The Cratchit Family Christmas

Then up rose Mrs Cratchit, Cratchit’s wife, dressed out but poorly in a twice-turned gown, but brave in ribbons, which are cheap and make a goodly show for sixpence; and she laid the cloth, assisted by Belinda Cratchit, second of her daughters, also brave in ribbons; while Master Peter Cratchit plunged a fork into the saucepan of potatoes, and getting the corners of his monstrous shirt collar (Bob’s private property, lent to him honour of the day) into his mouth, rejoiced to find himself so well dressed.

And now two smaller Cratchits, boy and girl, came tearing in, screaming that outside the baker’s they had smelt a goose, and known it was theirs; and basking in the thought of sage and onion, these young Cratchits danced about the table, and begged Master Peter Cratchit to the skies, while he (although his collars nearly choked him) blew the fire, until the slow potatoes, bubbling up, knocked loudly at the saucepan-lid to be let out and peeled.

‘What has got your precious father then?’ said Mrs Cratchit. ‘And your brother, Tiny Tim! And Martha warn’t as late last Christmas Day by half an hour?’

‘Here’s Martha, mother!’ said a girl, appearing as she spoke.

‘Here’s Martha, mother!’ cried the two young Cratchits. ‘Hurrah! There’s such a goose, Martha!’

‘Why, bless your heart alive, my dear, how late you are!’ said Mrs Cratchit, kissing her a dozen times, and taking off her shawl and bonnet for her.

‘We’d a deal of work to finish up last night,’ replied the girl, ‘and had to clear away this morning, mother!’

‘Well, never mind, so long as you are come,’ said Mrs Cratchit. ‘Sit ye down before the fire, my dear, and have a warm, Lord bless ye!’

‘No, no! There’s father coming,’ cried the two young Cratchits, who were everywhere at once. ‘Hide, Martha, hide!’

So Martha hid herself, and in came little Bob, the father, with at least three feet of scarf as well as the fringe, hanging down before him; and his threadbare clothes darned up and brushed, to look seasonable; and Tiny Tim upon his shoulder. Alas for Tiny Tim, he bore a little crutch, and had his legs supported by an iron frame!

‘Why, where’s our Martha?’ cried Bob Cratchit, looking round.

‘Not coming,’ said Mrs Cratchit.

‘Not coming!’ said Bob, with a sudden drop in his high spirits; for he had been Tim’s horse all the way from church and had come home excited. ‘Not coming upon Christmas Day!’
Martha didn’t like to see him disappointed, if it were only a joke, so she came out from behind the door and ran into his arms, while the two young Cratchits bore Tiny Tim off into the wash house, that he might hear the pudding singing in the copper.

‘And how did little Tim behave?’ asked Mrs Cratchit, when Bob had hugged his daughter to his heart’s content.

‘As good as gold,’ said Bob, ‘and better.’ Then Bob proposed, ‘A Merry Christmas to us all, my dears. God bless us!’

Which all the family echoed.

‘God bless us every one!’ said Tiny Tim, the last of all.

‘Mr Scrooge!’ said Bob, ‘I’ll give you Mr Scrooge, the Founder of the Feast!’

‘The Founder of the Feast indeed!’ cried Mrs Cratchit, reddening. ‘I wish I had him here. I’d give him a piece of my mind to feast upon, and I’d hope he had a good appetite for it.’

‘My dear,’ said Bob, ‘the children! Christmas Day.’

‘It should be Christmas Day, I am sure,’ said she, ‘on which one drinks the health of such an odious, stingy, hard, unfeeling man as Mr Scrooge. You know he is, Robert! Nobody knows it better than you do, poor fellow!’

‘My dear,’ was Bob’ mild answer, ‘Christmas Day.’

‘I’ll drink his health for your sake and the Day’s,’ said Mrs Cratchit, ‘not for his. Long life to him! A merry Christmas and a happy new year! He’ll be very merry and very happy, I have no doubt!’

The children drank the toast after her. It was the first of their proceedings which had no heartiness.