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Belle, Ebenezer's fiancé, releases Scrooge from marrying her. She is poor and he has changed. The Ghost of Christmas Past takes Ebenezer to Belle's home where the old miser sees a life which could have been his. Illustration by Arthur Rackam from the 1915 edition of "A Christmas Carol," online via Project Gutenberg.

Ebenezer Scrooge did not start his life as a selfish, grumpy person. As the "Spirit of Christmas Past" reminds him, Ebenezer's early life included joyful moments.

What if the "Sprit of Christmas Past" could take Scrooge back to those earlier days? What would they find? Was there a point in his life when Scrooge changed? What caused him to change?

Hereafter is an abridged version of "[Stave Two](#)" - "The First of the Three Spirits" - from "A Christmas Carol," by Charles Dickens. You can hear a dramatized version of this abridged story by clicking on the Narration for this chapter.

When Scrooge awoke, it was so dark, that looking out of bed, he could scarcely distinguish the transparent window from the opaque walls of his chamber until suddenly the church clock rolled a deep, hollow, melancholy ONE. Light flashed up in the room upon the instant, and the curtains of his bed were drawn aside. Scrooge found himself face to face with the unearthly visitor who drew them

It was a strange figure - like a child: yet not so like a child as like an old man. 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, hands, legs, and feet were bare. It wore a tunic of the purest white; and round its waist was bound a lustrous belt. It held a branch of fresh green holly in its hand; and, in singular contradiction of that wintry emblem, 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.

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

"I am!" The voice was soft and gentle. Singularly 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.

"No. Your past. The things that you will see with me are shadows of the things that have been; they will have no consciousness of us. Rise! And walk with me!"

It would have been in vain for Scrooge to plead that the weather and the hour were not adapted to pedestrian purposes; 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 a cold upon him at that time.

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 in supplication.

"I am a mortal," Scrooge remonstrated, "and liable to fall."

"Bear but a touch of my hand there," said the Spirit, laying it upon his heart, "and you shall be upheld in more than this!"

As the words were spoken, they passed through the wall, and stood in the busy thoroughfares of a city. The Ghost stopped at a certain warehouse door, and asked Scrooge if he knew it.

"Know it!" said Scrooge. "Was I apprenticed here?"

They went in. At sight of an old gentleman sitting behind a high desk Scrooge cried: "Why, it's old Fezziwig!"

Old Fezziwig laid down his pen, and called out in a comfortable, oily, rich, fat, jovial voice: "Yo ho, there! Ebenezer! No more work to-night. Christmas Eve! Clear away, and let's have lots of room here!"

It was done in a minute. In came a fiddler with a music-book. In came Mrs. Fezziwig, one vast substantial smile. In came the three Miss Fezziwigs, beaming and lovable. In came all the young men and women employed in the business. Away they all went, twenty couple at once; hands half round and back again the other way; down the middle and up again.

There were more dances, and there were forfeits, and there was cake, and there was a great piece of Cold Roast. But the great effect of the evening came when the fiddler struck up "Sir Roger de Coverley." Then old Fezziwig stood out to dance with Mrs. Fezziwig. A positive light appeared to issue from Fezziwig's calves. They shone in every part of the dance.

When the clock struck eleven, this domestic ball broke up. Mr. and Mrs. Fezziwig took their stations, 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.

"A small matter," said the Ghost, "to make these silly folks so full of gratitude. He has spent but a few pounds of your mortal money."

"It isn't that," said Scrooge, speaking unconsciously like his former, not his latter, self. "He has the power to render us happy or unhappy; to make our service light or burdensome; a pleasure or a toil. The happiness he gives, is quite as great as if it cost a fortune."

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

This was not addressed to Scrooge, or to any one whom he 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 avarice.

He was not alone, but sat by the side of a fair young girl in a mourning-dress: in whose eyes there were tears.

"It matters little," she said, softly, to Scrooge's former self. "To you, very little. Another idol has displaced me; and if it can comfort you in time to come, as I would have tried to do, I have no just cause to grieve."

"What Idol has displaced you?" he rejoined.

"A golden one. I have seen your nobler aspirations fall off one by one, until the master-passion, Gain, engrosses you."

"What then?" he retorted. "Even if I have grown so much wiser, what then? I am not changed towards you. Have I ever sought release from our engagement?"

"In words. No. Never."

"In what, then?"

"In a changed nature; in an altered spirit; in another atmosphere of life; another Hope as its great end. But if you were free to-day, to-morrow, yesterday, can even I believe that you would choose a dowerless girl; do I not know that your repentance and regret would surely follow? I do, and I release you. With a full heart, for the love of him you once were. May you be happy in the life you have chosen!"

She left him, and they parted.

"Spirit!" said Scrooge, "show me no more! Conduct 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 pinioned 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 like that last that Scrooge believed it was the same, until he saw her, now a comely matron, sitting opposite her daughter. The noise in this room was perfectly tumultuous, for there were more children there, than Scrooge in his agitated state of mind could count; and every child was conducting itself like forty. The consequences were uproarious beyond belief; but no one seemed to care; on the contrary, the mother and daughter laughed heartily, and enjoyed it very much; and the latter, soon beginning to mingle in the sports, got pillaged by the young brigands most ruthlessly.

But now a knocking at the door was heard, and a rush immediately ensued toward it, just in time to greet the father, who came home attended by a man laden with Christmas toys and presents. Then the shouting and the struggling, and the onslaught that was made on the defenseless porter! The scaling him with chairs for ladders to dive into his pockets, despoil him of brown-paper parcels, hold on tight by his cravat, hug him round the neck, pommel his back, and kick his legs in irrepressible affection! The shouts of wonder and delight with which the development of every package was received! The terrible announcement that the baby had been taken in the act of putting a doll's frying-pan into his mouth, and was more than suspected of having swallowed a fictitious turkey, glued on a wooden platter! The immense relief of finding this a false alarm! The joy, and gratitude, and ecstasy! They are all indescribable alike. It is enough that by degrees the children and their emotions got out of the parlor, and by one stair at a time, up to the top of the house; where they went to bed, and so subsided.

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; and when he thought that such another creature, quite as graceful and as full of promise, might have called him father, and been a spring-time in the haggard winter of his life, his sight grew very dim indeed.

"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. "That they are what they are, do not blame me!"

"Remove me!" Scrooge exclaimed, "I cannot bear it! Leave me! Take me back. Haunt me no longer!"

As he struggled with the Spirit he was conscious of being exhausted, and overcome by an irresistible drowsiness; and, further, of being in his own bedroom. He had barely time to reel to bed, before he sank into a heavy sleep.

The Spirits, however, were not done with Scrooge. He would soon get a visit from a gigantic ghost who didn't mince words just to make Ebenezer feel better about himself.

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:

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Spirit of Christmas Past by Sol Eytinge, Jr.

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Fiddler at the Fezziwig Ball

Image by John Leech, included in the 1843 first-edition of "A Christmas Carol," by Charles Dickens. Online, courtesy The Project Gutenberg.

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Fezziwig Dancing at the Ball

Image described above, by Arthur Rackham, included in the 1915 edition of "A Christmas Carol" published by J.B. Lippincott Company, at [page 54](#). Illustration online, courtesy The Project Gutenberg.

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THE FIRST of the THREE SPIRITS

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Sir Roger de Coverley Dance

Video clip, described above, online via YouTube.

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