



The Ghost of Christmas Yet to Be continues his guided tour, with Ebenezer Scrooge, stopping at a place where people buy and sell secondhand goods. Three people (two women and a man) are trying to sell Joe some things they've taken from a dead man's home.

It's a sad scene. The sellers are commenting on the dead man among themselves. They have unkind things to say about the person who was, apparently, very unkind to others during his lifetime.

What is left at the end of such a man's life? Was no one there to look after him, during his final hours? Does anyone care that he has died?

The sellers seem to think he brought on a lonely end himself. They discuss the man, without naming him, as Scrooge begins to realize they could be talking about someone like him.

Ebenezer Scrooge, the lonely old miser who only cares about himself and his money, is learning the lessons which the three Spirits have tried to teach him.

This image, by Arthur Rackman, illustrates the text of a 1915 edition of *A Christmas Carol* (printed in Britain and published by J.B. Lippincott Company Philadelphia and New York). Its caption is:

*"What do you call this?" said Joe. "Bed-curtains."*

It illustrates the following part of the story which appears in Stave Four, "The Last of the Spirits."

*They left the busy scene, and went into an obscure part of the town, where Scrooge had never penetrated before, although he recognised its situation and its bad reputation. The ways were foul and narrow; the shop and houses wretched; the people half naked, drunken, slipshod, ugly. Alleys and archways, like so many cesspools, disgorged their offences of smell and dirt, and life upon the straggling streets; and the whole quarter reeked with crime, with filth, and misery.*

*Far in this den of infamous resort, there was a low-browed, beetling shop, below a penthouse roof, where iron, old rags, bottles, bones, and greasy offal were bought. Upon the floor within were piled up heaps of rusty keys, nails, chains, hinges, files, scales, weights, and refuse iron of all kinds. Secrets that few would like to scrutinise were bred and hidden in mountains of unseemly rags, masses of corrupted fat, and sepulchres of bones. Sitting in among the wares he dealt in, by a charcoal stove made of old bricks, was a grey-haired rascal, nearly seventy years of age, who had screened himself from the cold air without by a frouzy curtaining of miscellaneous tatters hung upon a line and smoked his pipe in all the luxury of calm retirement.*

*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, who was no less startled by the sight of them than they had been upon the recognition of each other. After a short period of blank astonishment, in which the old man with the pipe had joined them, they all three burst into a laugh.*

*'Let the charwoman alone to be the first!' cried she who had entered first. 'Let the laundress alone to be the second; and let the undertaker's man alone to be the third. Look here, old Joe, here's a chance! If we haven't all three met here without meaning it!'*

*'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.'*

*'It's the truest word that ever was spoke,' said Mrs. Dilber. 'It's a judgment on him.'*

*'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.'*

*'I hope he didn't die of anything catching? Eh?' said old Joe, stopping in his work, and looking up.*

*'Scrooge listened to this dialogue in horror. As they sat grouped about their spoil, in the scanty light afforded by the old man's lamp, he viewed them with a detestation and disgust which could hardly have been greater, though they had been obscene demons marketing the corpse itself.'*

*'Ha, ha!' laughed the same woman when old Joe producing a flannel bag with money in it, told out their several gains upon the ground. 'This is the end of it, you see! He frightened every one away from him when he was alive, to profit us when he was dead! Ha, ha, ha!'*

*'Spirit!' said Scrooge, shuddering from head to foot. 'I see, I see. The case of this unhappy man might be my own. My life tends that way now. Merciful heaven, what is this?'*

*He recoiled in terror, for the scene had changed, and now he almost touched a bed—a bare, uncurtained bed—on which, beneath a ragged sheet, there lay a something covered up, which, though it was dumb, announced itself in awful language.*

*The room was very dark, too dark to be observed with any accuracy, though Scrooge glanced round it in obedience to a secret impulse, anxious to know what kind of room it was. A pale light, rising in the outer air, fell straight upon the bed; and on it, plundered and bereft, unwatched, unwept, uncared for, was the body of this man. (Excerpts from the 1915 edition of *A Christmas Carol*, described above, between pages 117-123.)*

Now he has a chance to identify the person who has died, but Scrooge is too afraid to pull back the sheet. He pleads with the Ghost of Christmas Yet to Be to leave the dead man's room.

Despite his unwillingness to identify the man who has died, the phantom will force him to do it. But ... not yet. And ... not here.

Credits:

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