happened to the sun, and this is twelve at noon."

The idea being an alarming one, he scrambled out of bed, and groped his way to the window. He was compelled to rub the frost off with the sleeve of his dressing-gown before he could see anything; and he could see very little then. All he could make out was that it was still very foggy and extremely cold. There was no noise of people running to and fro, and making a great stir, as there unquestionably would have been if night had given way to the bright day and taken possession of the world. This was a great relief to Scrooge.

Scrooge went to bed again, and thought, and thought, and thought it over and over and over and could make nothing of it. The more he thought, the more perplexed he was; and the more he tried not to think, the more he thought. Marley's Ghost bothered him exceedingly. Every time he convinced himself that it was all a dream, his mind flew back to the beginning and he asked himself, "Was it a dream or not?"

Scrooge thought about this until the chimes had gone three quarters more, when he remembered in an instant, that the Ghost had warned him of a visitation when the bell tolled one. He resolved to lie awake until the hour was past; and, considering that he could no more go to sleep than go to Heaven, this was perhaps the wisest course of action he could take.

The quarter was so long, that he was more than once convinced he must have drifted off to sleep and missed the clock. Finally, it broke upon his listening ear.

"Ding, dong!"

"A quarter past," said Scrooge, counting.

"Ding dong!"

"Half past!" said Scrooge.

"Ding dong!"

"A quarter to it," said Scrooge.

"Ding dong!"

"The hour itself," said Scrooge, triumphantly, "and nothing else!"

He spoke before the hour bell sounded, which it now did with a deep, dull, hollow, melancholy One. Light flashed up in the room in an instant, and the curtains of his bed were drawn.

The curtains of his bed were drawn aside, I tell you, by a hand. Not the curtains at his feet, nor the curtains at his back, but those to which he was looking at. The curtains of his bed were drawn aside; and Scrooge, sitting up, found himself face to face with the unearthly visitor who drew them: as close to it as I am now to you, and I am standing in the spirit at your elbow.

It was a strange figure—like a child: yet not so like a child as like an old man, viewed through some supernatural medium, which gave him the appearance of having receded from the view, and being shrunk to a child's size. Its hair, which hung about its neck and down its back, was white as if with age; and yet the face had not a wrinkle in it, and the tenderest bloom was on the skin. The arms were very long and muscular; the hands the same, as if its hold were of uncommon strength. Its legs and feet, most delicately formed, were, like those upper limbs, bare. It wore a tunic¹¹ of the purest white, and round its waist was bound a shiny belt, the sheen of which was beautiful. It held a branch of fresh green holly in its hand; and, had its dress trimmed with summer flowers. But the strangest thing about it was, that from the crown of its head there sprung a bright clear jet of light which lit up the room. Under its arm was located the cap which was used to cover the light.

Even this, though, when Scrooge looked at the spirit with increasing steadiness, was not its strangest quality. For as its belt sparkled and glittered first in one part and then in another, and what was light one instant, at another time was dark, so the figure itself changed in appearance: being now a thing with one arm, now with one leg, now with twenty legs, now a pair of legs without a head, now a head without a body. And in the very wonder of this, it would be itself again; sharp and clear as ever.

"Are you the Spirit, sir, whose coming was foretold to me?" asked Scrooge.

"I am."

The voice was soft and gentle. Very low, as if instead of being so close beside him, it were at a distance.

"Who, and what are you?" Scrooge demanded.

"I am the Ghost of Christmas Past."

"Long Past?" inquired Scrooge: sizing up its dwarfish stature.

"No. Your past."

Perhaps, Scrooge could not have told anybody why, if anybody could have asked him; but he had a special desire to see the Spirit in his cap; and begged him to be covered.

¹¹ Long, pullover shirt or blouse.

"What!" exclaimed the Ghost, "Would you put out with your hands, the good light I give? Is it not enough that you are one of those people whose actions in life made this cap, and force me to travel through years covering my head!"

Scrooge respectfully apologized and said he never intended to offend the Spirit at any point of his life. He then boldly asked what business brought him there.

"Your welfare," said the Ghost.

Scrooge expressed his gratitude, but could not help thinking that a night of unbroken rest would have been more helpful to his own welfare. The Spirit must have heard him thinking, for it said immediately:

"Your recovery, then. Listen to me."

It put out its strong hand as it spoke, and clasped him gently by the arm.

"Rise. And walk with me."

It would have been in vain for Scrooge to plead that the weather and the hour were not good to go for a walk; that bed was warm, and the thermometer a long way below freezing; that he was clad but lightly in his slippers, dressing-gown, and nightcap; and that he had been suffering from a cold. The grasp, though gentle as a woman's hand, was not to be resisted. He rose: but finding that the Spirit made towards the window, clasped his robe.

"I am mortal," Scrooge stammered, "and liable to fall."

"Bear but a touch of my hand there," said the Spirit, laying it upon his heart, "and you shall be free of your flesh."

As the words were spoken, they passed through the wall, and stood upon an open country road, with fields on either hand. The city had entirely vanished. Not a trace of it was to be seen. The darkness and the mist had vanished with it, for it was a clear, cold, winter day, with snow upon the ground.

"Good Heaven!" said Scrooge, clasping his hands together, as he looked about him. "I was born in this place. I was a boy here."

The Spirit gazed upon him quietly. Its gentle touch, though it had been light and instantaneous, still appeared present to the old man's sense of feeling. He was conscious of a thousand odors floating in the air, each one connected with a thousand thoughts, and hopes, and joys, and cares long, long, forgotten.

"Your lip is trembling," said the Ghost. "And what is that upon your cheek?"

Scrooge muttered, with an unusual catching in his voice, that it was a pimple; and begged the Ghost to lead him where he would.

"You remember the way?" inquired the Spirit.

"Remember it!" cried Scrooge with energy--"I could walk it blindfold."

"Strange to have forgotten it for so many years," observed the Ghost. "Let us go on."

They walked along the road, Scrooge recognizing every gate, and post, and tree; until a little market-town appeared in the distance, with its bridge, its church, and winding river. Some shaggy ponies now were seen trotting towards them with boys upon their backs, who called to other boys in country gigs¹² and carts, driven by farmers. All these boys were in great spirits, and shouted to each other, until the broad fields were so full of merry music, that the crisp air laughed to hear it.

"These are but shadows of the things that have been," said the Ghost. "They have no consciousness of us."

The cheerful travellers came on; Scrooge knew and named every one of them. Why was he happy to see them? Why did his cold eye glisten, and his heart leap up as they went past? Why was he filled with gladness when he heard them each say Merry Christmas as they parted at cross-roads and-bye ways, for their several homes? What was merry Christmas to Scrooge? Out upon merry Christmas! What good had it ever done to him?

"The school is not quite deserted," said the Ghost. "A lonely child, neglected by his friends, is left there still."

Scrooge said he knew it and he sobbed.

They left the high-road, taking a well-remembered lane and soon approached a mansion of dull red brick, with a little cupola on the roof and a bell hanging in it. It was a large house, but one of broken dreams; for the spacious offices were little used, their walls were damp and mossy, their windows broken, and their gates decayed. Birds clucked and strutted in the stables; and the coach-houses and sheds were over-run with grass. Nor did it remain in its original state inside, for entering the dreary hall, and glancing through the open doors of many rooms, they found them poorly furnished, cold, and vast. There was a dusty smell in the air, a chilly bareness in the place which associated itself somehow with too much getting up by candle-light and not too much to eat.

They went, the Ghost and Scrooge, across the hall, to a door at the back of the house. It opened before them, and revealed a long, bare, melancholy room, made barer still by simple chairs and desks. At one of these a lonely boy was reading near a small fire; and Scrooge sat down upon a chair, and wept to see his poor forgotten self as he used to be.

Not a quiet echo in the house, not a squeak and scuffle from the mice behind the paneling, not a drip from the half-thawed water-spout in the dull yard behind, not a sigh among the leafless branches of one despondent poplar¹³, not the idle swinging of an empty store-house door, not a clicking in the fire, none of these affected the heart of Scrooge more and allowed him to shed tears more easily.

The Spirit touched him on the arm, and pointed to his younger self, intent upon his reading. Suddenly a man, in foreign garments: wonderfully real and distinct to look at: stood outside the window, with an ax stuck in his belt, and leading by the bridle a mule laden with wood.

"Why, it's Ali Baba!" Scrooge exclaimed in ecstasy. "It's dear old honest Ali Baba. Yes, yes, I know. One Christmas time, when the child was left here all alone, he did come, for the first time, just like that. Poor boy. And Valentine," said Scrooge, "and his wild brother, Orson; there they go. And what's his name, who was put down in his undergarments, asleep, at the Gate of Damascus; don't you see him? And the Sultan's

¹² A two wheeled, one horse carriage.

¹³ A species of tree

Groom turned upside down by the Genii; there he is upon his head. Serve him right. I'm glad of it. What business had he to be married to the Princess."

To hear Scrooge using all the intensity of his intellect on such subjects, in a most extraordinary voice between laughing and crying; and to see his heightened and excited face; would have been a surprise to his business friends in the city, indeed.

"There's the Parrot." cried Scrooge. "Green body and yellow tail, with a thing like a lettuce growing out of the top of his head; there he is! Poor Robin Crusoe, he called him, when he came home again after sailing round the island. Poor Robin Crusoe, where have you been, Robin Crusoe? The man thought he was dreaming, but he wasn't. It was the Parrot, you know. There goes Friday, running for his life to the little creek! Halloo! Hoop! Hallo!"

Then, with an unusual change of emotion, he said, in pity for his former self, "Poor boy!" and cried again.

"I wish," Scrooge muttered, putting his hand in his pocket, and looking about him, after drying his eyes with his cuff: "but it's too late now."

"What is the matter?" asked the Spirit.

"Nothing," said Scrooge. "Nothing. There was a boy singing a Christmas Carol at my door last night. I should like to have given him something: that's all."

The Ghost smiled thoughtfully, and waved its hand: saying as it did so, "Let us see another Christmas!"

Scrooge's former self grew larger at the words, and the room became a little darker and more dirty. The panels shrunk, the windows cracked; fragments of plaster fell out of the ceiling; but how all this was brought about, Scrooge knew no more than you do. He only knew that it was quite correct; that everything had happened just the way he now saw it. There he was, alone again, when all the other boys had gone home for the jolly holidays.

He was not reading now, but walking up and down despairingly. Scrooge looked at the Ghost, and with a mournful shaking of his head, glanced anxiously towards the door.

It opened and a little girl, much younger than the boy, came darting in, and putting her arms about his neck, and often kissing him, addressed him as her "Dear, dear brother."

"I have come to bring you home, dear brother!" said the child, clapping her tiny hands, and bending down to laugh. "To bring you home, home, home!"

"Home, little Fan?" returned the boy.

"Yes!" said the child, happy with glee. "Home, for good and all. Home, for ever and ever. Father is so much kinder than he used to be. Home's like Heaven now! He spoke so gently to me one dear night when I was going to bed that I was not afraid to ask him once more if you might come home and he said, "Yes, you should." He sent me in a coach to bring you. And you're to be a man!" said the child, opening her eyes, "and are never to come back here! But first, we're to be together all the Christmas long, and have the merriest time in all the world."

