

A Christmas Carol.....



In the dim recesses of the offices of Scrooge and Marley Accountants, Bob Cratchett sat hunched over his desk, his pen scratching across the page. *Three days late already*, he thought. *If only we had a PC.*

"Mr Cratchett! Are those accounts not done?"

He snapped to attention.

"No Mr Scrooge, sir. I'm working as fast as I can but..." he braced himself, "we really need a computer."

"Computers!! Humbug! You have a brain, have you not? And a pen and paper? And, if my eyes do not deceive me, an abacus on your desk? Laziness, Mr Cratchett! Sheer laziness! I shall expect you to finish those accounts today or I shall dock your pay!"

"But it's Christmas Eve, Mr Scrooge!"

"Humbug!" snapped Scrooge and stamped out of the office.

Cratchett's shoulders slumped.



Christmas Eve and all his presents still to buy (there is a male gene which makes this compulsory). And now he'd have to work late, just because Scrooge was too mean to buy a PC. It'd be like last year all over again - a last minute grab of whatever was left in the shops. True, his wife had said she was pleased with the monogrammed handkerchiefs, even though they weren't her initials. But Tiny Tim had been inconsolable to find that instead of the Game Boy he'd yearned for, he'd got a china reindeer with one leg missing. Cratchett sighed again, and turned his attentions back to the ledger.

Outside was a scene to gladden Dickens' heart (*if he wasn't spinning in his grave*). Snowflakes drifted down, carollers sang, every shop and home

was lit with little Christmas lights, and homeless people huddled, frozen, in doorways. (*yes, we know that doesn't happen these days. It hardly ever snows at Christmas*). Ebenezer Scrooge passed them all by without a glance. Computers! Over his dead body would a computer ever cross the threshold of Scrooge and Marley. Scrooge's steps slowed a little as he remembered his late partner. Poor Jacob. A freak accident, they'd said. Who would ever have thought his abacus could explode like that? And the chances of one of the beads catapulting into his mouth and choking him? Sad.

Later that night, after he'd carefully polished his coins, Scrooge climbed into bed and thought again of Jacob Marley. It was hard not to, as his ghost was sitting on the end of the bed, unbuttoning his ghostly frock coat in order to improve his arm mobility for the forthcoming whoo-woo-woo's.

"Jacob!!" shrieked Scrooge. "Whoo-ooo-ooo! (*told you*) I bring a message for thee, Ebenezer Scrooooooge. Before this night is over, thee spirits shall come to thee. Heed them well or thou shall be sorry-ee-eee! Whoo-oo-oo!" wailed the ghost, waving his spectral arms and clanking his chains.

"Aren't you overdoing this a bit?" asked Scrooge disgustedly. "All the thee-ing and thou-ing and the old fashioned clothes? You've only been dead two weeks."

Marley scowled at him. "This is my first time out. I'm trying to get into the spirit of it." He waited. "Spirit? Get it?"

Scrooge looked at him blankly. Marley sighed.

"Still as funny as an ingrown toenail, eh Scrooge?" he muttered as he faded.

Cut to an hour later (*well come on, we haven't got time for the full novel treatment here*) and cue first ghost.

"I AM THE GHO-O-OST OF CHRISTMAS PA-A-ASSST. LISTEN TO ME, EBENEZER SCROOOOOOGE....."

(*Actually, let's do this without the sound effects as well, or we'll be here all night*).

"What do you want?" quavered Scrooge from behind his pillows.

"I WILL SHOW YOU CHRISTMAS AS IT USED TO BE. COME WITH ME." said the Ghost and drew the terrified Scrooge

from the bed and out the window.



"This is my old house", said Scrooge, peering in the window. "And look - that's me! Opening my presents!"

The Ghost gazed through the glass, where a young boy sat amidst a snowstorm of shredded paper. He watched him pounce on his next present like a terrier on a rat.

