

Chapter 4

The second spirit



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The second spirit

Scrooge woke up, back in bed,
as a clock struck one. He sat up
nervously but nothing happened.
He flung back his curtains. No
one was there.



Finally, Scrooge got up and went into the next room. He could hardly recognize it. And right in the middle sat the second spirit.

Come in and know me better! I am the Ghost of Christmas Present.



Scrooge followed the ghost, through streets full of people preparing for Christmas. Finally, they came to Bob Cratchit's house, where Mrs. Cratchit was getting the Christmas dinner ready.



"Here's father!" cried the two youngest, as Bob came in, carrying his invalid son.



Soon, everyone was enjoying the feast. It was a small meal for such a large family but no one would have dreamed of saying so.



"Spirit," said Scrooge suddenly, "tell me if Tiny Tim will live."

"I see an empty seat," said the ghost. "If things stay as they are, he will die."



Scrooge felt terrible, but then he heard his name.

"To Mr. Scrooge, who provided our feast!" cried Bob.

"Provided our feast, indeed!" snorted his wife. "I wish he was here. I'd give him a piece of my mind to feast upon."



By now, it was getting dark. The ghost led Scrooge back outside, into the bustling streets. They flew to quieter, emptier places... but everywhere Scrooge saw people full of Christmas spirit.

In the midst of the gloom,
Scrooge heard a hearty laugh. It
was his nephew Fred. They had
arrived in the middle of Fred's
Christmas dinner party.



"I feel sorry for Scrooge," said Fred. "Now, how about a game of blind man's buff?"

One game followed another. Scrooge grew so excited, he joined in, though no one could see or hear him.



Scrooge wanted to stay until the last guest left, but the ghost said no. "Just one more game then," Scrooge pleaded. "It's a new one called 'Yes and No'."

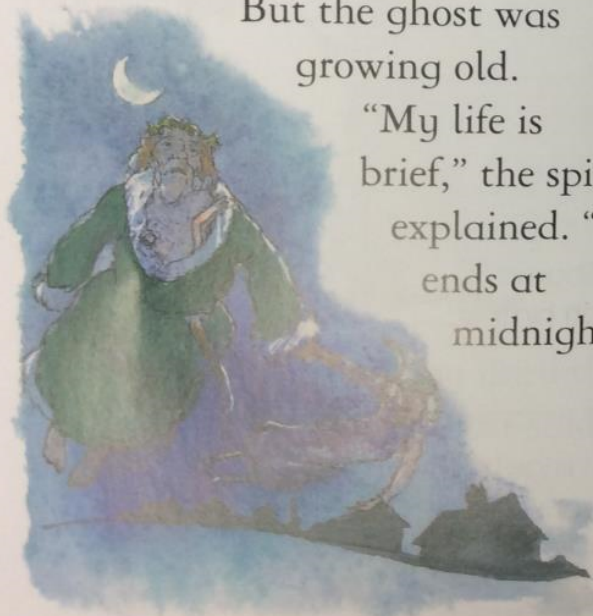


“Scrooge it is!” cried Fred. “And I wish him a Merry Christmas, whatever he is.”

Before Scrooge could wish Fred the same, the ghost had whisked him away. They went all over the world, finding rejoicing and hope.

But the ghost was growing old.

“My life is brief,” the spirit explained. “It ends at midnight.”



Already the clock was chiming three quarters past eleven.

“Forgive me for asking,” said Scrooge, “but is something hidden in your robes?”

“Look,” the ghost replied, revealing two miserable children. “The boy is Ignorance, the girl is Want. Beware of them both, but especially the boy!”



"Have they nowhere to go?"
asked Scrooge.

"Are there no prisons? No
workhouses?" the spirit replied,
using Scrooge's own words.


The clock struck twelve and the
spirit vanished. As the last chime
died away, Scrooge saw a hooded
phantom coming closer.



