

# The First of the Three Spirits

by Charles Dickens *from A Christmas Carol*

*A Christmas Carol tells the story of Ebenezer Scrooge, a successful but tight-fisted English businessman who hates Christmas. Scrooge has been told by the ghost of his dead business partner that three spirits will visit him. These spirits are the last chance Scrooge has to avoid the fate of his partner -- dragging chains around for eternity.*

*In this passage, the first spirit, called the Ghost of Christmas Past, has taken Scrooge back in time to see various Christmases in his earlier years. Here the spirit and Scrooge are watching Ebenezer as a young apprentice, or 'prentice, working with his young friend Dick for Mr. Fezziwig. Fezziwig and his wife have provided a large Christmas party for the employees.*

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There were more dances, and there were forfeits, and more dances, and there was cake, and there was negus, and there was a great piece of Cold Roast, and there was a great piece of Cold Boiled, and there were mince-pies, and plenty of beer. But the great effect of the evening came after the Roast and Boiled, when the fiddler (an artful dog, mind! The sort of man who knew his business better than you or I could have told it him!) struck up 'Sir Roger de Coverley.' Then old Fezziwig stood out to dance with Mrs. Fezziwig. Top couple, too; with a good stiff piece of work cut out for them; three or four and twenty pair of partners; people who were not to be trifled with; people who would dance, and had no notion of walking.

But if they had been twice as many—ah! four times—old Fezziwig would have been a match for them, and so would Mrs. Fezziwig. As to her, she was worthy to be his partner in every sense of the term. If that's not high praise, tell me higher, and I'll use it. A positive light appeared to issue from Fezziwig's calves. They shone in every part of the dance like moons. You couldn't have predicted, at any given time, what would become of them next. And when old Fezziwig and Mrs. Fezziwig had gone all through the dance; advance and retire, both hands to your partner, bow and curtsy, cork-screw, thread-the-needle, and back again to your place: Fezziwig 'cut'—cut so deftly, that he appeared to wink with his legs, and came upon his feet again without a stagger.

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

During the whole of this time Scrooge had acted like a man out of his wits. His heart and soul were in the scene, and with his former self. He corroborated everything, remembered everything, enjoyed everything, and underwent the strangest agitation. It was not until now, when the bright faces of his former self and

Dick were turned from them, that he remembered the Ghost, and became conscious that it was looking full upon him, while the light upon its head burnt very clear.

'A small matter,' said the Ghost, 'to make these silly folks so full of gratitude.'

'Small!' echoed Scrooge.

The Spirit signed to him to listen to the two apprentices, who were pouring out their hearts in praise of Fezziwig; and when he had done so, said:

'Why! Is it not? He has spent but a few pounds of your mortal money: three or four, perhaps. Is that so much that he deserves this praise?'

'It isn't that,' said Scrooge, heated by the remark, and speaking unconsciously like his former, not his latter self. 'It isn't that, Spirit. He has the power to render us happy or unhappy; to make our service light or burdensome; a pleasure or a toil. Say that his power lies in words and looks; in things so slight and insignificant that it is impossible to add and count 'em up: what then? The happiness he gives is quite as great as if it cost a fortune.'

He felt the Spirit's glance, and stopped.

'What is the matter?' asked the Ghost.

'Nothing particular,' said Scrooge.

'Something, I think?' the Ghost insisted.

'No,' said Scrooge, 'no. I should like to be able to say a word or two to my clerk just now. That's all.'

## Questions

1. Who are the best dancers in the group?
  
2. The text references Scrooge “ speaking unconsciously like his former, not his latter self.” Who is his former self, and who is his latter self? What are the difference between the two?
  
3. What does corroborated mean in the following: “He corroborated everything, remembered everything, enjoyed everything...”?
  
4. Scrooge gives a long speech about the effect a master, or boss, can have on an employee. He says, “He has the power to render us happy or unhappy; to make our service light or burdensome; a pleasure or a toil. Say that his power lies in words and looks; in things so slight and insignificant that it is impossible to add and count 'em up: what then? The happiness he gives is quite as great as if it cost a fortune.” Why do you think he then says he would like to talk to his clerk?

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**Vocabulary List**

Each of the vocabulary words below are used in the reading passage. As you read the passage, pay attention to context clues that suggest the word's meaning.

1. Plenty
2. Predicted
3. Domestic
4. Individually
5. Retired
6. Corroborate
7. former
8. gratitude

**Context Clues**

Using context clues from the sentences in the passage, underline the correct meaning of the word in boldface.

1) "...and there was a great piece of Cold Roast, and there was a great piece of Cold Boiled, and there were mince-pies, and **plenty** of beer."

- a. barrels    b. a great amount    c. a small amount    d. jugs

2) "You couldn't have **predicted**, at any given time, what would become of them next."

- a. anticipated    b. written    c. shared    d. wondered

3) "When the clock struck eleven, this **domestic** ball broke up. "

- a. holiday    b. household    c. heavy    d. happy

4) "Mr. and Mrs. Fezziwig took their stations, one on either side the door, and, shaking hands with every person **individually** as he or she went out, wished him or her a Merry Christmas."

- a. at the same time    b. one by one    c. together    d. as a group

5) "When everybody had **retired** but the two 'prentices, they did the same to them..."

- a. quit their jobs    b. waited    c. danced    d. stopped participating

6) He **corroborated** everything, remembered everything, enjoyed everything, and underwent the strangest agitation.

- a. supported    b. denied    c. recalled    d. ate and drank

7) "It was not until now, when the bright faces of his **former** self and Dick were turned from them, that he remembered the Ghost..."

- a. older    b. better-looking    c. younger    d. working

8) 'A small matter,' said the Ghost, 'to make these silly folks so full of **gratitude**.'

- a. love    b. concern    c. worry    d. thankfulness