

New Year Article for the Henley Standard for publ'n 2/1/15  
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## **Ebenezer Scrooge's New Year**

A wintry chill sent a white flurry of snow across Bell Street. Scrooge hurried back from the Watchnight Carol Service, his coat buttoned tightly against the wind, his face half hidden in the woollen scarf wrapping him snugly about. His eyes peeped brightly out from behind a new pair of polished spectacles.

"Evening, Scrooge!" called a familiar voice from across the street. The Constable was on his way home, his face as bright as a cherry, cheeks flushed with maybe one too many glasses of something warming.

"Good evening, Constable," Scrooge replied, with a smile. "A merry Christmas and a Happy New Year to you."

"And the same to you, Mr Scrooge. God bless you! In fact, God bless you twice !" replied the Constable.

Scrooge hurried on, anxious to avoid giving the Constable an opportunity to break into song, which he was rather prone to do under certain conditions of intoxication.

It had been a good ten years since Scrooge's Christmas ghostly visitations had caused him to completely reorder his life and lifestyle to one of God-fearing generosity, but he was nevertheless a shy man at heart who would strive to avoid the faintest glimmer of limelight, the slightest hint of the glare of publicity. He enjoyed singing carols, especially when there were children involved, but would cower and shrink in his pew whenever the vicar cast around for bass-voiced male volunteers to attempt Melchior's solo during the singing of "We Three Kings".

His reticence on this occasion proved however to be his undoing. A slight quickening of his pace, a small lengthening of his stride, and his outstretched foot found itself on an icy outcrop from where a leaking gutter overhead had persistently wetted the road. He was upended violently, and came down with a heavy crash on his back. There was the sound of breaking glass, or to be more accurate, breaking glasses, and then silence.

When Scrooge awoke, he was standing by his front door, keys in hand. He felt his head. There was no sign of any injury. Then he remembered his new spectacles, which were nowhere to be found. "Bah," he said. "Hum...." but then he remembered dimly that he did not say that any more, although he could not remember why.

He fumbled for his door key, and as he did so, a refined voice said,

"Could you help me, please ? I appear to be lost, and in need of shelter."

Scrooge looked around. There was nobody in sight, but a beautiful tortoiseshell cat was by his side, rubbing in his best tweed trousers, and depositing generous helpings of fur and whiskers thereupon. Scrooge blinked, gazed in a slightly myopic fashion down at the creature, shook his head, unlocked his door, and went in. He looked again at the cat as he closed the door. The cat miaowed loudly, which Scrooge found reassuring and discomforting in equal measure.

He found his hallway ablaze with lights. A strange man came out of a side room, and tried to take his coat. "What do you mean by this?!" cried Scrooge, with alarm. "Who are you, man, and what are you doing in my house? Why are all these candles burning? Answer me, my good man!"

The man, smartly dressed, seemed surprised. "I am Jeffries, sir, your butler. The candles are lit because you are hosting a New Year reception. Our guests will be due in a few moments time."

"Guests?" cried Scrooge in alarm. "A reception? In my house? It is unthinkable! Why, they might steal my silver spoons! I shan't do it, I tell you! You must send them away, do you hear me!"

And extinguish all these lights. Such a waste."

Jeffries now appeared rather confused. "But what shall I tell them, Sir? It is after all almost the hour, and many will have travelled a good few miles to be here, particularly the members of your family."

Scrooge turned to Jeffries in even greater alarm. "Family? Members of my family? Here? I shan't hear of it! Who invited them?"

Jeffries was at his best when he was matter of fact, and he rose magnificently to the occasion.

"I seem to recall that you did, Sir," he replied.

"Tell them I have had a fall, and am indisposed," Scrooge retorted. "I will take a small brandy in the library, before retiring to bed." With that, he left the hallway, and his baffled servant holding coat and scarf in hand.

In the library, by the fire with medicinal brandy in hand, Scrooge decided that he would glance at the daily paper before bed. He settled into his chair, and opened the paper. Just for a second, as he turned a page, he thought he saw the words "PLEASE HELP US" fly through the print, like a salmon forcing its way upstream, against the flow. Again, he blinked, turned the page, turned several pages, but it was just the news, and nothing more.

Guests were arriving at his house, now, and he could hear Jeffries apologising on his behalf.

Scrooge threw another log on the fire, and a spark leapt from the cinders onto the hearth rug.

"Oh no!" cried Scrooge. It was his prize rug, specially imported from India.

He stamped on the spark ferociously several times.

But it would not go out. He stamped even more ferociously, but the spark would still not go out.

Scrooge stamped still more, and in despair for his rug threw the contents of the the water jug onto the spark, but it still would not go out. If anything it was growing, brighter, and larger.

Scrooge was puzzled in that there were no flames, but somehow he was not really surprised when he heard a voice. It seemed very familiar.

"Ebenezer, you can't put out this Light."

The spark had grown now, in size and brilliance, to tower over the speechless Scrooge. In the brightness he thought he could discern the figure of a man.

"Do not be afraid," said his visitor. "I am sent to remind you of the one true Light, brighter than I by far, so that you do not forget how much He has done for you. You must turn towards the light every single day of your life, Ebenezer Scrooge, as the Old Year turns to dust, and the New Year lies open before you. You will see in this year many opportunities to do good, and be good, lying like treasures in the sand. You must seize them, gladly, for they are life and light to your soul."

Humbled, Scrooge nodded his head. The darkness was familiar, comfortable, but he knew once again that it was not the reason for his existence. To that far greater Creative power he owed his allegiance now.

"Mr Scrooge, Mr Scrooge, are you alright, Sir?" The Constable's voice, and beery breath, washed over him. He opened his eyes to see the flushed familiar face, concerned, peering into his. Above and behind, the stars shone, a twinkling halo around the Constable's head.

"I, well, yes, I appear to be a little dazed, but nothing seems broken, thank the Lord," Scrooge replied.

"You come home with me for a moment, Sir. It's only in the next street. You can catch your breath, and we'll have some family carols later. I'm sorry about your, spectacles, Sir," the Constable added, sadly.

And he helped the older man up, both somewhat unsteady, but nevertheless the two of them made it to their feet. In the doorway of the next shop a tortoiseshell cat shivered uncontrollably in the cold. Hardly pausing in his step, Scrooge stooped and picked her up, holding her against his coat to warm her.

"You shouldn't do that, Sir," cautioned the Constable. "You never know what..."

"I know exactly what, my good fellow," interrupted Scrooge. "This poor creature is lost, alone, and needs our help. You, in your kindness, were good enough to help me in my distress. If I in my turn can find some measure of goodness to share at this very moment, I am all the more diminished if I were to choose to pass such an opportunity by. Does not this smallest of God's good creatures deserve a happy New Year along with us?"

"Mr Scrooge," said the Constable. "If I did not know you the better I would be concerned that your fall has caused you injury in some manner."

"I think you may safely say that it has quite certainly affected my heart, good Constable." replied the old man. "How so?" asked the Constable in great puzzlement.

"Why, it has been enlarged," Scrooge replied, and he gave the Constable his best New Year smile.