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Chapter 5

The last spirit



Chapter 5

The last spirit



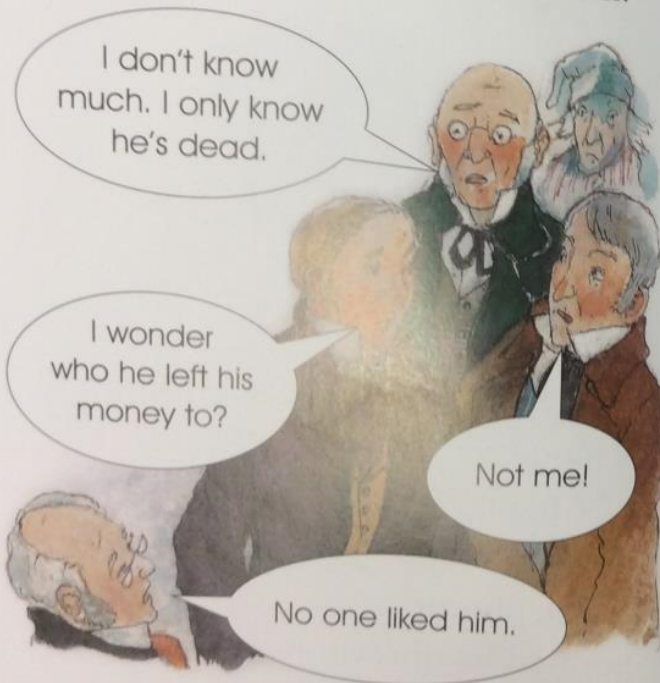
The phantom floated silently up to Scrooge.

“Are you the Ghost of Christmas Yet To Come?” he asked.

The phantom said nothing, but pointed its ghostly hand.

"Ghost of the future," cried Scrooge, "I fear you more than any other, but I shall go with you."

Staying silent, the ghost glided off. As Scrooge followed, a city seemed to spring up around them.



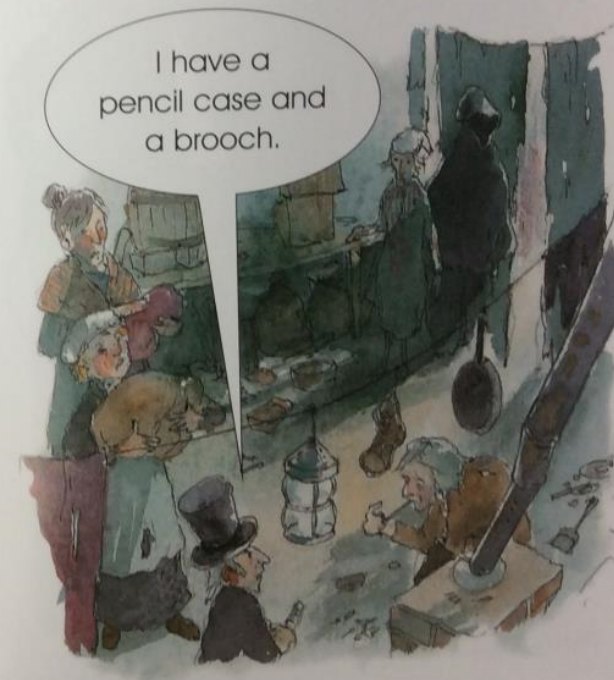
I don't know much. I only know he's dead.

I wonder who he left his money to?

Not me!