"You are quite a woman, little Fan!" exclaimed the boy.

She clapped her hands and laughed, and tried to touch his head; but being too little, laughed again, and stood on tiptoe to embrace him. Then she began to drag him, in her childish eagerness, towards the door; and he, wanting to go, accompanied her.

A terrible voice in the hall cried. "Bring down Master Scrooge's box, there!" And in the hall appeared the schoolmaster himself, who glared at Master Scrooge with disfavor, and threw him into a dreadful state of mind by shaking hands with him. He then took him and his sister into the old library where the maps upon the wall, and the celestial and terrestrial globes in the windows, were sticky with cold. Here he produced a bottle of curiously light wine, and a block of curiously heavy cake, and gave them to the young people. At the same time, he sent out a servant to offer a glass of "something" to the mailboy, who answered that he thanked the gentleman.

"Always a delicate creature, that girl," said the Ghost. "But she had a large heart!"

"So she had," cried Scrooge. "You're right. God forbid!"

"She died a woman," said the Ghost, "and had, as I think, children."

"One child," Scrooge returned.

"True," said the Ghost. "Your nephew!"

Scrooge seemed uneasy in his mind; and answered briefly, "Yes."

They left the school behind them, they were now in the busy streets of a city, where shadowy passengers passed and repassed; where shadowy carts and coaches battle for the way, and all the strife¹⁴ and clamor of a real city were. It was made plain enough, by the decorations of the shops, that here too it was Christmas time again; but it was evening, and the streets were lighted up.

The Ghost stopped at a certain warehouse door, and asked Scrooge if he knew it.

"Know it!" said Scrooge. "I learned my job here?"

They went in. At sight of an old gentleman in a Welsh wig, sitting behind such a high desk, that if he had been two inches taller he must have knocked his head against the ceiling, Scrooge cried in great excitement:

"Why, it's old Fezziwig! Bless his heart; it's Fezziwig alive again!"

Old Fezziwig laid down his pen, and looked up at the clock, which pointed to the hour of seven. He rubbed his hands; adjusted his huge waistcoat; laughed all over himself, and called out in a comfortable, oily, rich, fat, jovial voice:

"Yo ho, there! Ebenezer! Richard!"

Scrooge's former self, now grown a young man, came briskly in, accompanied by his fellow-worker.

¹⁴ bitter conflict; commotion

"Richard Wilkins, to be sure," said Scrooge to the Ghost. "Bless me, yes. There he is. Richard was very much attached to me. Richard. Dear, dear."

"Yo ho, my boys!" said Fezziwig. "No more work to-night. Christmas Eve, Richard. Christmas, Ebenezer. Let's have the shutters up," cried old Fezziwig, with a sharp clap of his hands, "before a man can say Jack Robinson."

You wouldn't believe how those two fellows went at it. They charged into the street with the shutters—one, two, three—had them up in their places—four, five, six—barred them and pinned then—seven, eight, nine—and came back before you could have got to twelve, panting like race-horses.

"Hilli-ho!" cried old Fezziwig, skipping down from the high desk, with wonderful agility. "Clear away, my lads, and let's have lots of room here. Hilli-ho, Richard! Chirrup, Ebenezer."

Clear away! There was nothing they wouldn't have cleared away, or couldn't have cleared away, with old Fezziwig looking on. It was done in a minute. Every movable was packed off, as if it were dismissed from public life for evermore; the floor was swept and watered, the lamps were trimmed, fuel was heaped upon the fire; and the warehouse was as snug, and warm, and dry, and bright a party-room, as you would desire to see upon a winter's night.

In came a fiddler with a music-book, and went up to the lofty desk, and made an orchestra of it. In came Mrs Fezziwig, one vast big smile. In came the three Miss Fezziwigs, beaming and lovable. In came the six young followers whose hearts they broke. In came all the young men and women employed in the business. In came the housemaid, with her cousin, the baker. In came the cook, with her brother's particular friend, the milkman. In came the boy from over the way. In they all came, one after another; some shyly, some boldly, some gracefully, some awkwardly, some pushing, some pulling; in they all came, anyhow and everyhow. Everyone danced this way and that until several couples tangled on the floor. When this result was brought about, old Fezziwig, clapping his hands to stop the dance, cried out, "Well done!" and the fiddler plunged his hot face into a pot of ale, especially provided for that purpose. But resisting rest, he instantly began again, though there were no dancers yet, as if the other fiddler had been carried home, exhausted, on a shutter, and he were a brand-new man resolved to beat him out of sight, or perish.

There were more dances, and more dances, and there was cake, and there was a great piece of Cold Roast, and there was a great piece of Cold Boiled, and there were mince-pies, and plenty of beer. But the great effect of the evening came after the Roast and Boiled, when the fiddler struck up "Sir Roger de Coverley." Then old Fezziwig stood out to dance with Mrs Fezziwig and all the couples joined in.

But if there had been twice as many—ah, four times— as many couples, old Fezziwig would have been a match for them, and so would Mrs Fezziwig. As to *her*, she was worthy to be his partner in every sense of the term. If that's not high praise, tell me higher, and I'll use it. A positive light appeared to issue from Fezziwig's calves. They shone in every part of the dance like moons. You couldn't have predicted, at any given time, what would have become of them next. And when old Fezziwig and Mrs Fezziwig had gone all through the dance; advance and retire, both hands to your partner, bow and curtsy, corkscrew, thread-the-needle, and back again to your place.

When the clock struck eleven, this domestic ball broke up. Mr and Mrs Fezziwig took their places, one on either side of the door, and shaking hands with every person individually as he or she went out, wished him or her a Merry Christmas.

During the whole of this time, Scrooge had acted like a man out of his mind. His heart and soul were in the scene, and with his former self. He remembered everything, enjoyed everything, and underwent the strangest disturbance. It was not until now, when the bright faces of his former self and Richard were turned from them, that he remembered the Ghost, and became aware that it was looking full upon him, while the light upon its head burnt very clear.

"A small matter," said the Ghost, "to make these silly folks so full of gratitude."

"Small!" echoed Scrooge.

The Spirit signaled to him to listen to the two apprentices who were pouring out their hearts in praise of Fezziwig. Then he said, "Why is it not small? He has spent only a few pounds¹⁵ of your mortal money: three or four perhaps. Is that so much money that he deserves to be thanked for this party?"

"It isn't that," said Scrooge, angry by the remark and speaking unconsciously like he did when he was a young man. "It isn't that, Spirit. He has the power to make us happy or unhappy; to make our work easy or hard; a pleasure or work. The happiness he gives, is quite as great as if it cost a fortune."

Scrooge felt the Spirit's glance and stopped.

"What is the matter?" asked the Ghost.

"Nothing in particular," said Scrooge.

"Something, I think?" the Ghost insisted.

"No," said Scrooge, "No. I should like to be able to say a word or two to my clerk just now! That's all."

His former self turned down the lamps as he gave sounds to the wish; and Scrooge and the Ghost again stood side by side in the open air.

"My time grows short," observed the Spirit. "Quick!"

This was not addressed to Scrooge, or to any one whom Scrooge could see, but it produced an immediate effect. For again Scrooge saw himself. He was older now; a man in the prime of life. His face had not the harsh and rigid lines of later years; but it had begun to wear the signs of care and greed. There was an eager, greedy, restless motion in his eyes, which showed the seeds of greed that had begun to grow within him.

He was not alone, but sat by the side of a fair young girl in a mourning-dress: who was crying.

"It matters little to you, Ebenezer," she said, softly, "very little. Another idol has replaced me and if it can cheer and comfort you in times to come, as I would try to do, I have no reason to be upset."

"What Idol has replaced you?" he asked.

"A golden one."

¹⁵ British money much like United States dollars

"This is the way the world works!" he said. "There is nothing so hard as poverty; and there is nothing greater than the pursuit of wealth!"

"You fear the world too much," she answered, gently. "All your other hopes have merged into the hope of being beyond any harm the world can cause you. I have seen your better dreams fall off one by one, until the master-passion, Greed, takes control of you. Have I not?"

"What then?" he retorted. "Even if I have grown so much wiser, what then? I am not changed towards you. I still feel the same."

She shook her head.

"I'm not?"

"The times have changed since we first came together," she said. "Once we were both poor and happy to be so, until, in better times, we could improve our situation by our hard work. You *are* changed now. But when we first met, you were different."

"I was a boy," he said impatiently.

"Your own feeling tells you that you have changed," she returned. "Once we were together, but now we are apart. How often and how much I have thought of this, I will not say. It is enough that I *have* thought of it, and can say 'good-bye' to you."

"Have I ever sought release?"

"In words? No. Never."

"In what, then?"

"In a changed personality; in a different spirit; in another atmosphere of life; your goals are different. What you want is not what I want," said the girl, looking mildly, but with steadiness, upon him; "tell me, would you seek me out and try to win me now? Ah, no!"

He seemed to stop and realize her reasoning was correct, in spite of himself. But he said with a struggle, "You think I would not try to win you now?"

"I would gladly think otherwise if I could," she answered, "Heaven knows. When *I* have learned a Truth like this, I know how strong and irresistible it must be. But if you were free to-day, to-morrow, yesterday, I can't believe that you would choose a poor girl—you weigh everything by money. I must let you go for you are not the man I once loved."

He was about to speak, but with her head turned from him, she resumed. "May you be happy in the life you have chosen." She left him and they parted.

"Spirit!" said Scrooge, "show me no more! Take me home. Why do you delight to torture me?"

"One shadow more!" exclaimed the Ghost.

"No more!" cried Scrooge! "No more, I don't wish to see it! Show me no more!"

But the relentless Ghost took him in both his arms, and forced him to observe what happened next.

They were in another scene and place; a room, not very large or handsome, but full of comfort. Near to the winter fire sat a beautiful young girl, so much like that last girl that Scrooge believed it was the same time period, until he saw *her*, now she was an older, pleasant looking mother, sitting opposite her daughter. The noise in this room was perfectly chaotic, for there were more children there than Scrooge in his agitated state of mind could count. The room was loud; but no one seemed to care; on the contrary, the mother and daughter laughed heartily and enjoyed it very much.

But now a knocking at the door was heard, and such a rush immediately ensued that she with laughing face and plundered dress was taken towards the door, just in time to greet the father, who came home with by a man carrying Christmas toys and presents. Then the shouting and the struggling, and the onslaught began on the defenseless porter¹⁶. Each package received shouts of wonder, delight, joy, gratitude, and ecstasy. They are all indescribable alike. And after a time, each child made their way up the stairs to their bed and went and slept.

And now Scrooge looked on more attentively than ever, when the master of the house, having his daughter leaning fondly on him, sat down with her and her mother at his own fireside; his sight grew very dim indeed.

"Belle," said the husband, turning to his wife with a smile, "I saw an old friend of yours this afternoon."

"Who was it?"

"Guess!"

"How can I? Tut, don't I know," she added in the same breath, laughing as he laughed. "Mr. Scrooge?"

