

A Christmas Carol

Ebenezer Scrooge is a very mean old man, who doesn't show any kindness to other people at any time, even at Christmas. One Christmas he is visited by a number of ghosts, who show him the past, the present and the future in turn. In this passage, he is visiting the past. The ghost has already shown Scrooge himself as a child, and now Scrooge sees himself as a young man, working as an apprentice (a sort of trainee) for Mr. Fezziwig. Mr. Fezziwig had a very generous approach to Christmas, making it full of fun, as you will see.

Some small passages have been cut out, where you see [].*

1 Old Fezziwig laid down his pen, and looked up at the clock, which pointed to the hour of
2 seven. He rubbed his hands; adjusted his capacious waistcoat; laughed all over himself,
3 from his shoes to his organ of benevolence¹; and called out in a comfortable, oily, rich, fat,
4 jovial voice:

5 'You ho, there! Ebenezer! Dick!'

6 Scrooge's former self, now grown a young man, came briskly in, accompanied by his
7 fellow-'prentice.

8 'Dick Wilkins, to be sure!' said Scrooge to the Ghost. 'Bless me, yes. There he is. He
9 was very much attached to me, was Dick. Poor Dick! Dear, dear!'

10 'Yo ho, my boys!' said Fezziwig. 'No more work to-night. Christmas-eve, Dick.
11 Christmas, Ebenezer! Let's have the shutters up,' cried old Fezziwig, with a sharp clap of
12 his hands, 'before a man can say, Jack Robinson!'

13 You wouldn't believe how those two fellows went at it! They charged into the street with
14 the shutters – one, two, three – had 'em up in their places – four, five six – barred 'em and
15 pinned 'em – seven eight, nine – and came back before you could have got to twelve,
16 panting like race-horses.

17 'Hilli-ho!' cried old Fezziwig, skipping down from the high desk, with wonderful agility.
18 'Clear away, my lads, and let's have lots of room here! Hilli-ho, Dick! Chirrup, Ebenezer!'

19 Clear away! There was nothing they wouldn't have cleared away, or couldn't have
20 cleared away, with old Fezziwig looking on. It was done in a minute. Every movable was
21 packed off, as if it were dismissed from public life for ever-more; the floor was swept and
22 watered, the lamps were trimmed, fuel was heaped upon the fire; and the warehouse was as
23 snug, and warm, and dry, and bright a ball-room, as you would desire to see upon a winter.

¹ 'organ of benevolence' = brain. i.e. he laughed from his head to his feet.

24 In came a fiddler² with a music-book, and went up to the lofty desk, and made an
 25 orchestra of it, and tuned like fifty stomach-aches. In came Mrs Fezziwig, one vast
 26 substantial smile. In came the three Miss Fezziwigs, beaming and loveable. In came the six
 27 young followers whose hearts they broke. In came all the young men and women employed
 28 in the business. In came the housemaid, with her cousin the baker. In came the cook, with
 29 her brother's particular friend, the milkman. In came the boy from over the way [*]. In they
 30 all came, one after another; some shyly, some boldly, some gracefully, some awkwardly,
 31 some pushing, some pulling; in they all came, anyhow and everyhow. Away they all went,
 32 twenty couples at once, hands half round and back again the other way; down the middle
 33 and up again; round and round in various stages of affectionate grouping [*]. Old Fezziwig,
 34 clapping his hands to stop the dance, cried out, 'Well done!' and the fiddler plunged his hot
 35 face into a pot of porter³, especially provided for that purpose. But, scorning rest upon his
 36 reappearance, he instantly began again, though there were no dancers yet, as if the other
 37 fiddler had been carried home, exhausted, on a shutter, and he were a bran-new man
 38 resolved to beat him out of sight, or perish.

39 There were more dances, and there were forfeits⁴, and more dances, and there was
 40 cake, and there was negus⁵, and there was a great piece of Cold Roast, and there was a
 41 great piece of Cold Boiled, and there were mince-pies, and plenty of beer. But the great
 42 effect of the evening came after the Roast and Boiled, when the fiddler (an artful dog, mind!
 43 The sort of man who knew his business better than you or I could have told it him!) struck up
 44 'Sir Roger de Coverley.'⁶ Then old Fezziwig stood out to dance with Mrs. Fezziwig. [*] A
 45 positive light appeared to issue from Fezziwig's calves. They shone in every part of the
 46 dance like moons. You couldn't have predicted, at any given time, what would become of
 47 them next. And when old Fezziwig and Mrs. Fezziwig had gone through all the dance;
 48 advance and retire, both hands to your partner, bow and curtsy, cork-screw, thread-the-
 49 needle, and back again to your place; Fezziwig 'cut' – cut do deftly, that he appeared to wink
 50 with his legs, and came upon his legs again without a stagger.

51 When the clock struck eleven, this domestic ball broke up. Mr. and Mrs. Fezziwig took
 52 their stations, one on either side of the door, and, shaking hands with every person
 53 individually as he or she went out, wished him or her a Merry Christmas. When everybody
 54 had retired, but the two 'prentices, they did the same to them; and thus the cheerful voices
 55 died away, and the lads were left to their beds; which were under a counter in the back-
 56 shop.

² Fiddle = violin, so fiddler = violinist.

³ A big mug of wine

⁴ A party game popular in the 19th century

⁵ Wine, mixed with hot water, sugar, and spices

⁶ A popular tune for dancing