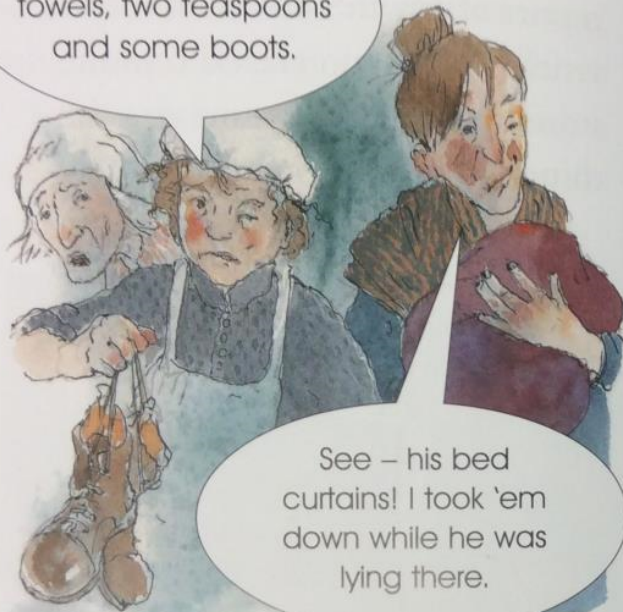
No one liked him.

They left the crowds and went to a part of town Scrooge had never visited. As they entered a junk store, three people came in with things to sell.



I have a pencil case and a brooch.

I've sheets,
towels, two teaspoons
and some boots.



See - his bed
curtains! I took 'em
down while he was
lying there.

Scrooge was horrified. These things had been stolen from a dead man's house.

"Spirit, I see!" he cried. "This poor man might be me."

As he spoke, the scene changed. Now, they were in a bedroom. A dead man lay on the bed, alone but for a cat and some rats. The phantom pointed to the man's face, but Scrooge couldn't look.

"Is no one moved by this man's death?" he begged.



The phantom spread out his dark robe for a second. When he drew it back, Scrooge saw a room where a man and wife were talking.

"We owe him so much money," the woman said. "It would take a miracle to soften his heart."

"It's past softening," replied her husband, cheerfully. "He's dead!"



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"But they are happy!" said Scrooge. "Let me see some sorrow for a death, spirit, please."

The phantom took him to the Cratchits' house. Mrs. Cratchit and her children were by the fire. An air of sadness hung over them.



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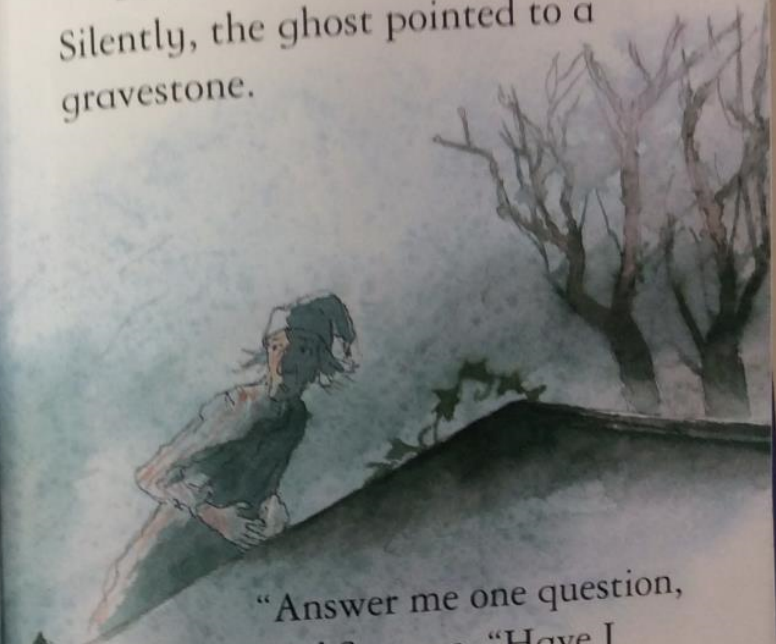
As Scrooge watched them, he had the feeling that the phantom was about to leave.

"Before you go, tell me, who was the man on the bed?" he begged.



The phantom said nothing but took Scrooge to a churchyard.

