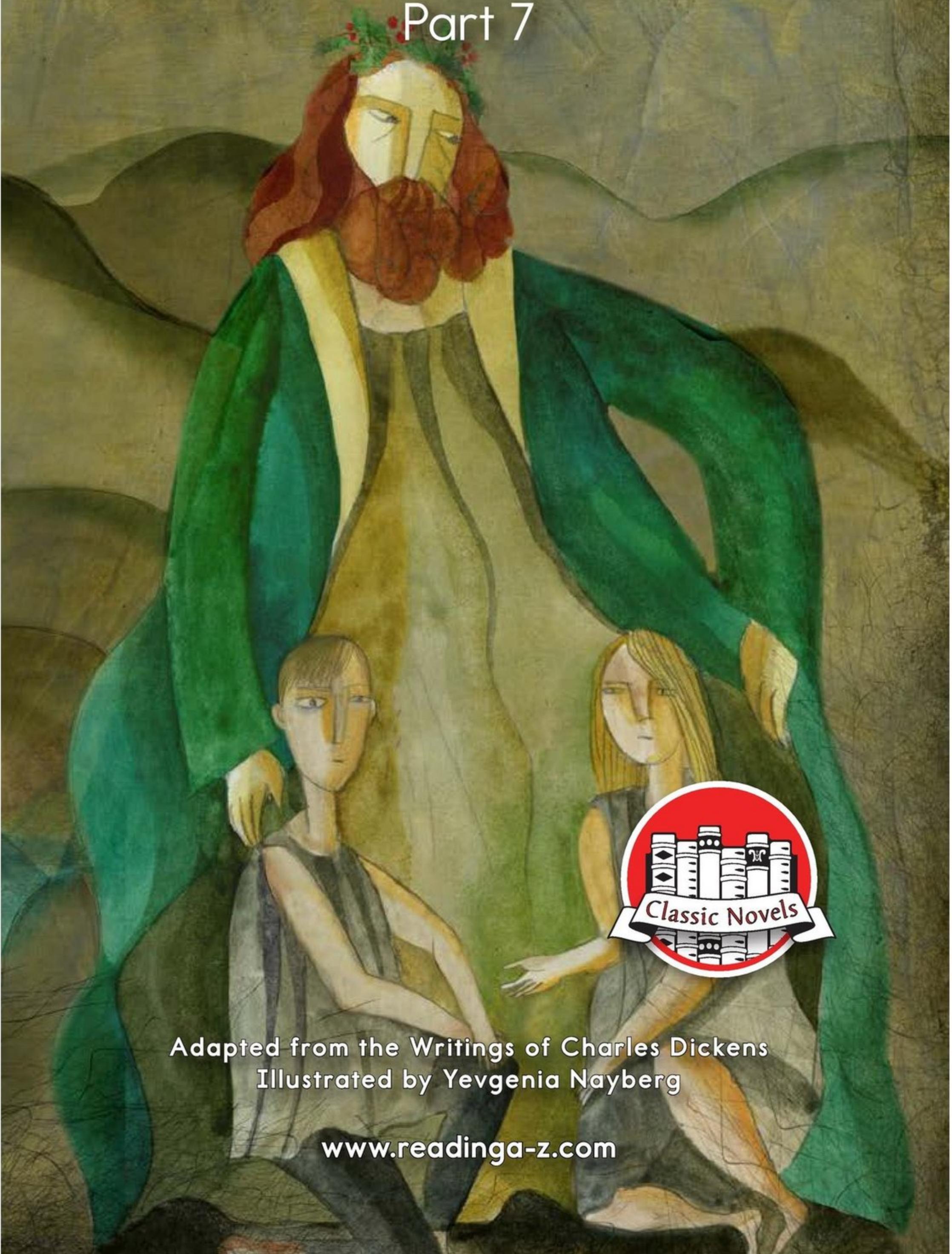


LEVELED BOOK • z²

A Christmas Carol

Part 7



Adapted from the Writings of Charles Dickens
Illustrated by Yevgenia Nayberg

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A Christmas Carol



"I have endeavoured in this Ghostly little book, to raise the Ghost of an Idea, which shall not put my readers out of humour with themselves, with each other, with the season, or with me. May it haunt their houses pleasantly, and no one wish to lay it."

Their faithful Friend and Servant, C. D.

December, 1843

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Focus Question

How do others perceive Ebenezer Scrooge?