"INDEED. WHAT A LITTLE SCAMP YOU WERE. AND WHAT IS THAT YOU'VE GOT?" The Ghost squinted in an attempt to see it better. "GRACIOUS - IS IT A BRICK?"

Scrooge looked at him coldly (he was standing in the snow in his nightshirt after all).

"That", he said pointedly, "is a mobile phone. One of the early ones. Nobody else round here had one you know!"

"AAAAH," said the Ghost. "SO YOU DID EMBRACE TECHNOLOGY ONCE. WHAT HAPPENED?"

"A boy down the street took it off me. Caught me a right ding round the ear with it too." Scrooge rubbed his head, reminiscing. He could still recall the pain and the humiliation. It had been very much like being hit with a brick.

(*Fast forward to the second visitation*).....

Scrooge looked doubtfully at the apparition, which bore an uncanny resemblance to the Ghost of Christmas Past.

"Weren't you just here?"

"CERTAINLY NOT. I EVEN LOOK DIFFERENT THAN I DID THEN IF IT'D BEEN ME BEFORE..... WHICH IT WASN'T."

The Ghost was not having a happy night. He'd been so pleased to land the job of first ghost and when they'd said he looked ideal for several upcoming roles, well, he'd thought he was set for a lifetime (as it were) of gainful employment. But after he'd knocked off as the Ghost of Christmas Past and headed back for a nice mug of Ovaltine and a Rich Tea, they'd slung a friendly arm through his shoulders and said "ye-e-ss, the thing is, dear boy...." ...and he'd finally understood that the upcoming roles were all in *this* story and had to be shoe-horned in by dawn. He sighed and tried to bring the story back on track.

"I AM THE GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PRESENT," he intoned.

"I like Christmas pres...." began Scrooge

"CHRISTMAS PRESENT, NOT PRESENTS", said the Ghost gloomily. "EVERYONE MAKES THAT MISTAKE." And so saying, he hauled Scrooge out the window again and off to Bob Cratchett's house.



"They don't seem to have very much," said Scrooge, peering through the panes and taking in the threadbare carpet and the single tin of beans. "Where are the presents?"

"BOB CRATCHETT WASN'T ABLE TO BUY THEM. HE HAD TO WORK LATE IF YOU RECALL, FINISHING THOSE ACCOUNTS."

"Oh. Oh yes. Oh dear. Who is that child on crutches?"

"THAT IS THEIR ONLY CHILD, TINY TIM."

"I always thought he had a large family," mused Scrooge.

"YOU MAY BE THINKING OF THE BOOK. THIS IS A CUT DOWN VERSION IN EVERY SENSE. YOU SHOULD BE GRATEFUL WE CAN STILL STRETCH TO THE FULL COMPLEMENT OF GHOSTS." And *that's only because yours truly is running around like a blue-bottomed fly*, he thought.

"Why is the child such an odd colour?" asked Scrooge.

"THAT IS A SUN TAN. HE HAS NEVER HAD THE PALLOR OF NORMAL CHILDREN WHO STAY IN THEIR BEDROOMS AND PLAY COMPUTER GAMES. TINY TIM DOESN'T HAVE A COMPUTER. HE IS FORCED TO PLAY OUTDOORS AND TAKE..." the Ghost shuddered "...EX-ER-CISE"

"And the crutches?"

"FROM TAKING EXERCISE ON A PUBLIC ROAD," the Ghost shook his head sadly.

Scrooge grew pensive, watching the child hobble across to the bare table.

(*A-a-a-nd, fast forward to the final ghost...a, by now, somewhat familiar figure*).....

"It's you again, isn't it?" said Scrooge, with a kind of resignation. "Are you low on spirits in Purgatory or something?"

"HAH! I SHOULD SAY SO! ESPECIALLY SINCE YOUR MATE JACOB 'MINE'S-A-LARGE-ONE' MARLEY TURNED UP," huffed the Ghost. These quick changes would be killing him if he wasn't already dead.

"No, I meant....."