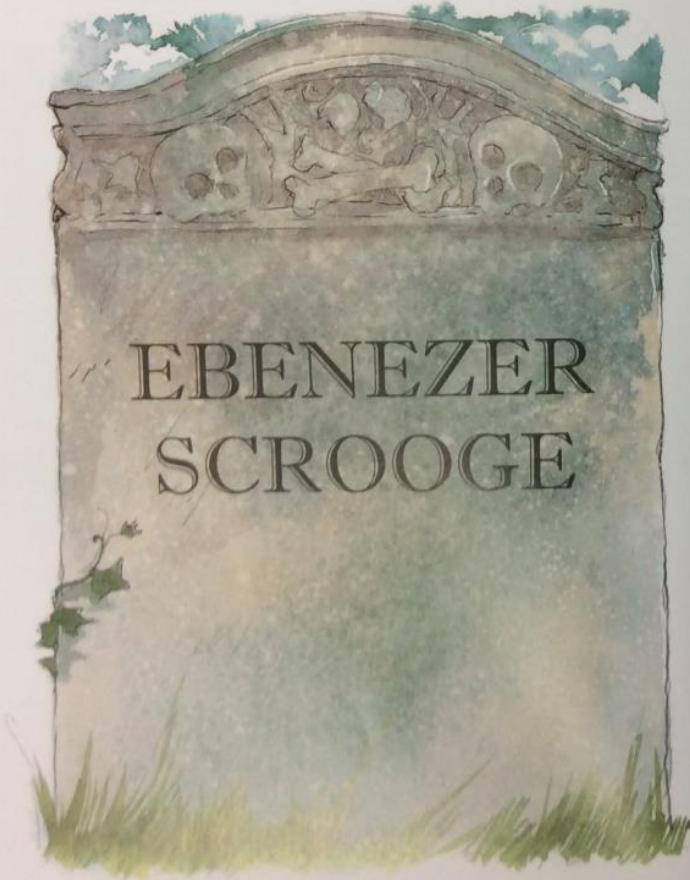
"He lies here?" said Scrooge. Silently, the ghost pointed to a gravestone.

A watercolor illustration of Scrooge, depicted as a thin, skeletal figure with a dark, hooded robe, standing on a grassy slope in a churchyard. He is looking towards a gravestone. In the background, there are bare trees and a misty atmosphere. The page number '47' is printed at the bottom center.

"Answer me one question, then," asked Scrooge. "Have I seen what will happen or what might happen?"

Still the ghost remained silent.

Trembling all over, Scrooge crept up to the gravestone and read the name upon it.



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With a terrible cry, Scrooge grabbed the ghost's robe. "No, spirit. Oh no!"

But the phantom simply pointed to Scrooge and back to the grave.

"I'm not the man I was," Scrooge cried. "Let me change."




Scrooge closed his eyes to pray. When he opened them again, the phantom had become his bedpost.

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Chapter 6

Merry Christmas!



Chapter 6

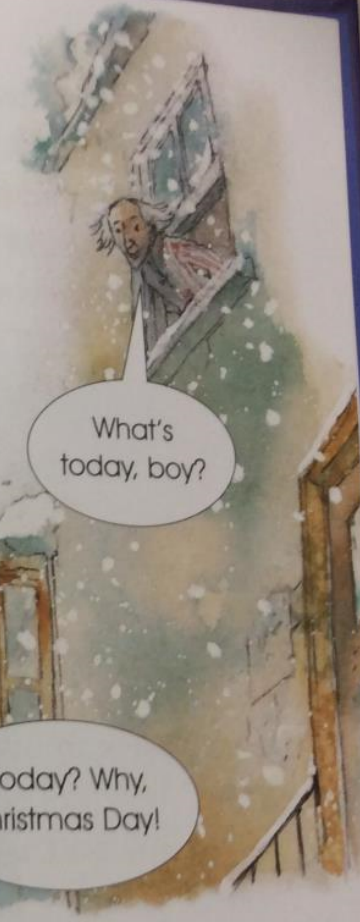
Merry Christmas!



He was back in his own bed.