Words to Know

abject
abyss
affability
almshouse
competent
consequence
degradation
earnest
elicited
humility
ignorance
imperceptibly

indignantly
meagre
menacing
profound
prostrate
protruding
provoking
revelled
sentiment
slander
want
workhouses

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of Charles Dickens
Illustrated by Yevgenia Nayberg

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Correlation

LEVEL Z2	
Fountas & Pinnell	Y-Z
Reading Recovery	N/A
DRA	70+



In Part 6 of A Christmas Carol, Scrooge and the Ghost of Christmas Present visit the Cratchits, who make up for a meager Christmas dinner with an abundance of heart. A joyless toast to Scrooge is raised—the stingy benefactor of the feast.



nd now, without a word of warning from the Ghost, they stood upon a bleak and desert moor. Monstrous masses of rude stone were cast about, as though it were the burial-place of giants. Water spread itself wheresoever it listed—or would have done so, but for the frost that held it prisoner. Nothing grew but moss and coarse rank grass. Down in the west the setting sun had left a streak of fiery red. It glared upon the desolation for an instant, like a sullen eye, frowning lower, lower, lower. Yet, it was lost in the thick gloom of darkest night.

"What place is this?" asked Scrooge.

"A place where Miners live, who labour in the bowels of the earth," returned the Spirit. "But they know me. See!"

A light shone from the window of a hut, and swiftly they advanced towards it. Passing through the wall of mud and stone, they found a cheerful company assembled round a glowing fire. An old man and woman with their children and their children's children were all decked out in their holiday attire. The old man was singing them a Christmas song. It had been a very old song when he was a boy. From time to time they all joined in the chorus.

The Spirit did not tarry here, but bade Scrooge hold his robe, and passing on above the moor, sped—whither? Not to sea? To sea. To Scrooge's horror, looking back, he saw the last of the land, a frightful range of rocks, behind them. His ears were deafened by the thundering of water, as it rolled and roared, and raged among the dreadful caverns it had worn, and fiercely tried to undermine the earth.

Built upon a dismal reef of sunken rocks on which the waters chafed and dashed, there stood

a solitary lighthouse. Great heaps of sea-weed clung to its base, and storm-birds rose and fell about it, like the waves they skimmed.

But even here, two men who watched the light had made a fire, that through the loophole in the thick stone wall shed out a ray of brightness on the awful sea. Joining their hands over the rough table at which they sat, they wished each other Merry Christmas.

The elder's face was all damaged and scarred with hard weather as the figure-head of an old ship might be. He struck up a sturdy song that was like a Gale in itself.

Again the Ghost sped on, above the black and heaving sea—on, on—until, being far away, as he told Scrooge, from any shore, they lighted on a ship. They stood beside the helmsman at the wheel, the look-out in the bow, and the officers who had the watch. They were dark, ghostly figures in their several stations.

But every man among them hummed a Christmas tune, had a Christmas thought, or spoke below his breath of some bygone Christmas Day, with homeward hopes belonging to it.

And every man on board, waking or sleeping, good or bad, had had a kinder word for another on that day than on any day in the year.

It was a great surprise to Scrooge, while listening to the moaning of the wind, and thinking what a solemn thing it was to move on through the lonely darkness over an unknown **abyss**, whose depths were secrets as **profound** as Death. It was a great surprise to Scrooge, while thus engaged, to hear a hearty laugh. It was a much greater surprise to Scrooge to recognise it as his own nephew's. He found himself in a bright, dry, gleaming room. The Spirit was standing smiling by his side, and looking at that same nephew with approving **affability**.

"Ha, ha!" laughed Scrooge's nephew. "Ha, ha, ha!"

While there is infection in disease and sorrow, there is nothing in the world so irresistibly contagious as laughter and good-humour. When Scrooge's nephew laughed in this way: holding his sides, rolling his head, and twisting his face into the most extravagant contortions: Scrooge's niece, by marriage, laughed as heartily as he.

And their assembled friends being not a bit behindhand, roared out lustily.

“Ha, ha! Ha, ha, ha, ha!”

“He said that Christmas was a humbug, as I live!” cried Scrooge’s nephew. “He believed it too.”

“More shame for him, Fred!” said Scrooge’s niece, **indignantly**. Bless those women; they never do anything by halves. They are always in **earnest**.