"Mr. Scrooge it was. I passed his office window; and as it was not shut up, and he had a candle inside, I could not help seeing him. His partner, Marley, lies upon the point of death, I hear; and there Scrooge sat alone. Quite alone in the world, I do believe."

"Spirit!" said Scrooge in a broken voice, "remove me from this place."

"I told you these were shadows of the things that have been," said the Ghost. "They are what they are, do not blame me!"

"Remove me!" Scrooge exclaimed, "I cannot bear it!"

He turned upon the Ghost, and seeing that it looked upon him with a face, in which in some strange way there were fragments of all the faces it had shown him, wrestled with it.

"Leave me! Take me back. Haunt me no longer!"

¹⁶ A man who handles packages or luggage.

In the struggle to leave the Ghost, Scrooge observed that its light was burning high and bright; and dimly connecting the brightness with the Ghost's influence over him, Scrooge seized the extinguisher-cap, and by a sudden action pressed it down upon its head.

The Spirit dropped beneath the cape, so that the extinguisher covered its whole form; but though Scrooge pressed it down with all his force, he could not hide the light, which streamed from under it, in an unbroken flood upon the ground.

Scrooge was conscious of being exhausted, and overcome by an irresistible drowsiness; and further, he now found himself in his own bedroom. He gave the cap a parting squeeze, in which his hand relaxed; and had barely time to reel to bed, before he sank into a heavy sleep.

Part Three. **The Second of the Three Spirits.**

Awaking in the middle of a loud snore, and sitting up in bed to get his thoughts together, Scrooge had no reason to be told that the bell was again upon the stroke of One. He felt that he was restored to consciousness just in time for the especial purpose of holding a conference with the second messenger sent to him through Jacob Marley's intervention. But, finding that he turned uncomfortably cold when he began to wonder which of his curtains this new spectre would draw back, he opened all of them. Lying down again, he established a sharp look-out all round the bed. For, he wished to challenge the Spirit on the moment of its appearance, and did not wish to be taken by surprise and made nervous.

Without exaggerating for Scrooge, I don't mind asking you to believe that he was ready for a good many of strange appearances, and that nothing between a baby and rhinoceros would have astonished him very much.

Now, being prepared for almost anything, he was not by any means prepared for nothing; and, as a result, when the bell struck one and no shape appeared, he was taken with a violent fit of trembling. Five minutes, ten minutes, a quarter of an hour went by, yet nothing came. All this time, he lay upon his bed, when a blaze of light struck him when the clock sounded the hour. Now, being only light, it was more alarming than a dozen ghosts, as Scrooge was powerless to make out what it meant; and was sometimes worried that he might become an interesting case of spontaneous combustion. At last, however, he began to think. He began to think that the source and secret of this ghostly light might be in the next room, from where, it seemed to emerge. After thinking about it, he got up softly and shuffled in his slippers to the door.

The moment Scrooge's hand was on the lock, a strange voice called him by his name, and requested him to enter. He obeyed.

It was his own room. There was no doubt about that. But it had undergone a surprising transformation. The walls and ceiling were covered with vines; from every part of which, bright gleaming berries glistened. The crisp leaves of holly, mistletoe, and ivy reflected back the light, as if so many little mirrors had been scattered there; and such a mighty blaze went roaring up the chimney. Heaped up on the floor, to form a kind of throne, were turkeys, geese, game, poultry, brawn, great joints of meat, pigs, long wreaths of sausages, mince-pies, plum-puddings, barrels of oysters, red-hot chestnuts, cherry-cheeked apples, juicy oranges, luscious pears, immense twelfth-cakes, and bowls of punch, that made the chamber dim with their delicious steam. Sitting at ease on the couch was a jolly Giant, glorious to see; who held a glowing torch, in shape of a horn, and held it up, high up, to shed its light on Scrooge, as he came round the door.

"Come in!" exclaimed the Ghost. "Come in, and learn who I am."

Scrooge entered timidly, and hung his head before this Spirit. He was not the strong-willed Scrooge he had been; and though the Spirit's eyes were clear and kind, he did not like to look at them.

"I am the Ghost of Christmas Present," said the Spirit. "Look upon me."

Scrooge reverently did so. It was clothed in one simple green robe, or mantle, bordered with white fur. This garment hung so loosely on the figure, that its sizeable chest was bare. Its feet, observable beneath the ample folds of the garment, were also bare; and on its head it wore no other covering than a holly wreath, set here and there with shining icicles. Its dark brown curls were long and free; free as its friendly face, its

sparkling eye, its open hand, its cheery voice, its free manner, and its joyful air. Wrapped round its middle was an antique scabbard¹⁷; but no sword was in it, and the ancient sheath was eaten up with rust.

"You have never seen the like of me before!" exclaimed the Spirit.

"Never," Scrooge made answer to it.

"Have never walked forth with the younger members of my family; meaning (for I am very young) my elder brothers born in these later years?" pursued the Phantom.

"I don't think I have," said Scrooge. "I am afraid I have not. Have you had many brothers, Spirit?"

"More than eighteen hundred," said the Ghost.

"A tremendous family to provide for," muttered Scrooge.

The Ghost of Christmas Present rose.

"Spirit," said Scrooge obediently, "take me where you want. I went out last night against my will, and I learned a lesson which is working now. To-night, if you have something to teach me, let me learn by it."

"Touch my robe."

Scrooge did as he was told, and held it fast.

Holly, mistletoe, red berries, ivy, turkeys, geese, game, poultry, brawn, meat, pigs, sausages, oysters, pies, puddings, fruit, and punch, all vanished instantly. So did the room, the fire, the ruddy glow, the hour of night, and they stood in the city streets on Christmas morning, where (for the weather was severe) the people made a rough, but brisk and not unpleasant kind of music, in scraping the snow from the pavement in front of their dwellings, and from the tops of their houses, where it was mad delight to the boys to see it come hurtling down into the road below, and splitting into artificial little snow-storms.

The house fronts looked black enough, and the windows blacker, contrasting with the smooth white sheet of snow upon the roofs, and with the dirtier snow upon the ground that had been ploughed up in deep furrows¹⁸ by the heavy wheels of carts and wagons. The sky was gloomy, and the shortest streets were choked up with a dingy mist, half thawed, half frozen, whose heavier particles descended in shower of sooty¹⁹ atoms, as if all the chimneys in Great Britain had, by one person's consent, caught fire, and were blazing away to their dear hearts' content. There was nothing very cheerful in the climate or the town, and yet was there an air of cheerfulness about that the clearest summer air and brightest summer sun might have tried to scatter in vain.

For the people who were shovelling snow away on the housetops were jovial and full of glee; calling out to one another from the parapets²⁰, and now and then throwing a snowball at each other. The butchers' shops were still half open, and the grocers' were radiant in their glory. There were great, round, pot-bellied baskets of chestnuts, shaped like the waistcoats of jolly old gentlemen, hanging loosely at the doors, and tumbling out into the street. There were pears and apples, clustered high in blooming pyramids; there were

¹⁷ A case for holding a sword, usually attached to a belt around the waist.

¹⁸ A narrow groove in the ground usually made by plowing.

¹⁹ Small black particles of carbon that come from burning firewood.

²⁰ A wall or barrier at the edge of a roof.

bunches of grapes, made, in the shopkeepers' generosity to dangle from hooks, that people's mouths might water as they passed; there were piles of hazel nuts, mossy and brown, recalling, in their fragrance, ancient walks among the woods, and pleasant walks ankle deep through withered leaves; there were the yellow of the juicy oranges and lemons, urgently begging to be carried home in paper bags and eaten after dinner.

The Grocers! oh the Grocers! Nearly closed, with perhaps two shutters down, or one; but through those gaps such glimpses. It was not the sound of the scales on their counters, or that the cans were rattled up and down like juggling tricks, or even that the blended scents of tea and coffee smelled so pleasing, or even that the raisins were so plentiful and rare, the almonds so extremely white, the sticks of cinnamon so long and straight, the other spices so delicious, the candied fruits so caked and spotted with melted sugar as to make the coldest lookers-on feel faint and irritable. Nor was it that the figs were moist and pulpy, or that the French plums blushed in modest tartness from their highly-decorated boxes, or that everything was good to eat and in its Christmas dress; but the customers were all so hurried and so eager in the hopeful promise of the day, that they tumbled up against each other at the door, clashing their wicker baskets wildly, and left their purchases upon the counter, and came running back to fetch them, and committed hundreds of the same mistakes, in the best humour possible.

But soon the bells rang calling all good people to church and chapel. Away they came, flocking through the streets in their best clothes and with their happy faces. And at the same time, mobs appeared from side streets, lanes, and nameless turnings, innumerable people, carrying their dinners to the bakers' shops. The sight of these poor merry-makers appeared to interest the Spirit very much, for he stood with Scrooge beside him in a baker's doorway, and taking off the covers of the food as the people passed, the Ghost sprinkled incense on their dinners from his torch. And it was a very uncommon kind of torch, for once or twice when there were angry words between some dinner-carriers who had bumped each other, he shed a few drops of water on them from it, and their good humour returned. For they said, it was a shame to argue upon Christmas Day. And so it was.

In time the bells ceased, and the bakers closed their shops.

"Is there a peculiar flavour in what you sprinkle from your torch?" asked Scrooge.

"There is. My own."

"Would it apply to any kind of dinner on this day?" asked Scrooge.

"To any kindly given. To a poor one most."

"Why to a poor one most?" asked Scrooge.

"Because it needs it most."

"Spirit," said Scrooge, after a moment's thought, "I wonder why you, of all the beings in the many worlds about us, should desire to get in the way of these people's opportunities of innocent enjoyment."

"I!" cried the Spirit.

"You would deprive them of their means of dining every seventh day, often the only day on which they can be said to dine at all," said Scrooge. "Wouldn't you?"

"I!" cried the Spirit.

"You seek to close these places on the Seventh Day," said Scrooge. "And it comes to the same thing."

"I seek!" exclaimed the Spirit.

"Forgive me if I am wrong. It has been done in your name, or at least in that of your family," said Scrooge.

"There are some upon this earth of yours," returned the Spirit, "who lay claim to know us, and who do their deeds of passion, pride, ill-will, hatred, envy, bigotry, and selfishness in our name, who are as strange to us and all our kind, as if they had never lived. Remember that, and lay the blame of their doings on themselves, not us."

Scrooge promised that he would; and they went on, invisible, as they had been before, into the suburbs of the town. It was a remarkable quality of the Ghost (which Scrooge had observed at the baker's), despite his gigantic size that he could bring himself to any place with ease.

And perhaps it was the pleasure the good Spirit had in showing off this power of his, or else it was his own kind, generous, hearty nature, and his sympathy with all poor men, that led him straight to Scrooge's clerk's; for there he went, and took Scrooge with him, holding to his robe. And on the threshold of the door the Spirit smiled, and stopped to bless Bob Cratchit's dwelling with the sprinkling of his torch. Think of that. Bob had but fifteen bob²¹ a-week himself he pocketed on Saturdays; and yet the Ghost of Christmas Present blessed his four-roomed house.

