



As the Ghost of Christmas Present guides Scrooge to various places, including the home of Bob Cratchit, it seems to Ebenezer that the night is very long. It's so long that the old miser doubts all of their travels are occurring on a single evening, let alone in a single hour.

Near the end of his time with Scrooge, the Spirit of Christmas Present starts to age dramatically. Scrooge wonders if it's possible for spirits to age in this manner?

Then ... very near the time when the second Spirit will leave Scrooge ... the Ghost once again uses Ebenezer's words against him.

This image illustrates the two children—"Want and Ignorance"—about whom the Spirit issues his warning. Created by Sol Eytinge, Jr.—to illustrate an 1868 edition of *A Christmas Carol*, published in Boston by Ticknor and Fields—the wood engraving illustrates the text near the end of Stave Three, "The Second of the Three Spirits."

It was a long night, if it were only a night; but Scrooge had his doubts of this, because the Christmas holidays appeared to be condensed into the space of time they passed together. It was strange, too, that, while Scrooge remained unaltered in his outward form, the Ghost grew older, clearly older. Scrooge had observed this change, but never spoke of it until they left a children's Twelfth-Night party, when, looking at the Spirit as they stood together in an open place, 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.'

'To-night!' cried Scrooge.

'To-night at midnight. Hark! The time is drawing near.'

The chimes were ringing the three-quarters past eleven at that moment. [Pg 106]

'Forgive me if I am not justified in what I ask,' said Scrooge, looking intently at the Spirit's robe, 'but I see something strange, and not belonging to yourself, protruding from your skirts. Is it a foot or a claw?'

'It might be a claw, for the flesh there is upon it,' was the Spirit's sorrowful reply. 'Look here!'

From the foldings of its robe it brought two children, wretched, abject, frightful, hideous, miserable. They knelt down at its feet, and clung upon the outside of its garment.

'O Man! look here! Look, look down here!' exclaimed the Ghost.

They were a boy and girl. Yellow, meagre, ragged, scowling, wolfish, but prostrate, too, in their humility. Where graceful youth should have filled their features out, and touched them with its freshest tints, a stale and shrivelled hand, like that of age, had pinched and twisted them, and pulled them into shreds. Where angels might have sat enthroned, devils lurked, and glared out menacing. No change, no degradation, no perversion of humanity in any grade, through all the mysteries of wonderful creation, has monsters half so horrible and dread.

Scrooge started back, appalled. Having them shown to him in this way, he tried to say they were fine children, but the words choked themselves, rather than be parties to a lie of such enormous magnitude.

'Spirit! are they yours?' Scrooge could say no more.

'They are Man's,' said the Spirit, looking down upon them. 'And they cling to me, appealing from their fathers. This boy is Ignorance. This girl is Want. Beware of them both, and all of their degree, but most of all beware this boy, for on his brow I see that written which is Doom, unless the writing be erased. Deny it!' cried the Spirit, stretching out his hand towards the city. 'Slander those who tell it ye! Admit it for your factious purposes, and make it worse! And bide the end!'

'Have they no refuge or resource?' cried Scrooge.

'Are there no prisons?' said the Spirit, turning on him for the last time with his own words. 'Are there no workhouses?'

The bell struck Twelve.

Once the bell struck Twelve, the Spirit of Christmas Present leaves Scrooge.

Credits:

Image entitled "Want and Ignorance," scanned from Dickens, Charles. "A Christmas Carol — A Ghost Story of Christmas." Il. Sol Eytinge, Jr. Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1868. The illustration, based on a wood engraving by Solomon Eytinge, Jr. (1833-1905), appears at [page 82 of the referenced work](#).

The image was scanned and placed online by Philip V. Allingham via Victorian Web.

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