She was very pretty: exceedingly pretty. She had a dimpled, surprised-looking, capital face, and a ripe little mouth that seemed made to be kissed. There were all kinds of good little dots about her chin that melted into one another when she laughed.

She had the sunniest pair of eyes you ever saw in any little creature’s head. Altogether she was what you would have called **provoking**, you know; but satisfactory, too. Oh perfectly satisfactory!

“He’s a comical old fellow,” said Scrooge’s nephew, “that’s the truth: and not so pleasant as he might be. However, his offenses carry their own punishment, and I have nothing to say against him.”

“I’m sure he is very rich, Fred,” hinted Scrooge’s niece. “At least you always tell me so.”

"What of that, my dear?" said Scrooge's nephew. "His wealth is of no use to him. He don't do any good with it. He don't make himself comfortable with it. He hasn't the satisfaction of thinking—ha, ha, ha!—that he is ever going to benefit us with it."

"I have no patience with him," observed Scrooge's niece. Scrooge's niece's sisters, and all the other ladies, expressed the same opinion.

"Oh, I have," said Scrooge's nephew. "I am sorry for him; I couldn't be angry with him if I tried. Who suffers by his ill whims? Himself, always. Here, he takes it into his head to dislike us, and he won't come and dine with us. What's the **consequence**? He don't lose much of a dinner."

"Indeed, I think he loses a very good dinner," interrupted Scrooge's niece. Everybody else said the same, and they must be allowed to have been **competent** judges, because they had just had dinner. With dessert upon the table, they were clustered round the fire, by lamplight.

"Well. I'm very glad to hear it," said Scrooge's nephew, "because I haven't great faith in these young housekeepers. What do you say, Topper?"

Topper had clearly got his eye upon one of Scrooge's niece's sisters. He answered that a bachelor was a wretched outcast, who had no right to express an opinion on the subject. Whereat Scrooge's niece's sister—the plump one with the lace tucker: not the one with the roses—blushed.

"Do go on, Fred," said Scrooge's niece, clapping her hands. "He never finishes what he begins to say! He is such a ridiculous fellow!"

Scrooge's nephew revelled in another laugh. It was impossible to keep the infection off; though the plump sister tried hard to do so. His example was unanimously followed.

"I was only going to say," said Scrooge's nephew, "that the consequence of his taking a dislike to us, and not making merry with us, is that he loses some pleasant moments, which could do him no harm. I mean to give him the same chance every year, whether he likes it or not, for I pity him. He may rail at Christmas till he dies.

"But he can't help thinking better of it if he finds me going there, in good temper, year after year. If it only puts him in the vein to leave his poor clerk fifty pounds, that's something; and I think I shook him yesterday."

It was their turn to laugh now at the notion of his shaking Scrooge. But being thoroughly good-natured, and not much caring what they laughed at, so that they laughed at any rate, he encouraged them in their merriment.

After tea they had some music. For they were a musical family, and knew what they were about. Especially Topper, who could growl away in the bass like a good one, and never swell the large veins in his forehead, or get red in the face over it. Scrooge's niece played well upon the harp. She played a simple little air which had been familiar to the child who fetched Scrooge from the boarding-school, as he had been reminded by the Ghost of Christmas Past.

When this strain of music sounded, all the things that Ghost had shown him, came upon his mind. He softened more and more. He thought that if he could have listened to it often, years ago, he might have cultivated the kindnesses of life for his own happiness with his own hands, without resorting to the sexton's spade that buried Jacob Marley.

But they didn't devote the whole evening to music. There was first a game at blind-man's buff. Of course there was. And I no more believe

Topper was really blind than I believe he had eyes in his boots.

It was a done thing between him and Scrooge's nephew; and the Ghost of Christmas Present knew it. The way he went after that plump sister was an outrage on the credulity of human nature. Knocking over the chairs, bumping against the piano, smothering himself among the curtains, wherever she went, there went he! He always knew where the plump sister was. He wouldn't catch anybody else.

If you had fallen up against him on purpose, he would have made a feint of endeavouring to seize you. Then he would instantly have sidled off in the direction of the plump sister. She often cried out that it wasn't fair; and it really was not. But at last he caught her; in spite of all her silken rustlings and rapid flutterings past him.

He got her into a corner whence there was no escape. For his pretending not to know her and further to assure himself of her identity by pressing a certain ring upon her finger, and a certain chain about her neck was vile, monstrous!

