

Stave 3 - The Second of the Three Spirits

Scrooge waited again.

Now, when the Bell struck One, he saw a ghostly light coming from the next room. He shuffled to the door.

A strange voice called him by his name, and bade him enter.

The room was hung with holly and mistletoe, and a mighty blaze went roaring up the chimney. Heaped up like a throne were geese, pies, plum-puddings, chestnuts, oranges, pears, cakes, and punch. Upon this food couch, there sat a jolly Giant, who held a glowing torch high up, to shed its light on Scrooge.

“Come in!” exclaimed the Ghost, “and know me better, man!”
Scrooge entered timidly, and hung his head.

“I am the Ghost of Christmas Present,” said the Spirit. “Look upon me!”

Scrooge reverently did so. It was clothed in a green robe, bordered with white fur. Its feet were bare; and on its head it wore a holly wreath, set here and there with shining icicles.

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

“Spirit,” said Scrooge, “conduct me where you will. I went forth last night and I learnt a lesson which is working now. To-night, if you have anything to teach me, let me profit by it.”

“Touch my robe!”

Feast, fire, room all vanished instantly and they stood in the city streets on a snowy Christmas morning.

The sky was gloomy, and yet was there an air of cheerfulness abroad like a summer day.

Soon the steeples called the people to church, and away they came, flocking through the streets in their best clothes, and with their happiest faces.

The good Spirit led him straight to Scrooge’s clerk’s, holding to his robe; and at the door the Spirit smiled, and stopped to bless Bob Cratchit’s dwelling. Think of that! Bob had but fifteen shillings a-week himself; and yet the Ghost of Christmas Present blessed his little house!

Then up rose Mrs. Cratchit, dressed poorly in a worn dress.

“What has ever got your precious father then?” said Mrs. Cratchit to the little Cratchits. “And your brother, Tiny Tim.”

In came Bob, the father, in his threadbare clothes; and Tiny Tim upon his shoulder. Sadly, Tiny Tim held a little crutch!

“And how did little Tim behave?” asked Mrs. Cratchit.



“As good as gold,” said Bob. “He told me, 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.”

At last the dishes were set on, and grace was said. Bob said he didn’t believe there ever was such a goose cooked. Mrs. Cratchit brought in the pudding, like a speckled cannon-ball, blazing with brandy, and with Christmas holly stuck into the top. A wonderful pudding!

Bob proposed a toast:

“A Merry Christmas to us all, my dears. God bless us!”

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

He 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 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 unaltered by the Future, he will die this year,” repeated the Ghost. “What then? If he be like to die, he had better do it, and decrease the surplus population.”

Scrooge hung his head, ashamed to hear his own words.

“Man,” said the Ghost, “will you decide what men shall live, what men shall die? It may be, that in the sight of Heaven, you are more worthless and less fit to live than millions like this poor man’s child!”

But now Scrooge heard his own name.

“Mr. Scrooge!” toasted Bob; “I’ll give you Mr. Scrooge, the Founder of the Feast!”

“The Founder of the Feast indeed!” cried Mrs. Cratchit, reddening.

“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!”

The children drank the toast after her, but they didn’t care for it. Scrooge was the Ogre of the family. The mention of his name cast a dark shadow on the party.

By-and-bye they had a song from Tiny Tim, who had a sweet little voice, and sang it very well indeed.

They were not a handsome family; they were not well dressed. But, they were happy, grateful, pleased with one another, and contented with the time. Scrooge watched them, and especially on Tiny Tim, until the last.

And now, they traveled through coal miners’ homes, past ships on the dark sea. And everywhere they went, no matter how poor, every person hummed a Christmas tune, or had a Christmas thought. And every person, good or bad, had a kind word for another on that day.

Scrooge heard a hearty laugh and recognised it as his own nephew's. He found himself in a bright, gleaming room, with the Spirit standing smiling by his side.

"Ha, ha!" laughed Scrooge's nephew. "He said that Christmas was a humbug, as I live! He believed it too!"

"More shame for him, Fred!" said Scrooge's niece, indignantly.

"He's a comical old fellow," said Scrooge's nephew, "and not so pleasant as he might be. However, his offences carry their own punishment, and I am sorry for him. Who suffers by his ill whims! Himself, always."

They had some music and played at games; for it is good to be children sometimes, and never better than at Christmas.

They all played and sang, and so did Scrooge, singing quite loud. He begged like a boy to be allowed to stay until the guests departed. But this the Spirit said could not be done.

Much they saw, and far they went, and everywhere the Spirit he left his blessing. It was a long night, and Scrooge noticed that the Ghost grew older, and 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 at midnight. Hark! The time is drawing near."

The bell struck twelve. And the Spirit disappeared. As the last stroke ceased to vibrate, he remembered the prediction of old Jacob Marley, and lifting up his eyes, beheld a solemn Phantom, draped and hooded, coming, like a mist along the ground, towards him.