“Ha!” he laughed. “I’m as light as a feather, as merry as a school boy. Thank you, Marley! From now on, I’ll keep Christmas in my heart all year round.”

“I don’t know what day it is. I don’t know what month it is! I don’t care,” he babbled. Just then, the church bells rang out. Scrooge raced to his window.



What's today, boy?

Today? Why, Christmas Day!

The spirits had done all their work in one night.

Scrooge chuckled and sent the boy off to buy the butcher's prize turkey. "I'll send it to Bob Cratchit," he said to himself and rubbed his hands with glee. "It's twice the size of Tiny Tim!"



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When the boy returned with the turkey, Scrooge gasped. The bird was huge. "Will you deliver it for me?" he asked, chuckling some more. "You'll need a cab."



And he paid the boy, found a cab and went back inside, still chuckling. He chuckled until the tears rolled down his cheeks.

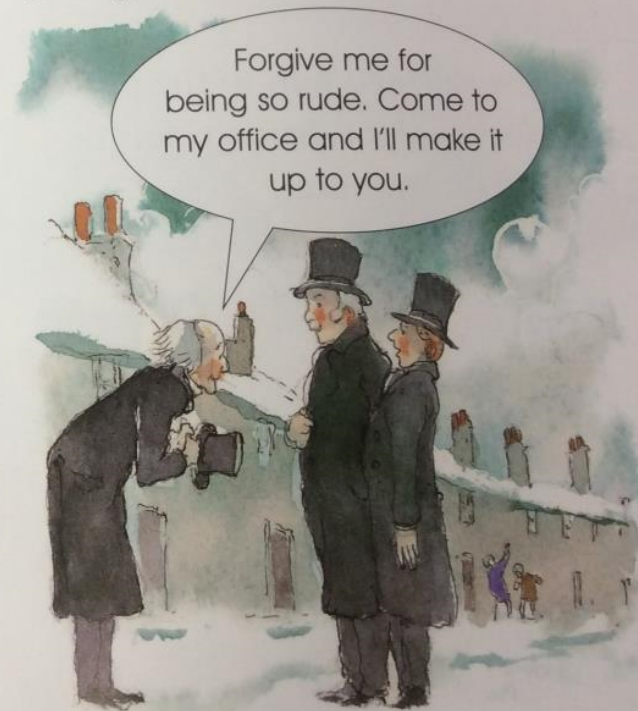
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At last, he was dressed in his best and outside. He looked so cheerful that several people said, "Morning sir! Merry Christmas!" Scrooge thought those the most beautiful words he had ever heard.



He hadn't gone far when he met the men who had been collecting for the poor the day before.

