A Christmas Carol Continuation

by geminiangel

Summary

An epilogue for my favorite story/book/play/movie...

PREFACE

I have endeavored in this little tale to reinforce the idea first put forth by Charles Dickens in my favorite book, story, movie, etc. Where he wished that the idea he put forward would haunt his readers’ houses pleasantly, I wish only that this piece not be haunted by mediocrity. This being said, I have borrowed characters from the many incarnations of his work and his own characters temporarily and will return them unhurt to his spirit.

His faithful follower,

GeminiAngel

Notes

CHARACTERS – I have elected to add a few names and characters to the list as characters not required by Dickens are required here.

Bob Cratchit, clerk to Ebenezer Scrooge.
Peter Cratchit, a son of the preceding.
Tim Cratchit ("Tiny Tim"), a cripple, youngest son of Bob Cratchit.
Fred Thomas, Scrooge's nephew.
Gwyn, Fred's wife
Ghost of Jacob Marley, a specter of Scrooge's former partner in business.
Ebenezer Scrooge, the former grasping, covetous old man, the surviving partner of the firm of Scrooge and Marley.
Belle, a comely matron, an old sweetheart of Scrooge's.
Edward, Belle’s husband.
David, John, Mary, Katherine and William, children of Belle and Edward.
STAVE ONE – Marley’s Ghost

Scrooge was dead. He had enjoyed Christmas Eve with his nephew Fred and his lovely wife. They had celebrated into the late hour when Scrooge retired to his bedchamber, never to rise again. Where once the passing would have passed with little fanfare or sorrow, the loss of Scrooge would been keenly felt by his nephew and his wife, their family, Bob Cratchit, his family and most especially by Bob’s young son, Tiny Tim.

For his part, Scrooge didn’t realize at first that he was dead. He rose as was his custom when the church bells tolled the morning. The Cratchits were due for Christmas feast and he had much to do before their arrival. It was only upon his hand going through the bed curtains that he glanced behind to see his body still posed as if in sleep.

It was the sound of chains that drew him forward from the bed. It was the same face, the one he had seen in memory may a night, as he offered up prayers for the soul of his departed partner, Jacob Marley. He was the same, exactly the same as he had appeared those long years ago. Yet, there was something different. It was the chain, the one that wound about him. It was still long but appeared to have less weight. There were fewer cash-boxes, padlocks and ledgers.

“Marley,” said Scrooge. “Have you come for me, then? Have not my endeavors earned mine reprieve?”

The face of Marley’s ghost twisted into its best imitation of a smile. “I do come for you, my friend. You have earned your reprieve and to some extent mine. It was your prayers that lightened the burden I must carry for eternity; but you, you will have no chain. It has been ordained that you will not be condemned to walk the earth as I.”

“Is there no release for you, old friend?”

“It is as it will be.” Marley’s ghost said dispassionately; he had long become resigned to his fate. “It is for your benefit that I have come.”

“Surely, it is too late to benefit,” Scrooge gestured towards the bed where his body lay.

“You are being given a chance, a second chance,” Marley moaned. “You have done much good these last years. Imagine all the good that might have been done, had your redemption not been required; but your humanity shared these long, long years.”

“I learned my lesson too late, I fear.”

“Would that you have never needed to learn, but I digress. Tonight, you will be given the chance to see how life might have gone; had you been who you were meant to be all along.”

“Marley, I do not understand.”
“You will, your spirit is chained here, bound by sorrow and regret.” Marley’s tone was somewhat ominous. “Three spirits shall take you forth where you will walk among the life you could have lead. It shall be your choice.”

“My choice? Marley, I don’t understand. Speak to me, what is my choice? Marley, Marley.” Scrooge’s spirit called in vain as his partner’s ghost faded from his visage. Marley was gone.

STAVE TWO – The first visitation

Scrooge looked around his chamber and puzzled. What could possibly be the benefit of visitations now? His soul had already departed his body. Was he not ready to face judgment now? As his ghost pondered, he heard the church bells chime again. It was while they were chiming that he noticed a soft glow in his bedchamber.

The spirit was young; a very young girl. For a moment, as the dawn light cast shadows upon her, he imagined that he was seeing his beloved sister, Fan, as she had looked as a child. “You are the first spirit that Marley spoke of?”

“I am.”

“By your look, you do not seem related to the spirits that I met before.”

“No, Ebenezer, I am not a spirit of Christmas. Their visitations served their purpose well; but it is I who will show the path that could have been had your redemption not have been required. I am the Spirit of Love.”

“Belle.” Ebenezer whispered.

“Indeed.” The spirit held out her hand. “Shall we see what might have been?”

Scrooge knew not the house where they appeared. It seemed quite pleasant. The large room in which they appeared was comfortable and outside could be seen views of the countryside. People of various age were scattered about the room chatting while children darted about by the large Christmas tree. Friends gained through the years, he remembered.

