

And again they drink, and THE SPIRIT shares the light of his torch with them, and the ship fades away. THE SPIRIT and SCROOGE are again alone.

C. PRESENT Even in the dangers of the sea men do not forget me.

SCROOGE Take me home, Spirit.

C. PRESENT You said you would gladly follow. Well?

SCROOGE I'll try. But away from these terrors.

C. PRESENT Not home. But nearer home. The home of your nephew - Fred.

No sooner said than done. There is suddenly bright light and tremendous roars of laughter, and THE SPIRIT and SCROOGE are in the midst of a party.

*With: Fred, his nephew
Fred's wife
His wife's pretty sister
His wife's plain sister
His friend, Topper*

FRED is the cause of the merriment, telling them a story.

Start

FRED He did. As I'm alive, I swear he did. He said Christmas was humbug. *(More laughter.)* And you know what's more? He believed it, too.

Yet more laughter.

F'S WIFE The more shame on him, Fred.

FRED He's a comical fellow and that's the truth.

TOPPER Comical!

FRED Oh, he may not be all that pleasant, but he suffers more for it than we do. At any rate, I've nothing to say against him.

F'S WIFE I wonder how rich he is.

PLAIN SIS Is he rich?

F'S WIFE Fred says he is.

PRETTY SIS He must be.

FRED What of it? His wealth is no use to him. He doesn't do any good with it. He doesn't make himself

comfortable with it. And he certainly hasn't the satisfaction of thinking he's ever going to benefit US with it.

Again they all laugh.

F'S WIFE I've no patience with him. *(There is general agreement.)*

FRED Oh, I have. I'm sorry for him. I couldn't be angry with him if I tried. Well, who suffers by his nasty whims? Himself - nobody else. Here he takes it into his head to dislike us, and he won't come and dine with us. What's the consequence? He doesn't lose much of a dinner!

There are howls of protest and more laughter at this teasing.

F'S WIFE Really, Fred! I think he loses a very good dinner.

PRETTY SIS So do I.

PLAIN SIS A marvellous dinner.

FRED Really? Well, I'm delighted to hear it. *(With a wink at TOPPER.)* Frankly I haven't too much faith in these young cooks. What do you say, Topper?

PRETTY SIS If Topper's wise he won't say anything.

PLAIN SIS Do stop teasing and go on with your story.

F'S WIFE Fred never does finish a story.

TOPPER I doubt he gets the chance.

More laughter from all.

FRED I was only going to say that the consequence of dear Uncle Ebenezer refusing to make merry with us is that he loses some mighty pleasant moments that couldn't possibly do him any harm - and he loses some companions that couldn't help be pleasanter than those in his own thoughts, whether he's in his mouldy old office or his dusty old house.

F'S WIFE But you won't ask him next year, will you?

Stop

~~**FRED** I most certainly will. I'll ask him every year. Whether he likes it or not.~~

~~**TOPPER** Why, when he always says no?~~