"OH. RIGHT. I SEE. WELL YES. SPREAD SO THIN, YOU CAN SEE RIGHT THROUGH US. SO TO SPEAK. LITTLE SPIRIT JOKE THERE."

"I'm sorry?"

"NEVER MIND. REGARD ME WELL EBENEZER SCROOGE, FOR I AM THE GHOST OF CHRISTMAS YET TO COME!"

"Future, you mean?"

"WHATEVER. GET YOUR SLIPPERS ON, WE'RE GOING OUT."

Back at Bob Cratchett's house, Scrooge found himself staring once more through the tiny window panes. The kitchen looked more impoverished than ever. Mrs Cratchett was bent over the kitchen table, tears flowing down her cheeks. And in the corner, unoccupied, with the crutches leaning against it, stood Tiny Tim's chair.

"Oh no," said Scrooge. "I didn't expect....."

He rounded on the Ghost in a fury.

"Can't you do something?"

"I AM BUT AN UNFORTUNATE SHADE."

Scrooge looked at him, bewildered. "Greeny-grey?"

"I MEANT THAT I HAVE NO CONTROL OVER THIS," sighed the Ghost. For this he'd missed the chance of giving his Banquo at Stratford?

"But this can't happen! I won't allow it to happen! Take me back! Take me back now!" demanded Scrooge, and turned away, upset. The figures faded.

Meanwhile, inside the house, Bob Cratchett came in and found his wife weeping.

"Whatever's the matter?" he cried

"Oh it's these onions", she sniffed. "Proper strong they are. Do us a favour Bob - give Tiny Tim a ring on the mobile. He's been down that Internet Café all day. And tell him the hospital wants those crutches back as well. Kids! I dunno."

Christmas morning, 6am. Bob Cratchett awoke, bleary-eyed, to the sound of a brisk *rat-tat-ta-tat* on his door. He staggered to the window and looked out to see Scrooge beaming up at him, standing in the snow with a whole array of boxes, several of them bearing the legend "Aurora PC" (*what? You were expecting us to say he bought Dells? Please! And if you're wondering how we rustled up all this kit between midnight on Christmas Eve and 6am next morning....we had the elves on overtime, all right?*)

"Good morrow Mr Cratchett!" he called. "Compliments of the season to you and all who dwell here this fine day!"

From somewhere deep underneath the duvet, Mrs Cratchett murmured "Who's the lunatic making all that racket?"

"It's Mr Scrooge. Uh, I think he's gone a bit.... Victorian. I'd better go down."

When his wife and son followed him down soon after, they found the parlour full of perfectly wrapped presents and Scrooge grinning like an idiot by the fireplace.

"Welcome Mrs Cratchett! And Tiny Tim too! Merry Christmas! Merry Christmas to you all!!!" Scrooge beamed expansively at everyone.

Bob Cratchett was running around like a child in a sweet shop. "Look wife!" he cried (*saving us the bother of making up any more names*). "Mr Scrooge has bought a computer for the office! And a laptop for me! And he's sorting out broadband for the house!! So I'll be able to connect to the office and work...." his enthusiasm wound down as the penny began to drop...."even.... longer.... hours... Ummmm, Mr Scrooge?... Sir?"

But no-one was listening. Technology had them all in its tight little fist.

"Well, would you look at this?" declared Mrs Cratchett. "A DVD player. And a new TV. Oh, thank you Mr Scrooge! Gawd bless you sir!!"

Tiny Tim unwrapped his presents and his little face lit up. "Oh Mr Scrooge! A Game Boy! And an MP3 player! Oh an'... an'... an', *gosh!!!...a computer!*" he breathed. "With *games!*" You could almost see his tan beginning to fade.

Drowning in a sea of exclamation marks, Scrooge took his leave, happy at a job well done. In the Cratchett's doorway, Tiny Tim leaned on his crutch and waved his new Game Boy at the departing figure.

"Gawd bless us, every one of us!" he warbled, while inside, his mother was overcome with hysteria.... and his father sobbed quietly into the cooking sherry.