Then up rose Mrs. Cratchit, Mr. Cratchit's wife, dressed in an old gown, but decorated in ribbons, which are cheap and colorful; and she laid the tablecloth, assisted by Belinda Cratchit, second of her daughters, also wearing ribbons. The oldest son Peter Cratchit plunged a fork into the saucepan of potatoes, and getting the corners of his monstrous shirt collar into his mouth. He rejoiced to find himself so well dressed, and wanted to show off his clothes to the world. And now two smaller Cratchits, boy and girl, came running in, screaming that outside the baker's they had smelt the goose, and it was theirs; and basking in luxurious thoughts of sage and onion, these young Cratchits danced about the table and cheered while Peter Cratchit (not proud, although his collars nearly choked him) blew on the fire, until the slow potatoes bubbling up, knocked loudly at the saucepan-lid to be let out and peeled.

"Where is your precious father?" said Mrs Cratchit. "And your brother, Tiny Tim; And Martha wasn't this late last Christmas Day by half-an-hour."

"Here's Martha, mother," said a girl, appearing as she spoke.

"Here's Martha, mother!" cried the two young Cratchits. "Hurrah! There's such a goose, Martha!"

"Why, bless your heart alive, my dear, you are late!" said Mrs Cratchit, kissing her a dozen times, and taking off her shawl and bonnet for her with enthusiasm.

"We'd a deal of work to finish up last night," replied the girl, "and had to clean up this morning, mother."

"Well. Never mind so long as you are here," said Mrs Cratchit. "You sit down before the fire, my dear."

²¹ A denomination or type of money.

"No, no. There's father coming," cried the two young Cratchits, who were everywhere at once. "Hide, Martha, hide!"

So Martha hid herself, and in came little Bob, the father, with at least three feet of comforter wrapped around him; and his threadbare clothes; and Tiny Tim upon his shoulder. Unfortunately, for Tiny Tim, he carried a little crutch, and had his limbs supported by an iron frame.

"Why, where's our Martha?" cried Bob Cratchit, looking round.

"Not coming," said Mrs Cratchit.

"Not coming!" said Bob, with a sudden drop in his high spirits. "Not coming upon Christmas Day?"

Martha didn't like to see him disappointed, even if it were only a joke; so she came out prematurely from behind the closet door, and ran into his arms, while the two young Cratchits quietly hustled Tiny Tim into the wash-house, that he might hear the pudding boiling in the copper pot.

"And how did little Tim behave?" asked Mrs Cratchit, when she saw Bob's spirits lifted, and Bob had hugged his daughter to his heart's content.

"As good as gold," said Bob, "and better. Somehow he gets thoughtful sitting by himself so much, and thinks the strangest things you ever heard. He told me, coming home, that he hoped the people saw him in the church, because he was a cripple, and it might be pleasant to them to remember upon Christmas Day, who made lame beggars walk and blind men see."

Bob's voice was shaky when he told them this and trembled more when he said that Tiny Tim was growing strong and hearty.

His active little crutch was heard upon the floor and back came Tiny Tim before another word was spoken, escorted by his brother and sister to his stool before the fire; and while Bob, turning up his cuffs—as if, poor fellow, they were capable of being made more shabby—mixed some hot mixture in a jug with gin and lemons, and stirred it round and round and put it on the stove to simmer. Master Peter, and the two ever-present young Cratchits went to fetch the goose and soon returned in high expectation.

There was such excitement that you might have thought a goose was a special bird. Mrs Cratchit made the gravy (ready beforehand in a little saucepan) hissing hot; Master Peter mashed the potatoes with incredible vigour; Miss Belinda sweetened up the apple-sauce; Martha dusted the hot plates; Bob took Tiny Tim beside him in a tiny corner at the table; the two young Cratchits set chairs for everybody, not forgetting themselves, and taking their seats, crammed spoons into their mouths, to keep from yelling for goose before their turn came to be helped. At last the dishes were set on the table, and grace was said. A quiet moment ensued, as Mrs Cratchit, looking slowly all along the carving-knife, prepared to plunge it in the goose, but when she did, and when the long expected gush of stuffing poured out, everyone cried, Hurrah!

There never was such a goose. Bob said he didn't believe there ever was such a goose cooked. Its tenderness and flavour, size and cheapness, were the themes that everyone enjoyed. Rounded out by apple-sauce and mashed potatoes, it was a sufficient dinner for the whole family. Indeed, as Mrs Cratchit said with great delight (surveying one small atom of a bone upon the dish), they had not eaten everything. Yet every one had had enough, and the youngest Cratchits in particular, were filled with food to the eyebrows. But now, the plates being cleared by Miss Belinda, Mrs Cratchit left the room alone to get the pudding and bring it in.

Suppose it should not be cooked enough? Suppose it should break in turning out? Suppose somebody should have got over the wall of the back-yard, and stolen it, while they were eating the goose—an idea at which the two young Cratchits became angry? All sorts of horrors were supposed.

Hallo! A great deal of steam! The pudding was out of the copper. In half a minute Mrs Cratchit entered—flushed, but smiling proudly—with the pudding.

Oh, a wonderful pudding! Bob Cratchit said, and calmly too, that he regarded it as the greatest success achieved by Mrs Cratchit since their marriage. Mrs Cratchit said that now the weight was off her mind, she would confess she had had her doubts about the quantity of flour. Everybody had something to say about it, but nobody said or thought it was at all a small pudding for a large family. It would have been flat wrong to do so. Any Cratchit would have been embarrassed to hint at such a thing.

At last the dinner was all done, the cloth was cleared, the hearth swept, and the fire made up. The mixture in the jug being tasted, and considered perfect, apples and oranges were put upon the table, and a shovel-full of chestnuts on the fire. Then all the Cratchit family drew round the hearth, in what Bob Cratchit called a circle, meaning half a one; and at Bob Cratchit's elbow stood the family display of glass. Two drinking glasses and a custard-cup without a handle.

These held the hot stuff from the jug as well as golden goblets²² would have done; and Bob served it out with joyful looks, while the chestnuts on the fire sputtered and cracked noisily. Then Bob proposed:

"A Merry Christmas to us all, my dears. God bless us."

Which all the family re-echoed.

"God bless us every one!" said Tiny Tim, the last of all.

Tiny Tim sat very close to his father's side upon his little stool. Bob held his withered little hand in his, as if he loved the child, and wished to keep him by his side, and dreaded that he might be taken from him.

"Spirit," said Scrooge, with an interest he had never felt before, "tell me if Tiny Tim will live."

"I see a vacant seat," replied the Ghost, "in the poor chimney-corner, and a crutch without an owner, carefully preserved. If these shadows remain unaltered by the Future, the child will die."

"No, no," said Scrooge. "Oh, no, kind Spirit. Say he will be spared."

"If these shadows remain unchanged by the Future, no other Spirit, will find him here," returned the Ghost. "As you said, if he is going to die, he had better do it, and decrease the surplus population."

Scrooge hung his head to hear his own words quoted by the Spirit, and was overcome with regret and grief.

"Ebenezer Scrooge," said the Ghost, "if you could set aside your petty ideas to see into the hearts of men and discover what makes someone valuable and what makes someone worthless, would you then decide

²² A large cup with a foot and stem.

what men shall live, what men shall die? It may be that in the sight of Heaven, you Ebenezer Scrooge are more worthless and less fit to live than millions like this poor man's child."

Scrooge bent before the Ghost's reprimand²³, and trembling cast his eyes upon the ground. But he raised them speedily, on hearing his own name.

"Mr Scrooge!" said Bob; "I'll give you Mr Scrooge, the Founder of the Feast!"

"The Founder of the Feast indeed!" cried Mrs Cratchit, reddening. "I wish I had him here. I'd give him a piece of my mind to feast upon, and I hope he'd have a good appetite for it."

"My dear," said Bob, "the children. Christmas Day."

"It should be Christmas Day, I am sure," said she, "on which one drinks to the health of such an evil, stinging, hard, unfeeling man as Mr. Scrooge. You know he is that way, Robert. Nobody knows it better than you do, you poor fellow."

"My dear," was Bob's mild answer, "Christmas Day."

"I'll drink his health for your sake and the Day's," said Mrs Cratchit, "not for his. Long life to him. A merry Christmas and a happy new year!—he'll be very merry and very happy, I have no doubt!"

The children drank the toast after her. It was the first time they all acted without happiness. Tiny Tim drank it last of all, but he didn't care for it. Scrooge was the Ogre of the family. The mention of his name cast a dark shadow on the party, which lasted for a full five minutes.

After it had passed away, they were ten times merrier than before, from the mere relief of "Scrooge the Sinister" being done with. Bob Cratchit told them how he had thought of a way for Master Peter, which would bring in, if obtained, full five-and-sixpence weekly. The two young Cratchits laughed tremendously at the idea of Peter's being a man of business; and Peter himself looked thoughtfully at the fire from between his collars, as if he were thinking what particular investments he should try when he received that large amount of money. Martha, who was a poor apprentice at a milliner's, then told them what kind of work she had to do, and how many hours she worked at a time, and how she meant to sleep in to-morrow morning for a good long rest; to-morrow being Christmas Day. All this time the chestnuts and the jug went round and round; and after a while they had a song about a lost child travelling in the snow, from Tiny Tim, who had a plain little voice, but sang it very well indeed.

There was no great talent in this. They were not a wealthy family; they were not well dressed; their shoes were far from being water-proof; their clothes were scanty; and Peter might have known, and very likely did, the inside of a pawnbroker's²⁴ shop. But, they were happy, grateful, pleased with one another, and satisfied with the time; and when they tired, and looked happier yet in the bright sprinklings of the Spirit's torch at parting, Scrooge watched them—especially Tiny Tim, until the last.

By this time it was getting dark and snowing pretty heavily; as Scrooge and the Spirit went along the streets, the brightness of the roaring fires in kitchens, parlours, and all sorts of rooms, was wonderful. Here, five places lit the interiors, showing preparations for a cosy dinner, with hot plates baking through and through before the fire, and deep red curtains, ready to be drawn to shut out cold and darkness. There all the

²³ To disapprove of strongly.

²⁴ A person who sells second-hand or used items.

children of the house were running out into the snow to meet their married sisters, brothers, cousins, uncles, aunts, and be the first to greet them. Scrooge saw the shadows on the window-blinds of guests inside homes; a group of handsome girls, all hooded and fur-booted, and all chattering at once, skipped lightly off to some near neighbour's house.

From the numbers of people on their way to a friendly gathering, you might have thought that no one was at home to welcome visitors. The Ghost gave blessings on all the homes with its palm open, and floated on. The man who lit the street lamps at dusk, who was dressed to spend the evening somewhere, laughed out loud as the Spirit passed.

And now, without a word of warning from the Ghost, they stood upon a bleak and desert wasteland, where monstrous masses of rude stone were laying about, as though it were the burial-place of giants; and water flowed from where it fell—or would have done so, but for the frost that held it prisoner; and nothing grew but moss and furze²⁵, and coarse smelly grass. Down in the west, the setting sun had left a streak of fiery red, which glared upon the desolation²⁶ for an instant, like a gloomy eye, frowning lower, lower, and lower until it was lost in the thick darkness of night.

"What place is this?" asked Scrooge.

"A place where Miners live, who labour in the bowels of the earth," returned the Spirit. "But they know me. See."

