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Scrooge's journey with the Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come ends in a graveyard. A man has died, alone and unloved, and Ebenezer wants to know: Who is this man? The Spirit forces Scrooge to discover the answer in a terrible way. John Leech created this illustration for Dickens' first edition of "A Christmas Carol." It is online courtesy Project Gutenberg.

The journey Ebenezer Scrooge takes with the "Ghost of Christmas Yet to Be" is the most-terrifying of all for the old miser. He sees the body of a man, lying on his bed, who obviously died alone and unloved. Who is that man?

Scrooge hears a group of people talking about the dead man in a very disrespectful way. He sees his belongings sold-off for next-to-nothing. If the person had any money in life, it isn't helping him now. Who is that man?

Ebenezer begins to worry that the man might be him. Is this what his future holds? Can he change his ways? Why show him such scenes unless there is a hope of change?

Hereafter is an abridged version of "Stave Four," from Charles Dickens' "A Christmas Carol," entitled "The Last of the Spirits." You can hear a dramatized version of this abridged story by clicking on the Narration for this chapter.

*The Phantom slowly, gravely, silently, approached. When it came near him, 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 garment, which concealed its head, its face, its form, and left nothing of it visible save one outstretched hand. But for this it would have been difficult to detach its figure from the night, and separate it from the darkness by which it was surrounded.*

*He felt that it was tall and stately when it came beside him, and that its mysterious presence filled him with solemn 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. "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 bear you company, and do it with a thankful heart. Will you not speak to me?"*

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

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

*They scarcely seemed to enter the city; for the city rather seemed to spring up about them. But there they were, in the heart of it, among the merchants.*

*The Spirit stopped beside one little knot 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. "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.*

*"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." Bye, bye!"*

*Scrooge was at first inclined to be surprised that the Spirit should attach importance to conversations apparently so trivial; but feeling assured that they must have some hidden purpose, he set himself to consider what it was likely to be. It could scarcely be supposed to have any bearing on the death of Jacob, his old partner, for that was Past, and this Ghost's province was the Future.*

*He looked about in that very place for his own image; but another man stood in his accustomed corner, and though the clock pointed to his usual time of day for being there, he saw no likeness of himself among the multitudes that poured in. It gave him little surprise, however; for he had been revolving in his mind a change of life, and thought and hoped he saw his new-born resolutions carried out in this.*

*They left the busy scene, and went into an obscure part of the town, to a shop where iron, old rags, bottles, bones, and greasy offal, were bought by a grey-haired rascal.*

*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, similarly laden, came in too; and she was closely followed by a man in faded black*

*"Let the charwoman be the first!" cried she who had entered first. "Let the laundress be the second; and let the undertaker's man be the third."*

*"What have you got to sell?" asked Joe.*

*"Half a minute's patience, Joe, and you shall see. Who's the worse for the loss of a few things like these? Not a dead man, I suppose. If he wanted to keep 'em after he was dead, a wicked old screw," pursued the woman, "why wasn't he natural in his lifetime? If he had been, he'd have had somebody to look after him when he was struck with Death, instead of lying gasping out his last there, alone by himself. Open that bundle, old Joe, and let me know the value of it. Speak out plain."*

*Joe went down on his knees, 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. "Bed-curtains! 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 take cold without 'em, I dare say. Ah! you may look through that shirt till your eyes ache; but you won't find a hole in it, nor a threadbare place. It's the best he had, and a fine one too."*

*Scrooge listened to this dialogue in horror.*

*"Spirit!" said Scrooge. "The case of this unhappy man might be my own. My life tends that way, now. Merciful Heaven, what is this!"*

*"Spirit! Let me see some tenderness connected with a death, or this dark chamber, Spirit, will be for ever present to me," said Scrooge.*

*The Ghost conducted him to poor Bob Cratchit's house; and found the mother and the children seated round the fire.*

*Quiet. Very quiet. The noisy little Cratchits were as still as statues, and sat looking up at Peter, who had a book before him.*

*"'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 sewing upon the table, and put her hand up to her face.*

*"The color hurts my eyes," she said.*

*The color? Ah, poor Tiny Tim!*

*"They're better now again," said Cratchit's wife. "It makes them weak by candle-light; and I wouldn't show weak eyes to your father when he comes home, for the world. It must be near his time."*

*"Past it rather," Peter answered, shutting up his book. "But I think he has walked a little slower than he used to, these last few evenings, mother."*

*"I have known him walk with - I have known him walk with Tiny Tim upon his shoulder, very fast indeed. 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, and they all tried who should help him to it most. 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 grieved!"*

*Bob was very cheerful with them, and spoke pleasantly to all the family.*

*"You went today, 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. 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.*

*"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 conveyed him to a dismal, wretched, ruinous churchyard.*

*The Spirit stood among the graves, and pointed down to One.*

*"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.*

*"Men's courses will foreshadow certain ends, to which, if persevered in, they must lead," said Scrooge. "But if the courses be departed from, the ends will change. Say it is thus with what you show me!"*

*The Spirit was as immovable as ever. Scrooge crept toward it, 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, upon his knees.*

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

*"No, Spirit! Oh no, no, Spirit, hear me! I am not the man I was. I will not be the man I must have been but for this. Why show me this, if I am past all hope! Assure me that I yet may change these shadows you have shown me, by an altered life!"*

*For the first time, the kind hand faltered.*

*"I will honor 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 strive within me. I will not shut out the lessons that they teach. Oh, tell me I may sponge away the writing on this stone!"*

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

Old Marley predicted that Scrooge would have visits from "Three Spirits," but he did not tell Ebenezer what would happen after that. Let's find out whether those visits made a difference in Scrooge's life.

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

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