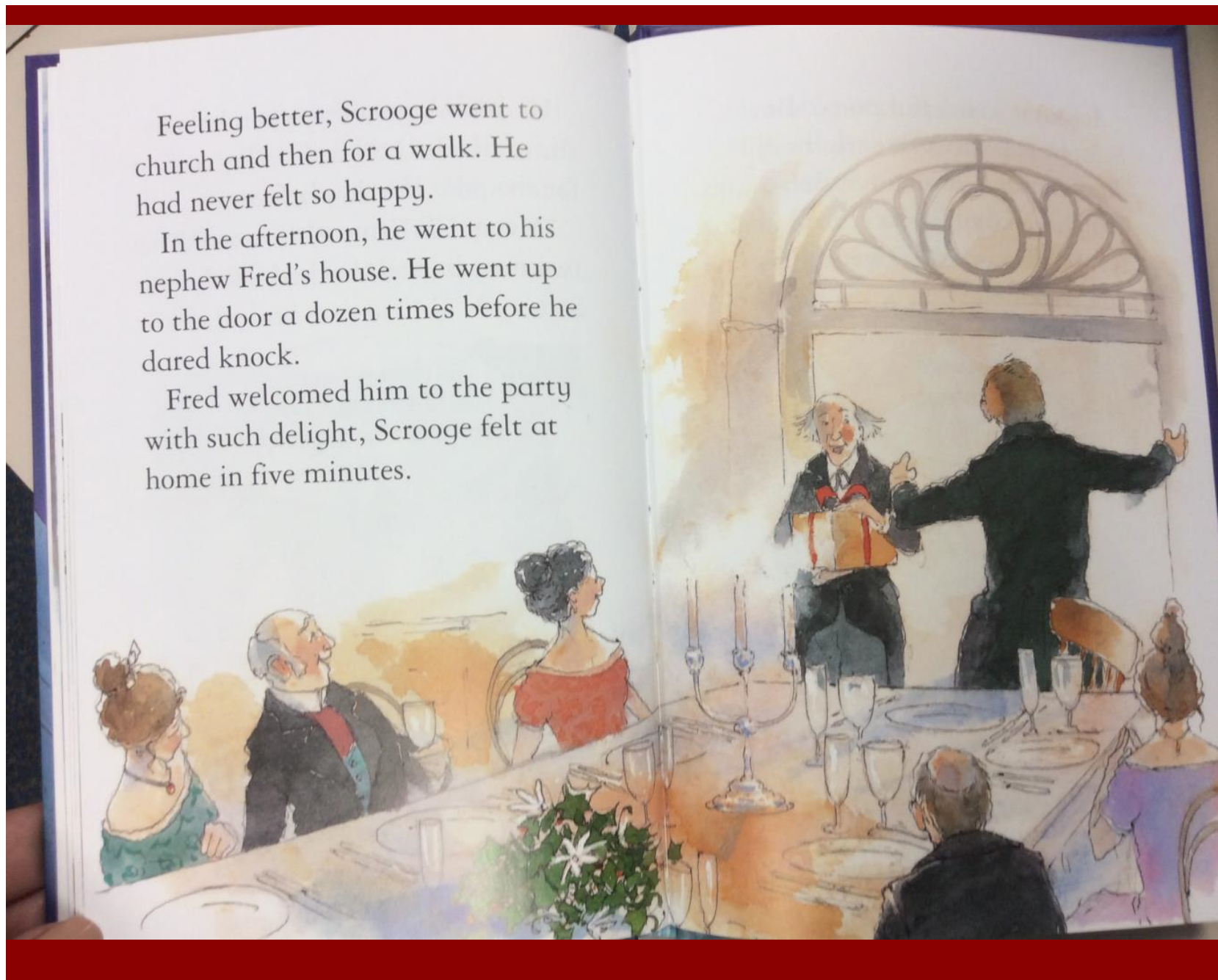
"Merry Christmas!" he cried. The two men looked shocked. Was this Scrooge?



Feeling better, Scrooge went to church and then for a walk. He had never felt so happy.

In the afternoon, he went to his nephew Fred's house. He went up to the door a dozen times before he dared knock.

Fred welcomed him to the party with such delight, Scrooge felt at home in five minutes.



It was a wonderful party. But Scrooge was at work early next day. He wanted to catch Bob Cratchit coming in late. And he did. Bob was nearly twenty minutes late.



Scrooge pretended to be furious. "I'm not going to stand for it any longer! Step into my office."

"It's only once a year," said Bob. "I'll tell you what I'm going to do," Scrooge went on, poking him in the ribs, "I'm going to raise your salary. Merry Christmas, Bob! Now, put some more coal on the fire before you pick up your quill!"



Scrooge promised to take care of Bob and his family, and he was as good as his word. To Tiny Tim – who did not die – he was a second father. Not only that, he became a good friend to all who lived in his town.

Some people laughed to see the change in him. Scrooge just let them laugh. He didn't care. He knew laughing was good for them and his own heart laughed with them.



He never saw the spirits again but it was always said of him that he knew how to have a jolly Christmas. May that be true of all of us. And so, in the words of Tiny Tim, "God bless us, every one!"

