

Eulogizing Ebenezer Scrooge

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Master Tim Cratchit sits at his father's desk, his cane leaning against the wall, the office door closed and locked against solemnity. Pencil in hand, he scrutinizes his eulogy for Mr. Scrooge, lately passed from living to be ninety-seven years old. "How fitting that such a great man lived so long," wrote the newspapers. "Oh, what a void has been left by his passing," cried the people of London, who dropped roses and wreaths on the steps of the Scrooge and Cratchit counting house. Tim mutters, scratches out a whole phrase and writes another in its place. Voices burble below him: the dozens, maybe hundreds of people who've come to pay their respects to Scrooge, all of them awaiting the appearance of the legendary "Tiny" Tim Cratchit, whom it is said Scrooge had pulled from the snapping whorl of death, the boy whom Scrooge had cured of his infirmity so he could go on to become one of the most successful young financiers in London. Tim holds the crumpled and re-crumpled papers close to his face, his fingers ripe with pencil smudges. He reads aloud the phrase, "We must find new saints," and huffs, and lays down his speech and his pencil. "I no longer want to be part of his story," he says, "nor do I want any part in continuing it. Why must this burdensome task fall to me?"

He slaps the desk, takes up his cane and walks to the window.
The pale sunlight humbugs its way through the frosted pane. Down below,
in the garden in front of the house, the mourners gather,
their black clothing curt upon the February snow. The trees are bare
but for beads of ice on their frail outreaching fingers, their bark stifflingly
engulfed by the cold, their branches rattling like old hearts attempting to awaken.
The bushes form small bulges in the snow, distant hints of future bloom.
Tim shakes his head. "I know none of these people," he says. "Yet
they all know me, through Scrooge. Ah, Mr. Scrooge. Forgive me, sir,
but there were so many times I wanted to tell you to mind
your own damn business. My leg is not your leg. My health
is not your health. Yet you doted on me as if it was. You hung over me
so much a crevice sloped upon my shoulder for your heavy hand to rest.
Whenever I lurched or stumbled, you were there to stifle my fall. I am grateful
for what you've given my family, but there must be limits to a man's
generosity. How often I questioned the extremes of your magnanimity.
What man so dotes over a child not his own? What drove you to such lengths?
You never explained. You merely maintained your severely dotting eye.
The year I was thought to have the consumption, you never left my bedside. You sobbed
and groaned, crying out to the spirits that they not take me, that you'd done everything
they'd asked of you. In that instant you frightened me, and from then on I watched you
with a more discerning eye. You so wanted me to be your friend, your personal cupid,
and in my youth I obliged, sharing with you the (edited) details of my days at school

and expressing my gratitude whenever I could. But even as I outgrew my leg brace and, eventually, my crutch, you never ceased. My ruddiness never quelled you. The speed with which I negotiated even the most difficult obstacles never discouraged you from visiting me every day. The jealousy among my brothers and sisters! They would say, ‘Why does Scrooge talk with Tim so often, Mother? Why does he get all the gifts?’ I witnessed the slow degeneration of my family’s values. Oh Peter and Martha! Oh Belinda, Agnes and Micah! How the perfumes of Piccadilly sullied your pristine spirits! Mother never answered these charges, nor did Father. They were content with things as they were and so did not want to stir the pot, so to speak (though since we’ve become wealthy Mother’s hardly folded a sheet, let alone stirred a bloody pot). And now I must eulogize you, Mr. Scrooge. I must canonize you in the minds of the London public. They think I became a success because of you. Did you plant my mathematical abilities in my head? Did I endeavour to employ my talents to count money and separate columns of accumulated interest? No one asked me whether I wanted to teach, or join a charity, or manage a poorhouse. No one asked me if I enjoyed being a financier. They saw my clothes, my house, my silver-burnished cane, and that was enough. Oh, you poor mourners! If only you understood the dilemma I face. How I wish I could scatter these pages amongst you and be done with it! What shall I do? Shall I present to you a portrait of the man you idolized, or a portrait of the man who frustrated me? Shall I remain mired in the life you’ve built for me, Mr. Scrooge? Or shall I gather all my valuables and catch a coach to the country, away from London’s choking air, away from the anxious

expectations of an entire populace?” Tim returns to the desk, groaning brisk and high against the swelled volume of the voices downstairs. He drops his cane on the floor and resumes editing. To the end of “We must find new saints” he adds “or, failing that, become our own saviours.” The pale sunlight squeezes, wrenches, scrapes through the frost-latticed window, exhales leadenly onto the pages.