

Stave 2 - The First of the Three Spirits

WHEN Scrooge awoke, it was dark. The chimes of a neighbouring church struck the hour, with a deep, melancholy ONE.

Light flashed up in the room, and the curtains of his bed were drawn aside, I tell you, by a hand. And Scrooge found himself face to face with the unearthly visitor who drew them: as close as I am now to you.

It was a strange figure—like a child, or an old man. Its white hair hung about its neck and down its back, and yet the face had not a wrinkle in it. Its legs and feet were bare. It wore a white tunic with a shining belt. It held a branch of fresh green holly in its hand; and had its dress trimmed with summer flowers

“Are you the Spirit whose coming was foretold to me?” asked Scrooge.

The voice was soft and gentle. “I am the Ghost of Christmas Past.”

“Long Past?” inquired Scrooge.

“No. Your past.”

It put out its strong hand and clasped him gently by the arm.

“Rise! and walk with me!”

They passed through the wall, and stood upon an open country road. Now it was a clear, cold, winter day, with snow upon the ground.

“Good Heaven!” said Scrooge. “I was a boy in this place!” He wiped away a tear and begged the Ghost to lead him.

“You recollect the way?” inquired the Spirit.

“Remember it!” cried Scrooge. “I could walk it blindfolded.”

They walked along the road, Scrooge recognizing every gate and tree; until a little town appeared in the distance. Some shaggy ponies trotted towards them with boys upon their backs. All these boys shouted to each other merrily. Scrooge knew and named them every one. “These are but shadows of the things that have been,” said the Ghost. “They do not see us.”

But why was he filled with gladness when he heard them tell each other Merry Christmas, as they parted! What was Merry Christmas to Scrooge? 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 there still.”

Scrooge said he knew it. And he cried.

They soon approached a large house, its windows broken, and the many rooms cold, and bare of food.

They went, the Ghost and Scrooge, to the back of the house, and a room with desks. At one of these a lonely boy was reading near a feeble fire; and Scrooge sat down, beside his poor forgotten self as he used to be. He said “Poor boy!” and cried again.

“I wish,” Scrooge muttered, 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 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!”

And there he was, alone again, when all the other boys had gone home for the holidays.

The door opened; and a little girl came darting in, and put her arms about his neck.

“I have come to bring you home, dear brother!” said the child. “We’re to be together all the Christmas long, and have the merriest time in all the world.”

“Your sister,” said the Ghost. “Always a delicate creature. But she had a large heart!”

“So she had,” cried Scrooge. “You’re right, Spirit!”

“She died a woman,” said the Ghost, “and had, I think, one child - your nephew”

Scrooge answered sadly, “Yes.”

All at once they were in a busy city. Here too it was Christmas time again; but it was evening, and the streets were lighted up.

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

“Know it!” said Scrooge. “I was apprenticed here!”

At sight of an old gentleman, behind a high desk, Scrooge cried in great excitement:

“Why, bless his heart; it’s Fezziwig alive again!”

Scrooge’s former self, now a young man, came in, beside his fellow apprentice.

Old Fezziwig laid down his pen, and looked up at the clock. He rubbed his hands and called out in a rich voice:

“No more work to-night, my boys!” said Fezziwig. “Christmas Eve, Dick. Christmas, Ebenezer! Clear away, lads!”

It was done in a minute. The floor was swept, the lamps were trimmed, fuel was heaped upon the fire; and the warehouse became a snug, warm, and bright ball-room.

In came a fiddler with a music-book. In came Mrs. Fezziwig, and the three Miss Fezziwigs,. In came all the young men and women employed in the business, the housemaid, the baker, the cook, the milkman. Away they all went, twenty couples at once!

There were dances, and games, and there was cake, and Roast Beef, and mince-pies, and plenty of ale.

During all this time, Scrooge had acted like a man out of his wits. He enjoyed everything. Now that he remembered the Ghost, he became conscious that it was looking full upon him.



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

“Small!” echoed Scrooge. “It isn’t that, Spirit. He has the power to make our work a pleasure or a toil. The happiness he gives, is quite as great as if it cost a fortune.”

He stopped.

“What is the matter?” asked the Ghost.

“Nothing 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.”

Scrooge and the Ghost again stood in the open air.

“My time grows short,” observed the Spirit. “Quick!”

Again Scrooge saw himself. He was older now. He was not alone, but sat by a pretty young girl: in her eyes there were tears.

“It matters little to you,” she said, softly. “Another idol has taken my place. It is the love of money. Good-bye. May you be happy in the life you have chosen!”

“Spirit!” cried Scrooge, “show me no more! I cannot bear it! Leave me! Take me back. Haunt me no longer!”

He was conscious of being exhausted, and of being in his own bedroom. He had barely time to reel to bed, before he sank into a heavy sleep.