A light shone from the window of a hut, and swiftly they advanced towards it. Passing through the wall of mud and stone, they found a cheerful group assembled round a glowing fire. An old, old man and woman, with their children and their children's children, and another generation beyond that, all decked out merrily in their holiday clothes. The old man, in a voice that seldom rose above the howling of the wind upon the barren waste, was singing them a Christmas song—it had been a very old song when he was a boy—and from time to time they all joined in the chorus. So surely as they raised their voices, the old man got quite happy and loud; and so surely as they stopped, his energy sank again.

The Spirit did not wait here, but asked Scrooge to hold his robe, and passing on above the wasteland, sped on. Not to sea? To sea. To Scrooge's horror, looking back, he saw the last of the land, a frightful range of rocks, behind them; and his ears were deafened by the thundering of water, as it rolled and roared, and raged among the dreadful caverns it had worn and fiercely tried to undermine the earth.

Built upon a dismal reef of sunken rocks, some distance from shore, on which the waters eroded and dashed all year round, there stood a solitary lighthouse. Great heaps of sea-weed clung to its base, and storm-birds—carried by the wind, circled above.

But even here, two men who watched the light had made a fire that gave out a ray of brightness on the awful sea. Shaking hands over the rough table at which they sat, they wished each other Merry Christmas in their can of grog²⁷; and the older of the two, with his face all damaged and scarred with hard weather, struck up a sturdy song that was like a Gale in itself.

Again the Ghost sped on, above the black and heaving sea—on, on—until, being far away, as he told Scrooge, from any shore, they landed on a ship. They stood beside the helmsman at the wheel, the look-out in the bow, the officers who had the watch; dark, ghostly figures in their several stations; but every man

²⁵ A low, many-branched, spiny shrub having yellow flowers.

²⁶ Loneliness; devastation

²⁷ A mixture of alcoholic liquid and water.

among them hummed a Christmas tune, or had a Christmas thought, or spoke below his breath to his companion of some bygone Christmas Day, with homeward hopes belonging to it. And every man on board, waking or sleeping, good or bad, had had a kinder word for another on that day than on any day in the year; and had shared to some extent in its festivities; and had remembered those he cared for who lived far away and had known that they delighted to remember him.

It was a great surprise to Scrooge, while listening to the moaning of the wind, and thinking what a solemn thing it was to move on through the lonely darkness over an unknown abyss²⁸, whose depths were secrets as profound as Death: it was a great surprise to Scrooge, to hear a hearty laugh. It was a much greater surprise to Scrooge to recognize it as his own nephew's and to find himself in a bright, dry, gleaming room, with the Spirit standing, smiling by his side, and looking at that same nephew with approving friendliness.

"Ha, ha!" laughed Scrooge's nephew. "Ha, ha, ha!"

If you should happen, by any unlikely chance, to know a man with a greater laugh than Scrooge's nephew, all I can say is, I should like to know him too. Introduce him to me, and I'll become his friend.

It is a fair observation that while there is infection in disease and sorrow, there is nothing in the world so irresistibly contagious as laughter and good-humour. When Scrooge's nephew laughed in this way: holding his sides, rolling his head, and twisting his face into the most impossible positions: Scrooge's niece, by marriage, laughed as deeply as he did, and their friends joined in.

"Ha, ha! Ha, ha, ha, ha!"

"He honestly said that Christmas was a humbug!" cried Scrooge's nephew. "He believed it too."

"More shame for him, Fred." said Scrooge's niece, indignantly. Bless those women; they say what they think and don't hold anything back.

She was very pretty: exceedingly pretty. With a dimpled, surprised-looking face with a little mouth, that seemed made to be kissed—as no doubt it was; all kinds of good little dots about her chin, that melted into one another when she laughed; and the sunniest pair of eyes you ever saw in any little creature's head. Altogether she was what you would have called cute, you know; but satisfactory, too. Oh perfectly satisfactory!

"He's a comical old fellow," said Scrooge's nephew, "that's the truth, but not as nice as he might be. However, his attitudes towards others carry their own punishment, and I have nothing to say against him."

"I'm sure he is very rich, Fred," hinted Scrooge's niece. "At least you always tell me so."

"What of that, my dear?" said Scrooge's nephew. "His wealth is of no use to him. He doesn't do any good with it. He doesn't make himself comfortable with it. He hasn't the satisfaction of thinking that he is ever going to benefit us with it."

"I have no patience with him," observed Scrooge's niece. Scrooge's niece's sisters, and all the other ladies, expressed the same opinion.

²⁸ A deep and vast chasm, gap, or break

"Oh, I have patience," said Scrooge's nephew. "I feel sorry for him; I couldn't be angry with him if I tried. Who suffers by his actions? Himself, always. He takes it into his head to dislike us, and he won't come and dine with us. What's the consequence? He doesn't lose much of a dinner."

"Indeed, I think he loses a very good dinner," interrupted Scrooge's niece. Everybody else said the same, as they had just finished dinner; and, with the dessert upon the table, were clustered round the fire, by lamplight.

"Well. I'm very glad to hear it," said Scrooge's nephew, "because I haven't great faith in these young housekeepers. What do you say, Topper?"

Topper had clearly got his eye upon one of Scrooge's niece's sisters, for he answered that a single person was a difficult thing to be, who had no right to express an opinion about what the single ladies may or may not be doing. The plump girl Topper had his eye on blushed.

"Do go on, Fred," said Scrooge's niece, clapping her hands. "He never finishes what he begins to say. He is such a ridiculous fellow."

Scrooge's nephew laughed hard, and it was impossible to keep the infection off; though the plump sister tried hard to do it with great effort; but everyone started laughing again.

"I was only going to say," said Scrooge's nephew, "that the consequence of his taking a dislike to us, and not spending time with us, means that he loses some pleasant moments in his life, which could do him no harm. I am sure he never makes many friends because he spends so much time either in his mouldy old office or his dusty home. I mean to give him the same chance every year, whether he likes it or not, for I pity him. He may criticize Christmas till he dies, but he can't help thinking better of it—I will go to his office in a good mood, year after year, and say Uncle Scrooge, how are you. If it only forces him to give his poor clerk fifty pounds, that's something; and I think I unnerved him yesterday."

It was their turn to laugh now at the notion of his unnerving Scrooge. But being thoroughly good-natured, and not much caring what they laughed at, so long as they were laughing, Fred encouraged them in their merriment and passed the bottle joyously.

After tea they had some music. For they were a musical family, and knew what they were about; especially Topper, who could sing in the baritone, and never swell the large veins in his forehead, or get red in the face over it. Scrooge's niece played well upon the harp; and she played a tune which Scrooge's sister had liked. When this song played, all the things that the Ghost had shown Scrooge, came back to him. He softened more and more, and thought that if he could have listened to this tune often, years ago, he might have embraced the kindnesses of life for his own happiness with his own hands, without resorting to the greed that buried Jacob Marley.

The Ghost was greatly pleased to find Scrooge thinking about his past, and looked upon him with such favour, that Scrooge begged like a boy to be allowed to stay until the guests departed. But this the Spirit said could not be done.

"Here's a new game," said Scrooge. "One half hour, Spirit, only one."

It was a Game called Yes and No, where Scrooge's nephew had to think of something, and the rest must find out what it is; he only answering to their questions yes or no. The others fired questions, one upon another, until discovering that he was thinking of an animal, a live animal, rather a disagreeable animal, a

savage animal, an animal that growled and grunted sometimes, and talked sometimes, and lived in London, and walked about the streets, and wasn't popular, and wasn't led by anybody, and was never killed in a market, and was not a horse, or a mule, or a cow, or a bull, or a tiger, or a dog, or a pig, or a cat, or a bear. At every fresh question that was put to him, this nephew burst into a fresh roar of laughter; and was so tickled, that he was forced to get up off the sofa and stamp his feet. At last the plump sister, falling into a similar state, cried out:

"I have found it out! I know what it is, Fred! I know what it is!"

"What is it?" cried Fred.

"It's your Uncle Scrooge!"

Which it certainly was. Although some objected that the reply to "Is it a bear?" should have been "Yes."

"Scrooge has given us plenty to laugh about, I am sure," said Fred, "and it would be ungrateful not to drink to his health. I propose a toast, 'Uncle Scrooge!'"

"Well! Uncle Scrooge!" they cried.

"A Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year to the old man, whatever he is," said Scrooge's nephew. "He wouldn't take it from me, but may he have it, nevertheless. Uncle Scrooge!"

Uncle Scrooge had become so merry in the company of the gathering, that he would have given the group a toast in return, if the Ghost had given him time. But the whole scene disappeared in the breath of the last word spoken by his nephew; and he and the Spirit were again upon their travels.

They saw much, traveled far, and visited many homes, but always left with a happy end. The Spirit stood beside sick beds, and they were cheerful; on foreign lands, and they were close at home; by struggling men, and they were patient in their greater hope; by poverty, and it was rich. Anywhere a man in his little brief authority had not tried to keep the Spirit out, the Spirit left his blessing, and taught Scrooge his lesson.

It was a long night, if it were only a night; but Scrooge had his doubts of this, because the Christmas Holidays appeared to be reduced into the space of time they passed together. It was strange, too, that while Scrooge remained unchanged in his appearance, the Ghost grew older, clearly older. Scrooge had observed this change, but never spoke of it, until they left a children's Twelfth Night party, when, looking at the Spirit as they stood together in an open place, he noticed that its hair was grey.

"Are spirits' lives so short?" asked Scrooge.

"My life upon this globe, is very brief," replied the Ghost. "It ends to-night."

"To-night!" cried Scrooge.

"To-night at midnight. Hark! The time is drawing near."

The chimes were ringing the three quarters past eleven at that moment.

"Forgive me if I should not ask this," said Scrooge, looking intently at the Spirit's robe, "but I see something strange, and not belonging to yourself, sticking out from your skirts. Is it a foot or a claw?"

"It might be a claw, for the flesh there is upon it," was the Spirit's sorrowful reply. "Look here."

From the foldings of its robe, it brought out two children; pitiful, miserable, frightful, hideous, sad. They knelt down at its feet, and clung upon the outside of its garment.

"Oh, Man, look here! Look, look, down here!" exclaimed the Ghost.

They were a boy and a girl. Yellow, small, ragged, dark, wolfish; but exhausted, too, in their humbleness. Where graceful youth should have filled their features out and given them energy and shine, a stale and shriveled hand, twisted with age. Angels and devils had never seen anything in creation half so horrible.

Scrooge jumped back, appalled. Having them shown to him in this way, he tried to say they were fine children, but he couldn't get the words out.

"Spirit, are they yours?" Scrooge could say no more.

"They are Man's," said the Spirit, looking down upon them. "And they cling to me. This boy is Ignorance²⁹. This girl is Want. Beware of both of them, but most of all beware of the boy for he can only bring Doom," cried the Spirit, stretching out its hand towards the city. "To pretend not to know something or to seek not to know something will always be fatal, and you must suffer the consequences."

"Have they no place to stay?" cried Scrooge.

"Are there no prisons?" said the Spirit, turning on Scrooge for the last time using Scrooge's own words. "Are there no workhouses?"

