

BELINDA. Here's father coming! Hide, Martha, hide!

MARTHA. (*Who's not yet had the chance to sit down.*) Where?

(*Quickly, they settle on beneath the table. No sooner is she hidden then CRATCHIT enters with CHARLEY as TINY TIM on his shoulder. TIM carries a crutch.*)

CRATCHIT. Merry Christmas, my dear!

(*Putting TIM into PETER's arms in order that he may take off his comforter, which he hangs on the coatrack.*)

Merry Christmas, Peter.

PETER. Merry Christmas, father!

CRATCHIT. (*Noticing MARTHA's absence.*) Why, where's our Martha?

BETSEY. Not coming.

CRATCHIT. Not coming? Not coming on Christmas Day?

BETSEY. She had so much work at the milliner's. They sent someone 'round to tell the families that all the girls would be staying.

CRATCHIT. (*Very much let down.*) Oh. Well, if she feels she must stay, we'll abide by her good judgment. But it hardly seems fair...to work on Christmas Day.

(*A giggle is heard beneath the table. CRATCHIT goes to the table just as MARTHA pops her head out, then emerges fully and embraces him.*)

MARTHA. I'm here, father! I can't stand to see you disappointed, even for a joke!

CRATCHIT. Well, then, we're all together after all! Then it *will* be a merry Christmas.

BETSEY. Peter, take Tim off to the wash-house. The goose will be ready before we know it.

PETER. (*Who still has TIM on his shoulder.*) Right, ma'am. All right, Timothy. This way.

(*They exit through the up-right door.*)

BETSEY. And tend to the pudding, Belinda. It mustn't be overdone.

BELINDA. (*Sensing the gravity of this possibility.*) What if it were!

(*She and MARTHA exit up right, determined to save the pudding.*)

BETSEY. (*They cross to the fireplace and sit. To BOB.*) And how did Tim behave at church?

CRATCHIT. As good as gold, and better. Somehow, he gets thoughtful, sitting by himself so much and he thinks the strangest things you ever heard. He told me, coming home, that he hoped the people saw him in church so they might remember upon Christmas Day who made lame beggars walk and blind men see.

(*A pause.*)

Then, I trotted us 'round to the shop windows, where he gazed for the longest time at the toys. Sensing his spirits beginning to droop, I galloped straight away to Cornhill Street, where, in honor of its being Christmas, we went down the slide twenty times.

(*TINY TIM and MARTHA enter.*)

TINY TIM. Twenty-five!

CRATCHIT. (*Taking TIM on his lap.*) Right you are, Tim. Twenty-five!

(*Another pause.*)

MARTHA. You haven't made the punch yet, father. It can't be Christmas without your special punch.

CRATCHIT. (*Brightening.*) That's a fact. What could I be thinking to forget that?

(*Taking a decanter from the mantel, he crosses to the table, where MARTHA is placing the mugs and pitcher.*)

Here's Christmas dinner practically on the table, and not a drop of Bob Cratchit's deluxe punch in evidence. Easily remedied!

(He adds some of the decanter's contents into the pitcher and stirs.)

PETER. Here we are, perfectly cleaned, and wonderfully starved.

BETSEY. And the goose is all but calling to be brought to the table. Martha, help your father with the punch.

(She exits, BELINDA following her to the door to stand guard.)

CRATCHIT. No need, no need. All done and in a trice.

(MARTHA helps him distribute the mugs around the table.)

PETER. Remarkable time, father.

CRATCHIT. Let no man say that old Bob Cratchit can't mix his Christmas punch with the swiftest of 'em.

BELINDA. Here's the goose!

(She exits. MRS. CRATCHIT enters proudly bearing a small roast goose on its tray. BELINDA enters again, carrying the pudding. "Ooohs" and "Ahhhs" from the family; universal admiration for both bird and pudding.)

PETER. Bravo! A glorious bird!

(They gather around the table.)

CRATCHIT. Never has there been such a bird! A truly sumptuous-looking fowl, Mrs. C.

SCROOGE. *(To CHRISTMAS PRESENT.)* So small a goose for so large a family.

CRATCHIT. And a pudding! Have you ever seen such a one? I ask you, Martha.

MARTHA. The girls at the shop would be ashamed to display theirs anywhere in the vicinity.

BELINDA. Hear, hear!

TINY TIM. They'd not be seen.

CRATCHIT. And you, Master Peter? Have you ever set eyes upon the mortal pudding which could equal this wonder?

PETER. In all my years as a Christmas Pudding observer, I've never seen a finer.

CRATCHIT. And that's a high compliment, indeed. Tell me a higher one, and I'll use it. Mrs. C., as for myself, I think that it is your greatest success since our marriage.

BETSEY. Well, it's a great weight off my mind. I don't mind confessing I had my doubts about the quantity of flour.

MARTHA. Never fear, mother. It's perfect.

CRATCHIT. (*Tapping his mug with a spoon.*) Now, before plunging into this splendid feast, I'd like to propose a health.

(*He raises his mug; THE OTHERS do the same.*)

A merry Christmas to us all, my dears. God bless us.

TINY TIM. God bless us, every one.

SCROOGE. (*With an interest he's never felt before.*) Spirit, tell me if Tiny Tim will live.

GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PRESENT. I see a vacant seat in the chimney corner, and a crutch without an owner, carefully preserved. If these shadows remain unaltered by the future, the child will die.

SCROOGE. Kind spirit, say he will be spared.

GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PRESENT. If these shadows remain unaltered by the future, none other of my race will find him here.

(*Turning on SCROOGE.*)

What of it? If he be like to die, he had better do it, and decrease the surplus population. Man, if man you be, will you decide what men shall live and what men shall die? In the sight of heaven, it might be that you are less fit to live than this poor family's child.

SCROOGE. It may be, Spirit. It may be.