

## A COVID CHRISTMAS CAROL

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The clock ticked in the quiet room, the only sound besides the soft crackle of the fire and the occasional slurp as the man spooned his soup. Outside, the winter wind howled.

Down the hall came a thump, then the scrape of something heavy dragged against the wooden floors.

The man stared at the heavy wooden door, startled.

An apparition appeared—as apparitions are wont to do.

The apparition drew a chain behind him. The chain was clasped about his middle. It was long and wound about him like a tail; it was made of cash-boxes, keys, padlocks, ledgers, and heavy purses wrought in steel. His body was transparent so that the man could see the two buttons on his coat behind.

“Wait. What?” the man said.

“I wear the chain I forged in life,” cried the Ghost. “I made it link by link, and yard by yard; I girded it on of my own free will, and of my own free will I wore it. Is its pattern strange to you?”

“Ummm....yeah. I mean...it’s nice, but...” The man wiped the soup he’d spilled on the front of his pajamas in his surprise, then stood. “Who are you?”

“I am here tonight to warn you that you have yet a chance and hope of escaping my fate. A chance and hope of my procuring, Ebenezer.”

The man cocked his head. “I’m sorry—who?” He drew his head back. “Oh, *Ebenezer!* That’s the old man next door! Yeah...you have the wrong house, mate.”

“Mankind was my business!” the Ghost roared.

“Yeah, yeah, of course.” The man laughed awkwardly and reached out to take the ghost by the elbow. “Listen, you’re looking for 3121 *B*. This is 3121 *A*. I get his mail all the time.”

The Ghost jerked back and screeched, “You will be haunted by three Spirits!”

“Umm, no, I think I’m good. I put eight dollars in the red kettle just this afternoon. I would have put more, but you know, nobody carries cash these days and that’s all I had on me —”

He stopped when the Ghost swirled into the night with another tortured howl. The man stood in the silent, empty room for a few seconds. “Well, *that* was bizarre.” He bent to pick up his bowl. He turned, then shrieked as he saw another apparition. His bowl clattered to the floor.

“I am the Spirit of Christmas Past.”

“Look, I told your friend, you have the wrong--” He broke off again when the floor appeared to open below them. He scrambled back, shouting, “Whoa! Dude!”

Below him was a bustling shopping center, where carolers sang and people hurried about, smiling, laughing, hugging as they spotted friends.

“Spirit, no!” the man cried. He hid his face behind his hands and crouched in the corner. “Make it stop! Please, I beg you!”

The Spirit stared at him. “But, this is the good part.”

“No, it’s horrible! Look at all those people just—just *touching* each other. They’re all closer than six feet! And--” He scrambled on his knees to look at the scene below. “There’s not one mask in sight! Not one! Oh, Spirit...get me away from this horror.”

The Spirit sighed, then scratched his head. “Look, man. Stop freaking out. This is...” He drew into his robe and pulled out a sheet of paper. “This is how it goes. I’m showing you the happy past, then the next guy will...” He trailed off as he studied the notes. He held them up and compared them to the man shivering in the corner. “Wait a minute. Is this even...oh, good grief!” He sighed again and slapped the notes against his thigh. “Not again.” The Spirit gathered his robes around him and tucked the notes back into his pocket. “I am so sorry for the inconvenience. Please don’t write about this on Yelp, okay? It’s not my fault. I just follow the...” His voice trailed off as he dis-apparated.

The man huddled, shaking for a few minutes, then finally leapt into bed and pulled the covers around him. “Just when you think 2020 can’t get any weirder...”