The bell struck twelve.

Scrooge looked around him for the Ghost, but it was gone. As the last stroke ceased to vibrate, he remembered the prediction of old Jacob Marley, and lifting up his eyes, beheld a solemn³⁰ Phantom, draped and hooded, coming towards him, like a mist along the ground.

²⁹ Lack of knowledge.

³⁰ Gloomy; very serious

Part Four.
The Last of the Spirits.

The Phantom slowly, gravely, silently approached. When it came, Scrooge bent down upon his knee; for in the very air through which this Spirit moved it seemed to scatter gloom and mystery.

It was shrouded in a deep black cloak, which concealed its head, its face, its form, and left nothing of it visible except one outstretched hand. Except for this, it would have been difficult to see this figure in the night, and separate it from the darkness by which it was surrounded.

Scrooge felt that it was tall and dignified when it came beside him and that its mysterious presence filled him with a grave dread. He knew no more, for the Spirit neither spoke nor moved.

"I am in the presence of the Ghost of Christmas Yet To Come?" said Scrooge.

The Spirit answered not but pointed downward with its hand.

"You are about to show me shadows of the things that have not happened, but will happen in the time before us," Scrooge pursued. "Is that so, Spirit?"

The upper portion of the cloak was tightened for an instant in its folds, as if the Spirit had nodded its head. That was the only answer Scrooge received.

Although well used to ghostly company by this time, Scrooge feared the silent shape so much that his legs trembled beneath him, and he found that he could hardly stand when he prepared to follow it. The Spirit paused a moment, observing Scrooge's condition, and gave him time to recover.

But Scrooge was all the worse for this. It thrilled him with a vague uncertain horror, to know that behind the dusky shroud there were ghostly eyes intently looking upon him, while he, though he strained his own eyes to the utmost, could see nothing but a ghostly hand and one great heap of black.

"Ghost of the Future!" he exclaimed, "I fear you more than any spectre I have seen. But as I know your purpose is to do me good, and as I hope to live to be another man from what I was, I am prepared to go with you, and do it with a thankful heart. Will you not speak to me?"

The Spirit gave him no reply. The hand was pointed straight before them.

"Lead on," said Scrooge. "Lead on. The night is ending fast, and it is precious time to me, I know. Lead on, Spirit."

The Phantom moved away as silently as it had approached. Scrooge followed in the shadow of its dress, which lifted him up, he thought, and carried him along.

They scarcely seemed to enter the city; for the city rather seemed to spring up around them, and surround them of its own will. But there they were, in the heart of it; amongst the merchants; who hurried up and down, and the money clanged in their pockets, and they spoke in groups, and looked at their watches, and so forth, as Scrooge had seen them do often.

The Spirit stopped beside one little group of business men. Observing that the hand was pointed to them, Scrooge advanced to listen to their talk.

"No," said a great fat man with a monstrous chin, "I don't know much about it, either way. I only know he's dead."

"When did he die?" inquired another.

"Last night, I believe."

"Why, what was the matter with him?" asked a third, taking a vast quantity of snuff³¹ out of a very large snuff-box. "I thought he'd never die."

"God knows," said the first, with a yawn.

"What has he done with his money?" asked a red-faced gentleman with a large growth on the end of his nose.

"I haven't heard," said the man with the large chin, yawning again. "Left it to his company, perhaps. He hasn't left it to me. That's all I know."

This comment was received with a general laugh.

"It's likely to be a very cheap funeral," said the same speaker; "for upon my life I don't know of anybody who will go to it. Suppose we make up a party and volunteer to go?"

"I don't mind going if a lunch is provided," observed the gentleman with the growth on his nose. "But I must be fed, if I go."

Another laugh.

"Well, I am the most disinterested among you, after all," said the first speaker, "for I never wear black gloves, and I never eat lunch. But I'll offer to go, if anybody else will. When I come to think of it, I'm not at all sure that I wasn't his best friend; for we used to stop and speak whenever we met. Bye, bye."

Speakers and listeners strolled away, and mixed with other groups. Scrooge knew the men, and looked towards the Spirit for an explanation.

The Phantom glided on into a street. Its finger pointed to two persons meeting. Scrooge listened again, thinking that the explanation might lie here.

He knew these men, also, perfectly. They were men of great business: very wealthy, and of great importance. He had made a point of always treating them well: in a business point of view, that is; strictly in a business point of view.

"How are you?" said one.

"How are you?" returned the other.

"Well!" said the first. "Old Scratch³² has got his own at last, hey."

³¹ Powdered tobacco, usually taken through the nose.

"So I am told," returned the second. "Cold, isn't it."

"Usual for Christmas time. You're not an ice skater, I suppose?"

"No. No. Something else to think of. Good morning."

Not another word. That was their meeting, their conversation, and their parting.

Scrooge was at first inclined to be surprised that the Spirit should attach importance to conversations apparently so unimportant; but feeling certain that they must have some hidden purpose, Scrooge tried to consider what the meaning was likely to be. They couldn't have anything to do with the death of Jacob, his old partner, for that was Past, and this Ghost specialized in the Future. He couldn't think of anyone else they could be talking about. But Scrooge knew that there must be some important meaning, some moral for him to understand. He decided to take in everything he saw and heard, especially when he saw the shadow of his future self when it appeared.

He looked about in that very place for his own image; but another man stood in the corner Scrooge usually occupied, and though the clock pointed to his usual time of day for being there, he saw no likeness of himself among the crowds that poured into the hall through the Porch. It did not surprise him, however; for he had been thinking about a change of life, and thought and hoped he saw this change in his absence from the room.

Quiet and dark, beside him stood the Phantom, with its outstretched hand. When Scrooge came out of his daydream, he believed from the turn of the creature's hand and its position to him that the Unseen Eyes of the Spirit were looking at him intently. It made Scrooge shudder and feel very cold.

They left the busy scene and went into a remote part of the town, where Scrooge had never gone before, although he knew the area's bad reputation. The streets were foul and narrow; the shops and houses wretched; the people half-naked, drunken, sloppy, ugly. Alleys and archways, like so many cesspools, gave their offenses of smell, and dirt, and life, upon the streets; and the whole area reeked with crime, with filth, and misery.

There was a beetling shop, below a pent-house roof, where iron, old rags, bottles, bones, and greasy animal parts, were bought. Upon the floor within, were piled up heaps of rusty keys, nails, chains, hinges, files, scales, weights, and old iron of all kinds. Secrets that few would like to know were created and hidden in mountains of unseemly rags, masses of corrupted fat, and piles of bones. Sitting in among the goods he dealt in, by a charcoal stove made of old bricks, was a grey-haired rascal, nearly seventy years of age. He shielded himself from the cold wind by a screen of cloth hanging on a line and smoked his pipe in all the luxury of calm retirement.

Scrooge and the Phantom came into the presence of this man, just as a woman with a heavy bundle slunk into the shop. But she had scarcely entered, when another woman, carrying a bundle, came in too; and that woman was closely followed by a man in faded black. After a short period of blank astonishment, in which the old man with the pipe had joined them, all three newcomers burst into a laugh.

"Let the charwoman alone to be the first!" cried she who had entered first. "Let the laundress alone to be the second; and let the undertaker's man alone to be the third. Look here, old Joe, what chance is there of us three meeting at the same time like this!"

³² The devil.

"You couldn't have met in a better place," said old Joe, removing his pipe from his mouth. "Come into the parlour. You've all been here before. Let me shut the door to the shop. Oh, how it squeals. There is not a bit of metal in this place as rusty as these hinges. And I'm sure there's no bones in this place older than mine. Ha, ha! We all deserve to be who we are; we're perfect. Come into the parlour. Come into the parlour."

The parlour was the space behind the screen of rags. The old man raked the fire together with an old stair-rod, and having lighted his smoky lamp (for it was night) with the stem of his pipe, put it in his mouth again.

While he did this, the woman who had already spoken threw her bundle on the floor and sat down in an arrogant manner on a stool; crossing her elbows on her knees, and giving a superior look at the other two.

"What odds then. What odds, Mrs Dilber." said the woman. "Every person has a right to take care of themselves. He always did."

"That's true, indeed," said the laundress. "No man more so."

"Why then, don't stand staring as if you was afraid, woman; who's the wiser? We're not going to pick holes in each other's coats, I suppose?"

"No, indeed," said Mrs Dilber and the man together. "We should hope not."

"Very well, then!" cried the woman. "That's enough. Who's the worse for the loss of a few things like these? Not a dead man, I suppose."

"No, indeed," said Mrs Dilber, laughing.

"If he wanted to keep them after he was dead, a wicked old man," pursued the woman, "why didn't he have somebody to look after him when he was struck with Death, instead of lying gasping out his last there, alone by himself."

"You are quite right," said Mrs Dilber. "It's a judgment on him."

"I wish it was a little heavier judgment," replied the woman; "and it should have been, so that I could have taken more. Open that bundle, old Joe, and let me know what's in it. Tell us. We all know we have been taking from the dead. It's no sin. Open the bundle, Joe."

The man in faded black produced the first of the stolen goods. There was not a lot. A seal or two, a pencil-case, a pair of sleeve-buttons, and a brooch of no great value—that was all. They were examined and appraised³³ by old Joe, who wrote down the value of each item on the wall, and added them up into a total when he found there was nothing more to come.

"That's what your goods are worth," said Joe, "and I wouldn't give another sixpence for it, even if I was to be boiled. Who's next?"

Mrs Dilber was next. Sheets and towels, a little wearing apparel, two old-fashioned silver teaspoons, a pair of sugar-tongs, and a few boots. Her account was stated on the wall in the same manner.

³³ Given value

"I always give too much to ladies. It's a weakness of mine, and that's the way I ruin myself," said old Joe. "That's what your goods are worth. If you asked me for another penny in front of others, I would change my mind and knock off half-a-crown³⁴."

"And now undo my bundle, Joe," said the first woman.

Joe went down on his knees for the greater convenience of opening it, and having unfastened a great many knots, dragged out a large and heavy roll of some dark stuff.

"What do you call this?" said Joe. "Bed-curtains?"

"Ah!" returned the woman, laughing and leaning forward on her crossed arms. "Bed-curtains."

"You don't mean to say you took them down, rings and all, with him lying there?" said Joe.

"Yes I do," replied the woman. "Why not?"

"You were born to make money," said Joe, "and you'll certainly do it."

"I won't leave alone what I can take, especially from a man such as he, I promise you, Joe," returned the woman coolly. "Don't drop that oil upon the blankets, now."

"His blankets?" asked Joe.

"Whose else's do you think?" replied the woman. "He isn't likely to catch cold without them, I dare say."

"I hope he didn't die of any diseases. Eh?" said old Joe, stopping in his work, and looking up.

"Don't you be afraid of that," returned the woman. "I ain't so fond of his company that I'd wait around him for such things, if he did have diseases. Ah, you may look through that shirt till your eyes ache; but you won't find a hole in it, nor a missing thread. It's the best he had, and a fine one too. They'd have wasted it, if it hadn't been for me."

"What do you call wasting of it?" asked old Joe.