No doubt she told him her opinion of it, when, another blind-man being in office, they were so very confidential together, behind the curtains.

Scrooge's niece was not one of the blind-man's buff party, but was made comfortable with a large chair and a footstool, in a snug corner, where the Ghost and Scrooge were close behind her. But she joined in the game of How, When, and Where, and was very great.

To the secret joy of Scrooge's nephew, she beat her sisters hollow. There might have been twenty people there, young and old, but they all played. So did Scrooge, for, wholly forgetting that his voice made no sound in their ears, he sometimes came out with his guess quite loud, and very often guessed quite right, too.

The Ghost was greatly pleased to find him in this mood. He looked upon him with such favour that Scrooge begged like a boy to be allowed to stay until the guests departed. But this, the Spirit said, could not be done.

"Here's a new game," said Scrooge. "One half hour, Spirit, only one."

It was a Game called Yes and No, where Scrooge's nephew had to think of something, and the rest must find out what; he by only answering to their questions yes or no. The brisk fire of questioning to which he was exposed, elicited from him that he was thinking of an animal. It was a live animal, rather a disagreeable animal, a savage animal, an animal that growled and grunted sometimes. Sometimes it talked. It lived in London, and walked about the streets, and wasn't made a show of. It wasn't led by anybody, and didn't live in a menagerie.

It was never killed in a market. It was not a horse, or a donkey, or a cow, or a bull. It was not a tiger, or a dog, or a pig, or a cat, or a bear. At every fresh question that was put to him, this nephew burst into a fresh roar of laughter. He was so inexpressibly tickled, that he was obliged to get up off the sofa and stamp. At last the plump sister, falling into a similar state, cried out:

“I have found it out! I know what it is, Fred! I know what it is!”

“What is it?” cried Fred.

“It’s your Uncle Scrooge!”

Which it certainly was. Admiration was the universal **sentiment**, though some objected that the reply to "Is it a bear?" ought to have been "Yes," inasmuch as an answer in the negative was sufficient to have diverted their thoughts from Mr Scrooge.

"He has given us plenty of merriment," said Fred, "and it would be ungrateful not to drink his health. Here is a glass of mulled wine ready to our hand at the moment; and I say, 'Uncle Scrooge!'"

"Well! Uncle Scrooge!" they cried.

"A Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year to the old man, whatever he is," said Scrooge's nephew. "He wouldn't take it from me, but may he have it, nevertheless. Uncle Scrooge!"

Uncle Scrooge had **imperceptibly** become so gay and light of heart, that he would have pledged the unconscious company in return, and thanked them in an inaudible speech, if the Ghost had given him time.

But the whole scene passed off in the breath of the last word spoken by his nephew; and he and the Spirit were again upon their travels.

Much they saw, and far they went, and many homes they visited, but always with a happy end.

The Spirit stood beside sick beds, and they were cheerful; on foreign lands, and they were close at home. He stood by struggling men, and they were patient in their greater hope; by poverty, and it was rich. In **almshouse**, hospital, and jail, in misery's every refuge, he left his blessing, and taught Scrooge his precepts.

It was a long night, if it were only a night. 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. He looked at the Spirit as they stood together in an open place, and 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 tonight."

"Tonight!" cried Scrooge.

“Tonight at midnight. Hark! The time is drawing near.”

The chimes 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 robe, “but I see something strange, and not belonging to yourself, protruding from your skirts. Is it a foot or a claw?”

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

From the foldings of its robe, it brought two children; wretched, **abject**, frightful, hideous, miserable. They knelt down at its feet, and clung 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, wolfish; but **prostrate**, too, in their **humility**. Graceful youth should have filled their features out, and touched them with its freshest tints. Instead, a stale and shrivelled hand, like that of age, had pinched, and twisted them, and pulled them into shreds.

Where angels might have sat enthroned, devils lurked, 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 back, appalled. Having them shown to him in this way, he tried to say they were fine children, but the words choked themselves, rather than be parties to a lie of such enormous magnitude.

“Spirit, are they yours?” Scrooge could say no more.

