



Tim Cratchit, although frail, is having a splendid time with his family on Christmas Eve. Although none of the Cratchits know it, Ebenezer Scrooge and the Spirit of Christmas Present are watching their every move and hearing their every word.

It becomes clear to Ebenezer, perhaps for the first time, that Tim has significant needs. Despite his inherent cheerfulness, the child is desperately ill. His parents know that, and Bob Cratchit tries to stay near the child as much as he can.

This image, by Arthur Rackman, illustrates a 1915 edition of Dicken's *A Christmas Carol*. The drawing is included in Stave Three, "The Second of the Three Spirits." It shows how much Bob loves his youngest child. It comes just before this part of the text:

... Then Bob proposed:

'A merry Christmas to us all, my dears. God bless us!'

Which all the family re-echoed.

'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 to 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 poor chimney 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 none other of my race,' returned the Ghost, 'will find him here. What then? If he be like to die, he had better do it, and decrease the surplus population.'

Scrooge hung his head to hear his own words quoted by the Spirit, and was overcome with penitence and grief.

'Man,' said the Ghost, 'if man you be in heart, not adamant, forbear that wicked can't until you have discovered what the surplus is, and where it is. 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. O God! to hear the insect on the leaf pronouncing on the too much life among his hungry brothers in the dust!'

Scrooge bent before the Ghost's rebuke, and, trembling, cast his eyes upon the ground.

It isn't easy for Scrooge—whose favorite saying is "Humbug!"—to hear this well-deserved criticism. To his credit, at least he recognizes his own words which he recently used to say "No!" to fund-raisers trying to help the poor.

Tiny Tim will not be the only child-in-need which Scrooge sees on this night, thanks to the Spirit of Christmas

Present.

Credits:

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