"Putting it on him to be buried in, to be sure," replied the woman with a laugh. "Somebody was fool enough to do it, but I took it off again. If a plain woven cotton cloth ain't good enough for a burial, it ain't good enough for anything. He can't look uglier than he did in that one."

Scrooge listened to this dialogue in horror. As they sat grouped about their stolen goods, in the little light given off by the old man's lamp, he viewed them with revulsion and disgust which could not have been greater.

"Ha, ha!" laughed the same woman, when old Joe, producing a flannel bag with money in it, threw out their money upon the ground. "This is the end of it, you see. He frightened every one away from him when he was alive, to profit us when he was dead. Ha, ha, ha!"

³⁴ A denomination of money

"Spirit," said Scrooge, shuddering from head to foot. "I see, I see. The case of this unhappy man might be my own. My life tends that way, now. Merciful Heaven, what is this?"

Scrooge stepped back in terror, for the scene had changed, and now he almost touched a bed: a bare, uncurtained bed: on which, beneath a ragged sheet, there lay something covered up.

The room was very dark, too dark to be observed with any accuracy, though Scrooge glanced round it in curiosity, anxious to know what kind of room it was. A pale light, rising in the outer air, fell straight upon the bed; and on it, plundered, unwatched, unwept, uncared for, was the body of this man.

Scrooge glanced towards the Phantom. Its steady hand was pointed to the head. The cover was so carelessly adjusted that the slightest raising of it, the motion of a finger upon Scrooge's part, would have revealed the face. He thought of it, felt how easy it would be to do, and wanted to do it; but had no more power to withdraw the sheet than to send away the spectre at his side.

He thought, if this man could be brought back to life now, what would be his first thoughts. Greed, hard-dealing, unimportant—all of these cares have brought him to a rich end, truly.

The body lay, in the dark empty house, with not a man, a woman, or a child, to say that he was kind to me in this or that. A cat was tearing at the door, and there was a sound of gnawing rats beneath the fireplace. What the animals wanted in the room of death and why they were so restless and disturbed, Scrooge did not dare to think.

"Spirit," he said, "this is a fearful place. In leaving it, I shall not forget what I've learned here, trust me. Let us go."

Still the Ghost pointed with an unmoved finger to the head.

"I understand you," Scrooge returned, "and I would remove the cover, if I could, but I have not the power, Spirit. I have not the power."

Again it seemed to look upon him.

"If there is any person in the town, who feels emotion caused by this man's death," said Scrooge quite distressed, "show that person to me, Spirit, I beg you."

The Phantom spread its dark robe before him for a moment, like a wing; and withdrawing it, revealed a room by daylight, where a mother and her children were.

She was expecting some one with anxious eagerness; for she walked up and down the room; jumped at every sound; looked out from the window; glanced at the clock; tried, but in vain, to work with her needle; and could hardly bear the voices of the playing children.

After a time, the long-expected knock was heard. She hurried to the door, and met her husband; a man whose face was worn and depressed. Suddenly, his expression changed; a kind of serious delight of which he felt ashamed and which he struggled to hide.

He sat down to the dinner that had been waiting for him by the fire; and when she asked him faintly what news (which was not until after a long silence), he appeared embarrassed on how to answer.

"Is it good," she said, "or bad?"—to help him.

"Bad," he answered.

"We are quite ruined."

"No. There is hope yet, Caroline."

"If he is dead, there is," she said, amazed. "Nothing is past hope, if such a miracle has happened."

"He is past letting go," said her husband. "He is dead."

She was a kind and patient person; but she was thankful in her soul to hear it, and she said so, with clasped hands. She regretted her feelings; but gladness was the first emotion of her heart. He is dead.

"What the half-drunken woman whom I told you of last night, said to me, when I tried to see him and get another week to pay; and what I thought was a mere excuse to avoid me; turns out to have been quite true. He was not only very ill, but dying, then."

"Who will collect our debt now?"

"I don't know. But before that time we shall have the money; I cannot believe the next collector will be as unfeeling as he was. I believe we shall sleep well tonight, Caroline."

Yes. Despite the death of a fellow human being, their hearts were lighter. The children gathered round to hear what they did not understand, but their mood became brighter; and it was a happier house for this man's death. The only emotion that the Ghost could show him, caused by the event, was one of pleasure.

"Let me see some tenderness, some sympathy, some grief connected with this man's death," said Scrooge; "or that dark room, Spirit, which we left just now, will never be out of my mind."

The Ghost brought Scrooge through several streets familiar to his feet; and as they went along, Scrooge looked here and there to see his future self, but nowhere was he to be seen. They entered poor Bob Cratchit's house; the dwelling Scrooge had visited before; and found the mother and the children seated round the fire.

Quiet. Very quiet. The noisy little Cratchits were as still as statues in one corner, and sat looking up at Peter, who had a book before him. The mother and her daughters were engaged in sewing. But surely they were very quiet.

"And he took a child, and set him in the midst of them."

Where had Scrooge heard those words? He had not dreamed them. The boy must have read them out, as he and the Spirit crossed the threshold. Why did he not go on?

The mother laid her work upon the table, and put her hand up to her face.

"The colour hurts my eyes," she said.

The colour? Ah, poor Tiny Tim.

"They're better now," said Cratchit's wife. "The candle-light makes my eyes strain so; and I wouldn't show weak eyes to your father when he comes home, not for the world. He must be home soon, now."

"No, he is late," Peter answered, shutting up his book. "I think he's walked a little slower these few last evenings, mother."

They were very quiet again. At last she said, in a steady, cheerful voice, that only faltered once:

"I have known him to walk with—I have known him to walk with Tiny Tim upon his shoulder, very fast indeed."

"And so have I," cried Peter. "Often."

"And so have I," exclaimed another. So had all.

"But he was very light to carry," she resumed, intent upon her work, "and his father loved him so, that it was no trouble—no trouble. And there is your father at the door!"

She hurried out to meet him; and little Bob in his comforter—he had need of it, poor fellow—came in. His tea was ready for him on the hob. Then the two young Cratchits got upon his knees and laid, each child a little cheek, against his face, as if they said, "Don't mind it, father. Don't be upset."

Bob was very cheerful with them and spoke pleasantly to all the family. He looked at the work upon the table, and praised the effort and speed of Mrs Cratchit and the girls. They would be done long before Sunday, he said.

"Sunday. You went to-day, then, Robert?" said his wife.

"Yes, my dear," returned Bob. "I wish you could have gone. It would have done you good to see how green a place it is. But you'll see it often. I promised him that I would walk there on a Sunday. My little, little child!" cried Bob. "My little child!"

He broke down all at once. He couldn't help it. If he could have helped it, he and his child would have been farther apart perhaps than they were.

He left the room, and went up-stairs into the room above, which was lighted cheerfully, and decorated with Christmas. There was a chair set close beside the child, and there were signs of some one having been there, lately. Poor Bob sat down in it, and when he had thought a little and composed himself, he kissed the little face. He was resigned to what had happened, and went down again quite happy.

They drew about the fire, and talked; the girls and mother working still. Bob told them of the great kindness of Mr Scrooge's nephew, whom he had only seen once, and who, meeting him in the street that day, and seeing that he looked a little upset, inquired what had happened to upset him. I told him and he replied, 'I am heartily sorry for it, Mr Cratchit,' he said, 'and heartily sorry for your good wife.' By the bye, how he ever knew that, I don't know."

"Knew what, my dear?"

"Why, that you were a good wife," replied Bob.

"Everybody knows that," said Peter.

"Very well said, my boy!" cried Bob. "I hope they do. 'Heartily sorry,' he said, 'for your good wife. If I can be of service to you in any way,' he said, giving me his card, 'that's where I live. Please come to me.' Now, it wasn't," cried Bob, "for the sake of anything he might be able to do for us, so much as for his kind way. It really seemed as if he had known our Tiny Tim, and felt our pain with us."

"I'm sure he's a good soul," said Mrs Cratchit.

"You would know it, my dear," returned Bob, "if you saw and spoke to him. I believe it possible he might get Peter a good job."

"And then," cried one of the girls, "Peter will start seeing a lady, and setting up a business for himself."

"Get along with you!" retorted Peter, grinning.

"It's possible," said Bob, "one of these days; though there's plenty of time for that, my dear. But however and when ever we part from one another, I am sure none of us shall forget poor Tiny Tim."

"Never, father!" they all cried.

"And I know," said Bob, "I know, my dears, that when we remember how patient and how kind he was; although he was a little, little child; we shall not forget poor Tiny Tim."

"No, never, father!" they all cried again.

"I am very happy," said little Bob, "I am very happy!"

Mrs Cratchit kissed him, his daughters kissed him, the two young Cratchits kissed him, and Peter and himself shook hands.

"Spectre," said Scrooge, "something informs me that our parting moment is at hand. I know it, but I know not how. Tell me what man that was whom we saw lying dead."

The Ghost of Christmas Yet To Come carried him, as before—though at a different time in the future; there seemed no order in these future visions, except that they were in the Future. Indeed, the Spirit quickly moved on.

"This passage," said Scrooge, "through which we hurry now, is where my business is, and has been for some time. I see the house. Let me see what I shall be in the future."

The Spirit stopped; the hand was pointed elsewhere.

"The house is there," Scrooge exclaimed. "Why do you point away?"

The extended finger underwent no change.

Scrooge ran quickly to the window of his office, and looked in. It was an office still, but not his. The furniture was not the same, and the figure in the chair was not himself. The Phantom pointed as before.

Scrooge joined the Spirit once again, and accompanied it until they reached an iron gate. He paused to look round before entering.

A churchyard. Here, then, the wretched man whose who Scrooge wanted to know, lay underneath the ground. It was a good place. Walled in by houses; overrun by grass and weeds. A good place for him!

The Spirit stood among the graves, and pointed down to One. Scrooge advanced towards it trembling. The Phantom was exactly as it had been, but Scrooge dreaded that he saw new meaning in its spectre's shape.

"Before I draw nearer to that stone to which you point," said Scrooge, "answer me one question. Are these the shadows of the things that Will be, or are they shadows of things that May be, only?"

Still the Ghost pointed downward to the grave by which it stood.

"The actions of men will lead them to a certain end," said Scrooge. "But if the actions be changed, then the end will change. Tell me this is true."

The Spirit was immovable as ever.

Scrooge crept towards the grave, trembling as he went; and following the finger, read upon the stone of the neglected grave his own name, EBENEZER SCROOGE.

"Am I that man who lay upon the bed?" he cried, falling upon his knees.

The finger pointed from the grave to him, and back again.

"No, Spirit! Oh no, no!"

The finger still was there.

"Spirit!" he cried, tight clutching at its robe, "hear me. I am not the man I was. Because of tonight, I am a changed man. Why show me this, if I am past all hope of changing the future?"

For the first time the phantom's hand appeared to shake.

"Good Spirit," he pursued, as he fell upon the ground before it: "You have come for me, and you pity me. Tell me I can change the future away from this."

The kind hand trembled.

"I will honour Christmas in my heart, and try to keep it all the year. I will live in the Past, the Present, and the Future. The Spirits of all Three shall remind me of what has happened. I will not shut out the lessons that they teach. Oh, tell me I may erase away the writing on this stone!"