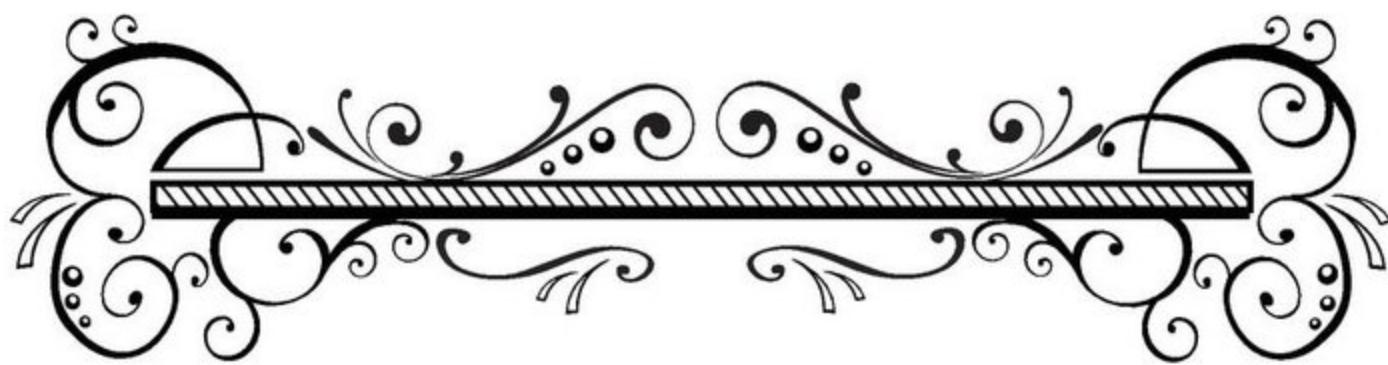
“They are Man’s,” said the Spirit, looking down upon them. “And they cling to me, appealing from their fathers. This boy is **Ignorance**. This girl is **Want**. Beware them both, and all of their degree, but most of all beware this boy, for on his brow I see that written which is Doom, unless the writing be erased. Deny it!” cried the Spirit, stretching out its hand towards the city. “**Slander** those who tell it ye. Admit it for your factious purposes, and make it worse. And abide 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 hooded, coming, like a mist along the ground, towards him.



Glossary

abject (<i>adj.</i>)	hopeless or resigned; without strength or spirit (p. 16)
abyss (<i>n.</i>)	a deep and seemingly endless hole or space (p. 6)
affability (<i>n.</i>)	the quality of being friendly or good-natured (p. 6)
almshouse (<i>n.</i>)	a place where poor people could live for free (p. 15)
competent (<i>adj.</i>)	having the required skills or abilities to do something; capable (p. 8)
consequence (<i>n.</i>)	the result of an action (p. 8)
degradation (<i>n.</i>)	the act or condition of breaking down or deteriorating (p. 17)
earnest (<i>n.</i>)	a sincere or serious state of mind (p. 7)
elicited (<i>v.</i>)	got or drew out something from someone, such as information or an answer (p. 13)
humility (<i>n.</i>)	a simple or modest attitude; the quality of not acting or thinking oneself better than others (p. 16)
ignorance (<i>n.</i>)	a lack of knowledge or information (p. 17)

imperceptibly <i>(adv.)</i>	in a slow and gradual way that it is almost unnoticeable (p. 14)
indignantly <i>(adv.)</i>	in a manner that shows anger or annoyance about something that seems wrong or unfair (p. 7)
meagre (<i>adj.</i>)	thin or slight (British spelling) (p. 16)
menacing (<i>adj.</i>)	threatening (p. 17)
profound (<i>adj.</i>)	requiring deep study or knowledge (p. 6)
prostrate (<i>adj.</i>)	completely helpless or overcome (p. 16)
protruding (<i>v.</i>)	sticking out or extending beyond (p. 16)
provoking <i>(adj.)</i>	causing a strong reaction in others; annoying (p. 7)
revelled (<i>v.</i>)	took great satisfaction or pleasure in something (p. 9)
sentiment (<i>n.</i>)	a feeling or opinion (p. 14)
slander (<i>v.</i>)	to make a false statement that causes damage to another (p. 17)
want (<i>n.</i>)	the condition of not having what is needed or desired (p. 17)
workhouses (<i>n.</i>)	places where people who are poor or dependent live and work in exchange for shelter and food (p. 18)

A Christmas Carol

A Reading A-Z Level Z2 Leveled Book

Word Count: 2,863

Connections

Writing

Write an analysis of the author's point of view toward Scrooge.

How is this perspective reflected in Part 7?

Social Studies

Research the history of Blindman's Buff. Work in groups to compare three different versions of the game and create a poster showing this information.

Reading A-Z

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