It was not to them that Scrooge’s attention focused. It was the spirit of a woman who entered the room. Time had aged her gently and whilst the color had long faded to white, he knew her instantly and moved to meet her. “Belle.” Unlike previous visitations, he found that he could touch her and grasped her hand in his. “Belle, how wonderful.”

“Ebenezer?” Belle’s tone reiterated her confusion. “Where am I?”

Thousands of memories of events that hadn’t occurred filled Scrooge’s spirit. “Home. We’re home, Belle.” Scrooge looked about the room. There were plenty of friends, it should have been full of his children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

“Children? Where are my children? Where is Mary? Where’s John?” Belle’s tone was panicked.

“Fred will be home soon.” Scrooge interrupted her. “We have no children.”

“Ebenezer, what is this madness?” Belle’s visage changed as she became more spirited. “Of course we have no children, Ebenezer.”

It was Belle and Ebenezer’s greatest wish left unfulfilled. Their son Edwin, born too early, lived
but a few days. Belle had never conceived again. They had filled their lives with friends. “This is the life we were meant to live. Oh, Belle, how long have I wished to undo my mistake of putting money before our love. Now, here we have the chance. “We are here together. This is what was meant to be. You are my wife, my only love. Don’t tell me this isn’t what you wanted.” He reach out tenderly and stroked her cheek.

“Ebenezer, dear, dear, Ebenezer.” The lines of Belle’s face softened and her eyes shimmered slightly with tears. “Of course, this is what I once wanted, but this…this isn’t real. My children aren’t here. Edward and I have raised five wonderful children; David, John, Mary, Katherine and William.”

“It can be.”

“No, it can’t.” Belle drew him to a nearby loveseat. “Ebenezer, I am Edward’s wife and quite content to be so. He is a good and kind man. I think had things been different, you would have liked him; perhaps even been friends.”

“Never. He stole you from me.”

“Ebenezer,” Belle scolded. “Edward did not steal me. You left me. I know that it is hard for you to face. I was alone for over a year after I last saw you. It was then that I met Edward. He was, well everything I hoped you would be. I love him, Ebenezer.”

“You love me, I know that you did.”

“Yes, I did, Ebenezer. I loved you enough to set you free. Now you must do the same.” Belle gave him a gentle kiss on the cheek and rose slowly; before turning and leaving the room. As she went through the doorway, she paused for a brief second to look at the family and then she gave Scrooge a sad smile before disappearing into room beyond where an elder gentlemen and her family rose as she entered. “Good-bye, Ebenezer.”

“Why did you force me to go through Belle’s rejection all over again? Have I not suffered enough? Could not this visitation have given me comfort? Shown me the life we should have had.” Scrooge closed his eyes tightly to hold back tears.

“This is not the life you wanted; it is the life that you would have had if things had been different, Ebenezer. As to Belle, it was you, you and your longer, who drew her spirit to you in this life. Would you have her spirit turn its back on the life she has with her husband and children?”

“Spirit, take me from this place. Do not torture me longer.”

“It is your choice.”

STAVE THREE – The second visitation

Scrooge opened his eyes to find his ghost back in his bedchamber. There had been changes. The curtains of his bed were parted and he could see his body lying there; a breakfast tray cooling on the nightstand. Mrs. Cassidy must have brought breakfast and found him. As he hoped she had not been overly distressed, he saw a familiar glow.

“I do not believe your presence is required.” Ebenezer said.

“Ah, but it is.” He turned slowly and faced the spirit. It was the same girl, now a young teen. She appeared the age of Fan when she brought him from school. She had the same kindly smile.
“You…you were…”

“I am not only the Spirit of Love, Ebenezer. I am also the Spirit of Family.”

“As you know, I have no family,” his tone was a touch bitter.

“Do you not? Then why does he grieve?”

Unbeknownst to Scrooge, his nephew Fred had arrived. “Fred, Fred, do not grieve so.” Scrooge attempted to lay his hand on Fred’s shoulder to offer comfort.

“Shall we see what might have been?” Not waiting for him to reply, the spirit touched Scrooge and he found himself in a well-appointed study to see his nephew, Fred diligently at work behind a desk.

“Uncle? I thought you left for home. You know, Aunt Belle hates it when you are late.”

“And leave my favorite nephew, here working alone?” Like before, Scrooge could remember the years. He and Belle had raised Fred after Fan’s death. He was as a son to them both. After his schooling, Fred had joined Scrooge at the firm. The sign now proudly proclaimed “Scrooge and Thomas.” It had been one of Scrooge’s proudest days. Not even a child of his own could have showed the same affinity for business that Fred did.

“Come, close up. We shall go together.”

“Not tonight, uncle.”