In his agony, he caught the spectral hand. It sought to free itself, but Scrooge would not let go. The Spirit, stronger yet, pushed him away.

Holding up his hands in a last prayer to have his fate reversed, he saw a change in the Phantom's hood and dress. It shrunk, collapsed, and dwindled down into a bedpost.

Part Five: The End of It

Yes! and the bedpost was his own. The bed was his own, the room was his own. Best and happiest of all, the Time before him was his own, to make amends in!

"I will live in the Past, the Present, and the Future!" Scrooge repeated, as he scrambled out of bed. "The Spirits of all Three shall work within me. Oh Jacob Marley, thank you! Heaven, and the Christmas Time be praised for this. I say it on my knees, old Jacob, on my knees! Thank you!"

He was so thrilled and so glowing with his good intentions, that he could barely speak. He had been sobbing violently in his conflict with the Spirit, and his face was wet with tears.

"They are not torn down!" cried Scrooge, folding one of his bed-curtains in his arms, "they are not torn down, rings and all. They are here—I am here—the shadows of the things that would have been, may be dispelled³⁵. They will be! I know they will."

He wrung his hands and torn at his gown all the time.

"I don't know what to do!" cried Scrooge, laughing and crying in the same breath. "I am as light as a feather, I am as happy as an angel, I am as merry as a schoolboy. A merry Christmas to everybody! A happy New Year to all the world! Hallo here! Whoop! Hallo!"

He had danced into the sitting-room and was now standing there: perfectly out of breath.

"There's the saucepan that the gruel was in!" cried Scrooge, starting off again, and dancing round the fireplace. "There's the door, by which the Ghost of Jacob Marley entered. There's the corner where the Ghost of Christmas Present, sat. There's the window where I saw the wandering Spirits. It's all right, it's all true, it all happened. Ha ha ha!"

Really, for a man who had been out of practice for so many years, it was a splendid laugh, a most memorable laugh. It was the father of a long, long line of brilliant laughs.

"I don't know what day of the month it is," said Scrooge. "I don't know how long I've been among the Spirits. I don't know anything. I'm quite a baby. Never mind. I don't care. I'd rather be a baby. Hallo! Whoop! Hallo here!"

He paused when the church bells began ringing. Clash, clang, hammer; ding, dong, bell! Bell, dong, ding; hammer, clang, clash! Oh, glorious, glorious!

Running to the window, he opened it, and put out his head. No fog, no mist; clear, bright, cheerful, stirring, cold; cold, piping for the blood to dance to; Golden sunlight; Heavenly sky; sweet fresh air; merry bells. Oh, glorious. Glorious!

"What's to-day?" cried Scrooge, calling downward to a boy in Sunday clothes, who perhaps had stopped in to look about him.

"Eh?" returned the boy, bewildered.

³⁵ Done away with.

"What's to-day, my fine fellow?" said Scrooge.

"To-day?" replied the boy. "Why, Christmas Day."

"It's Christmas Day!" said Scrooge to himself. "I haven't missed it. The Spirits have done it all in one night. They can do anything they like. Of course they can. Of course they can. Hallo, my fine fellow!"

"Hallo!" returned the boy.

"Do you know the Poulterer's, in the next street, at the corner?" Scrooge inquired.

"I should hope I did," replied the lad.

"An intelligent boy!" said Scrooge. "A remarkable boy! Do you know whether they've sold the prize Turkey that was hanging up there—Not the little prize Turkey: the big one?"

"What, the one as big as me?" returned the boy.

"What a delightful boy!" said Scrooge. "It's a pleasure to talk to him. Yes, my boy."

"It's hanging there now," replied the boy.

"Is it?" said Scrooge. "Go and buy it."

"What!" exclaimed the boy. "You go get it."

"No, no," said Scrooge, "I cannot wait. Go and buy it, and tell them to bring it here, so that I may give them the direction where to take it. Come back with the man, and I'll give you a shilling. Come back with him in less than five minutes and I'll give you half-a-crown."

The boy was off trotting like a horse at full gallop.

"I'll send it to Bob Cratchit's!" whispered Scrooge, rubbing his hands, and letting out a laugh. "He shall not know who sends it. It's twice the size of Tiny Tim. Joe Miller never made such a joke as surprising as me sending that turkey to Bob's will be!"

The hand in which he wrote the address was not a steady one, but write it he did, somehow, and went down-stairs to open the street door, ready for the coming of the poulterer's man. As he stood there, waiting his arrival, the knocker caught his eye.

"I shall love it, as long as I live!" cried Scrooge, patting it with his hand. "I scarcely ever looked at it before. What an honest expression it has in its face. It's a wonderful knocker. Here's the Turkey. Hallo! Whoop! How are you? Merry Christmas!"

It was a huge Turkey! He never could have stood upon his legs, that bird. He would have snapped them off in a short minute, like thin twigs.

"Why, it's impossible to carry that to Camden Town," said Scrooge. "You must have a cab."

The chuckle with which he said this, and the chuckle with which he paid for the Turkey, and the chuckle with which he paid for the cab, and the chuckle with which he paid the boy, were only to be exceeded by the chuckle with which he sat down breathless in his chair again, and chuckled till he cried.

Shaving was not an easy task, for his hand continued to shake very much; and shaving requires attention, even when you don't dance while you are at it. But if he had cut the end of his nose off, he would have put a piece of sticking-plaster over it, and been quite satisfied.

He dressed himself all in his best, and at last got out into the streets. The people were by this time coming out, as he had seen them with the Ghost of Christmas Present; and walking with his hands behind him, Scrooge met every one with a delighted smile. He looked so irresistibly pleasant, in a word, several people said, "Good morning, sir. A merry Christmas to you." And Scrooge said often afterwards, that of all the happy sounds he had ever heard, those were the happiest in his ears.

Scrooge had not gone far, when coming on towards him he beheld the portly gentleman, who had walked into his counting-house the day before, and said, "Scrooge and Marley's, I believe." It sent a pain across Scrooge's heart to think how this old gentleman would look upon him when they met; so he walked straight towards him.

"My dear sir," said Scrooge, quickening his pace, and taking the old gentleman by both his hands. "How do you do. I hope you succeeded yesterday. It was very kind of you. A merry Christmas to you, sir!"

"Mr Scrooge?"

"Yes," said Scrooge. "That is my name, and I fear it may not be pleasant to you. Allow me to ask for forgiveness. And will you have the goodness"—here Scrooge whispered in his ear.

"Lord bless me!" cried the gentleman, as if his breath were taken away. "My dear Mr Scrooge, are you serious?"

"If you please," said Scrooge. "Not a farthing³⁶ less. A great many back-payments are included in it, I assure you. Will you do me that favour?"

"My dear sir," said the other, shaking hands with him. "I don't know what to say to such generosity."

"Don't say anything please," retorted Scrooge. "Come and see me. Will you come and see me?"

"I will!" cried the old gentleman. And it was clear he meant to do it.

"Thank you," said Scrooge. "I am much obliged to you. I thank you fifty times. Bless you!"

He went to church, and walked about the streets, and watched the people hurrying to and fro, and patted children on the head, and questioned beggars, and looked down into the kitchens of houses, and up to the windows, and found that everything could make him happy. He had never dreamed that any walk—that anything—could give him so much happiness. In the afternoon he turned his steps towards his nephew's house.

³⁶ A denomination of money.

He passed the door a dozen times before he had the courage to go up and knock. But he made an attempt, and did it:

"Is your master at home, my dear?" said Scrooge to the girl. Nice girl.

"Yes, sir."

"Where is he, my dear?" said Scrooge.

"He's in the dining-room, sir, along with his wife. I'll show you up-stairs, if you please."

"Thank you. He knows me," said Scrooge, with his hand already on the dining-room lock. "I'll go in here, my dear."

He turned it gently, and thrust his face in, round the door. They were looking at the table (which was spread out in great display); for these young housekeepers are always nervous on such points, and like to see that everything is right.

"Fred!" said Scrooge.

His niece jumped at the sound of his voice. Scrooge had forgotten, for the moment, about her sitting in the corner on the footstool, or he would have been more careful not to surprise anyone.

"Why bless my soul!" cried Fred, "who's that?"

"It's I. Your uncle Scrooge. I have come to dinner. Will you let me in, Fred?"

Let him in! It is a miracle no one dropped to the floor. Scrooge was at ease in five minutes. Nothing could be better. His niece looked just the same. So did Topper when he came. So did the plump sister when she came. So did every one when they came. Wonderful party, wonderful games, wonderful friendship, won-der-ful happiness!

But Scrooge was early at the office the next morning. Oh he was early there. If he could only be there first, and catch Bob Cratchit coming late! That was the thing he had set his heart upon.

And he did it; yes, he did. The clock struck nine. No Bob. A quarter past. No Bob. He was a full eighteen and a half minutes late. Scrooge sat with his door wide open that he might see him come into the cubicle.

Bob's hat was off, before he opened the door; his comforter too. He was on his stool in a jiffy; driving away with his pen, as if he were trying to overtake nine o'clock.

"Hallo," growled Scrooge, in his accustomed voice, as near as he could fake it. "What do you mean by coming here at this time of day?"

"I'm very sorry, sir," said Bob. "I *am* late."

"You are?" repeated Scrooge. "Yes. I think you are. Step this way, if you please."

"It's only once a year, sir," pleaded Bob, appearing from the cubicle. "It shall not be repeated. I was making rather merry yesterday, sir."

"Now, I'll tell you what, my friend," said Scrooge, "I am not going to stand this sort of thing any longer. And therefore," he continued, leaping from his stool, and giving Bob such a pat in the waistcoat that Bob staggered back into the cubicle again; "and therefore I am about to raise your salary."

Bob trembled, and got a little nearer to the ruler. He had a momentary idea of knocking Scrooge down with it, holding him, and calling to the people in the street for help and a strait-jacket.

"A merry Christmas, Bob," said Scrooge, with an cheerfulness that could not be mistaken, as he clapped him on the back. "A merrier Christmas, Bob, my good fellow, than I have given you for many a year. I'll raise your salary, and try to assist your struggling family, and we will discuss your problems this very afternoon, over a Christmas lunch, Bob. Make up the fires, and get more coal before you dot another *i*, Bob Cratchit!"

Scrooge was better than his word. He did it all, and a lot more; and to Tiny Tim, who did not die, he was a second father. He became as good a friend, as good a master, and as good a man, as the good old city knew, or any other good old city, town, or borough, in the good old world. Some people laughed to see the change in him, but he let them laugh, and paid no attention to them; for he was wise enough to know that nothing ever happened on this planet, where someone didn't laugh at something they had never seen before; and knowing that people like these did not understand, let them have a good laugh. His own heart laughed: and that was quite enough for him.

He had no further communication with Spirits; and it was always said of Scrooge, that he knew how to keep Christmas well, if any man alive possessed the knowledge. May that be truly said of us, and all of us! And so, as Tiny Tim observed, God Bless Us, Every One!

A Christmas Carol

Name: _____

Block: _____

Date: _____

Read a *Christmas Carol: A Christmas Ghost Story* by Charles Dickens and answer the questions below.