



Ignorance and want

Scrooge has been taken by the Spirit of Christmas Present to the sea, to a lighthouse, then to his nephew's house where the old man has begun to appreciate the family Christmas party. Finally, two mysterious characters are introduced.

Charles Dickens
A Christmas Carol
(1843)

Stave III

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 chimes¹ were ringing the three quarters past eleven at that moment.

'Forgive me if I am not justified in what I ask,' said Scrooge, looking intently at the Spirit's robe², 'but I see something strange, and not belonging to yourself, protruding from your skirts. Is it a foot or a claw³?''

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

From the foldings⁴ of its robe, it brought two children; wretched, abject, frightful, hideous⁴, miserable. They knelt down⁵ at its feet, and clung⁵ upon the outside of its garment.

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

They were a boy and a girl. Yellow, meagre, ragged, scowling, wolfish⁶; but prostrate, too, in their humility. Where graceful youth should have filled their features out, and touched them with its freshest tints⁷, a stale and shrivelled hand⁸, like that of age, had pinched, and twisted them⁹, and pulled them into shreds¹⁰. Where angels might have sat enthroned¹¹, devils lurked¹², 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 back¹³, appalled. Having them shown to him in this way, he tried to say they were fine children, but the words choked¹⁴ 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 Want¹⁵. Beware them¹⁶ both, and all of their degree, but most of all beware this boy, for on his brow I see that written which is Doom¹⁷, unless the writing be erased¹⁸. Deny it!' cried the Spirit, stretching out its hand towards the city. 'Slander¹⁹ those who tell it ye! Admit it for your factious purposes, and make it worse! And abide²⁰ 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.

Scrooge looked about him for the Ghost, and saw it not. As the last stroke ceased to vibrate, he remembered the prediction of old Jacob Marley, and lifting up his eyes, beheld a solemn Phantom, draped and hooded²¹, coming, like a mist along the ground, towards him.

- 1 chimes. Campanie.
- 2 robe. Veste lunga.
- 3 claw. Artiglio.
- 4 abject, frightful, hideous. Miserabili, spaventosi, infelici.
- 5 clung. Si aggrapparono.
- 6 scowling, wolfish. Imbronciati, selvaggi.
- 7 tints. Tinte.
- 8 stale ... hand. Mano vecchia e grinzosa.
- 9 had pinched ... them. Li aveva schiacciati e li aveva fatti soffrire.
- 10 shreds. Brandelli.
- 11 sat enthroned. Stare seduti in trono.
- 12 lurked. Stavano in agguato.
- 13 started back. Fece un balzo all'indietro.
- 14 choked. Soffocarono.
- 15 Want. Miseria.
- 16 Beware them. Guardati da loro.
- 17 Doom. Rovina.
- 18 erased. Cancellata.
- 19 Slander. Diffama.
- 20 abide. Attendi.
- 21 hooded. Incappucciato.

**LITERARY COMPETENCE****> VOCABULARY****1 READ the text and match the highlighted words with their meaning.**

- | | | | |
|---|--|---|-------------------------------|
| 1 | parts that are bent over upon themselves | 4 | shocked |
| 2 | remain attached | 5 | get down on their knees |
| 3 | begging | 6 | relating to the outside |

> COMPETENCE: READING AND UNDERSTANDING A TEXT**2 READ the text again and complete the sentences below.**

- 1 The night was
- 2 Scrooge had observed that while he remained unaltered, the Ghost grew and its hair was
- 3 The Ghost's life on earth was and it would be over at
- 4 Scrooge could see something, coming out of the
- 5 Two appeared from the foldings of the robe: they were, frightful and
- 6 They down at its feet and upon the garment.
- 7 They were a and a
- 8 Scrooge was by their look.
- 9 He tried to say they were but these words in his throat.
- 10 The Spirit said these two creatures belonged to
- 11 The boy was and the girl was
- 12 The Ghost warned Scrooge to of them.
- 13 Scrooge remembered the of old Marley when he saw a solemn, draped and hooded, appearing from the mist.

> COMPETENCE: ANALYSING AND INTERPRETING A TEXT**3 DESCRIBE the main features of the setting. What is it like?****4 IDENTIFY the narrator and say whose point of view you share as a reader.****5 STUDY the way the atmosphere of the passage has been built up.**

- 1 Does the author make use of objective elements or subjective data?
- 2 List the most important repetitions in the extract. What atmosphere do they create?
- 3 Where is the climax of this passage?

6 FOCUS on the two children.

- 1 What sort of creatures are they?
- 2 How do you react to these two figures?
- 3 What is the eccentricity of these characters?
- 4 What are they symbols of?

7 DEFINE the theme of the text.