“I will not leave you here alone. On a Christmas Eve? Your Aunt Belle would see me drawn and quartered first. Come, wouldn’t you rather spend the night with your family and maybe, a special lass?”

“I’ve told you, uncle. I haven’t found anyone up to the standard of Aunt Belle. When I do, then I will settle down.”

“I hate to see you wasting your youth in this place.”

“Uncle, the day you made me a partner, I swore I would work hard to justify the faith you put in me.”

“You have no need to justify anything, Fred.” Scrooge searched his new memories for Fred’s lovely wife and his many grand-nephews and grand-nieces only to come up empty. “What about that girl, what was her name? Gwyn?”

Fred shook his head. “I know no Gwyn. Perhaps, you speak of Virginia Hobson?”

Instant memories appeared to Scrooge. He now remembered the young woman; born of privilege, she was a bit stiff with what could never be described as a warm demeanor. “Yes, yes. You haven’t brought her round in a while. Why is that?”

“She is married.” Fred’s tone was flat. “She found somewhat with better assets.”

“Fred…” Scrooge’s tone was filled with regret. “Come home with me.” Scrooge didn’t understand his own words. It was as if he was forced to ignore the thought that Belle would not be there. He distinctly remember Fred at their home growing with him and Belle.

“Perhaps later, uncle, I will stop by. Now off with you or Aunt Belle will have us both.”
Before Scrooge could say another word, the Spirit took Fred’s words to heart and returned them to
the bedchamber where Scrooge’s ghost stood as before next to Fred’s side. “Why show me that?
That abomination? That is not Fred’s life.”

“It is your choice.”

STAVE FOUR – The third visitation.

Scrooge was distracted by the arrival of his niece Gwyn, Fred’s dearly loved wife. Scrooge
watched as she wrapped her arms around her husband and together they grieved. Helpless to ease
their pain, he watched them. When the glow appeared again, Scrooge was not overly surprised to
see the young girl again. She had aged again; her appearance that of teenage girl. Her features
showed the beginnings of the beauty that she would become. Again, he was struck by her
resemblance to his sister Fan.

“Spare me. I have no wish to see my family as it might have been or the atrocity that you portend
of Fred’s life. What more could you force upon me?”

“You do not ask what I represent now. Are you not curious?”

“If you tell me, you will tell me.”

“Indeed.” The spirit smiled. “You could at least say that my appearance is more comely than that
of the third visitation last time.”

Scrooge spared her a baleful gaze before focusing on Fred and Gwyn again.

“Come, Ebenezer. You cannot avoid me. After all, I am the Spirit of Goodwill and Friendship.
Can you not show me some?”

“What could you have to show me now? Have you not tortured me enough? You’ve showed me
all of my…” Scrooge’s ghost trembled for a moment. “It is a pattern. The first visitation, like
before, was of Belle. The second visitation was of Fred and Gwyn. It is the Cratchits. That is who
you would show me.”

“Come.”

This time, Scrooge found himself on a dirty street corner. He looked around in vain but could see
no sign of the Cratchit family. The spirit took his hand and turned him to face the alley and
pointed gracefully. He studied the woman standing there. She bore a remarkable resemblance to
Bob Cratchit’s good wife; but she was much too thin. The aging of her face had been accelerated
by years of work, pain and despair.

As he watched, two young women also prematurely aged entered the alley. “Mother.”

“What news have you?”

“Peter has been placed in prison.” The elder daughter, Martha caught her mother as she collapsed.
She motioned Belinda to help her ease her mother to the ground.

“What is to become of us now?” Mrs. Cratchit moaned. “What is to become of us? Tis the
workhouse now, for sure.”

“It’ll be alright, mother. I’ll find a job.” Martha vowed. “Belinda will care for you and I will
support us.” Mrs. Cratchit gave no response only continuing to moan. Martha motioned Belinda to
join her a few steps away.
“How do you think you will support her? Support us? Neither of us can pick a pocket like Peter. How Peter have been so stupid? To get caught?” Belinda raged.

“There are jobs down at the wharf.” Martha stated unemotionally.

“Only for…” Belinda shook her head in disbelief. “You can’t become one of them. Mother would die of embarrassment.”

“Better embarrassment then starvation.” Martha round on her sister. “Do you think some fairy godmother is going to show up and rescue us? Peter will be in jail for years. I don’t plan to sit here and starve to death waiting.”

“What would Father have said?”

Martha glared at her. “If he were here, we wouldn’t have to worry about, would we? Stay with her. I’ll be back as soon as I can. Here, take this…” Martha stripped out of her worn, tattered cloak. “It will help keep her warm till I can get back.”

“Martha…” Belinda appealed to her sister.

Without a word, Martha forced her emotions down. Her face was void of expression, only the shimmer of unshed tears in her eyes. Resolutely, she pushed the cloth into her sister’s hand and turned to stride from the alley.

“Spirit, what is this? This travesty? Where is Tiny Tim? Where is Bob?”

The scenery shifted to a graveyard. Chills ran through Scrooge’s ghost; a graveyard again for the third visitation. “Do you show me my death again?”

“No.”

“Tim…Oh, no not Tiny Tim.” Scrooge looked at the spirit to avoid the grave in front of them.

“There is no Tiny Tim.”

“Don’t be ridiculous. I’m his godfather.”

“No, you’re not. Tim was never born. Look, Ebenezer.”

Scrooge was unable to withstand the compulsion. There he saw two initials carved on a wooden cross marking a beggar’s grave; B. C.

“Not Bob? How?”

“You were a different man, Ebenezer. The old Ebenezer had such a wicked reputation that Bob Cratchit knew you would hire him if only because no one else would work in such misery; especially for the slave wages you offered. He had little experience when he came to you.”

“That is true.” Scrooge nodded. It had taken many a harsh word to train him to Scrooge’s exacting standards.

“You and Fred have a wonderful firm. There are many people who hope to one day earn a position. Bob had no chance when he applied. Therefore, he was forced to work as a laborer. He was crippled in an accident shortly after Belinda was born. Mrs. Cratchit took in laundry and did what she could to hold them together. They never had Tiny Tim. Eventually they were forced
from their home and stayed wherever they could find. In his condition, Bob could not handle the cold; he caught a fever and passed that fall.”

“No…”

“Peter tried to hold the family together. He became quite accomplished as a pickpocket. Unfortunately he was caught recently. Peter will be spending the rest of his youth in a prison leaving his mother and sisters to fend for themselves.”

“He had such promise; a quite enterprising lad. Why didn’t Fred take him on like before?”

“They had no occasion to meet. Bob never became your clerk; thus, Fred was never introduced to the Cratchits.”

“Enough. Take me from here, this will not be.”

“It is your choice.”

STAVE FIVE – The end of it

This time, Ebenezer’s ghost did not reappear in his chamber; but in his parlor. The undertaker had obviously come and gone. There upon benches brought in for the purpose were his mourners; his family. Fred sat closet with Gwyn holding his hand tightly. Their children sat somberly on the row behind them. On the other side were the Cratchits. Bob and his wife seemed at a loss and sat quietly. There was Peter, thankfully not in prison garb; Martha, Belinda and then his godson.

Scrooge’s ghost smiled. Even with red eyes that spoke of tears of grief, Tiny Tim was now a healthy, good-looking young man. Here and there he saw friends new and those from long ago. Scrooge was grateful to see them all, but not the light that began to glow. “Three visitations were forced upon me and I am through them. Why do you appear now?” He refused to turn to face the spirit.

“I told you, it is your choice.”

“I don’t understand, Spirit. Save me your puzzles.” Scrooge spoke harshly.

“You earned redemption, but you have deep sorrow and regret over your life. It ties your spirit to this plane. This is your choice, your second chance.”

“You mean…the things I saw…”

“Could be your life, if you desire it. All you have to do is say, ‘yes’, Ebenezer.”

In shock, Scrooge’s ghost gasped. His life. He could have all he longed for since his redemption. All he had to do was say yes and it would be his. Belle would be his wife. They would live in their beautiful house in the country and raise his nephew Fred. He would be like a son to them. In that moment, he felt so much joy that he started to answer; but a movement among the mourners distracted him as Tiny Tim rose and left the room hurriedly; followed by his father.

Tiny Tim. If he did say yes, there would be no Tiny Tim. He looked at his family. Bob would be gone. Gwyn would have a different life; her family with Fred would not exist. He could have all he ever longed for but not with them. The decision was easy. He put aside his sorrow and regrets. How could he lose the family he loved, force such hardships upon their shoulders? His ghost spoke firmly. “No. My choice is ‘No’, Spirit.”

“I knew you would choose the right path, my son. My Ebenezer.”
Scrooge’s ghost turned slowly. “Son?” He peered at the Spirit now older still a beautiful young woman with more than a passing resemblance to Fan. “Mother?”

“Yes, Ebenezer. I knew given the choice, you would let go of your sorrow; your regrets. Your spirit is now free, you are unencumbered and can join us.”

“Us.”

“Yes, Ebenezer, us. Fan and I have waited a long time for you. Come now, Ebenezer, it’s time for us to go home.”

Home. The one thing Ebenezer had truly wanted since a young lad; to go home with his family. He smiled one last time at his earthly family as they mourned him. He already knew that he would see them again. At home. Taking the hand of his mother’s spirit, both vanished.

So it came to pass. Those who Ebenezer had loved and those that loved him grew up, raised families, and grew old. They upheld his beliefs; his charity and kindness. And came to pass that it was Ebenezer’s spirit who came to them as they departed from the mortal world to show them the path home.

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