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READ ANYWHERE, ANYTIME

Tiny Tim

Charles Dickens

IT was Christmas Day, and the Cratchit family were going to have a most wonderful dinner. Perhaps, some other days, they had scarcely enough to eat, for they were a large family. Work as hard as Father Bob Cratchit could, there was often not enough to go around. For there were Mother Cratchit, and Martha who worked in the milliner's shop, and Belinda who helped at home, and Peter, and the two little Cratchits, and, last of all, Tiny Tim. Alas for Tiny Tim! He bore always a little crutch and had his limbs supported by an iron frame! But, although he was only a little, little child, Tiny Tim was patient and mild, and they loved him more than all the rest. And it was Christmas Day.

Mother Cratchit and Belinda laid the cloth, and Peter blew the fire until the slow potatoes, bubbling up, knocked loudly at the saucepan lid to be let out and peeled. The two little Cratchits came tearing in to say that outside, at the baker's, they had smelled a goose and knew it for their very own. Martha came home, and, last of all, in came little Bob, the father, wrapped up in three feet of muffler, with his thread-bare clothes darned and brushed to look seasonable, and with Tiny Tim on his shoulder.

"And how did little Tim behave?" asked Mother Cratchit.

"As good as gold," said Bob, "and better," setting Tiny Tim carefully down, while the two little Cratchits hustled him off to the wash-house, that he might hear the pudding singing in the copper.

"He told me coming home that he hoped the people saw him in the church, because he was a cripple, and it might be pleasant for them to remember, upon Christmas Day, Who made lame beggars to walk and blind men to see."

Bob's voice trembled, and it trembled more as he said that he thought Tiny Tim was growing very strong and well.

But they heard the sound of Tiny Tim's little crutch upon the floor and they helped him over to his stool by the fire—while the two little Cratchits went out to the baker's to fetch the goose. Mother Cratchit made the gravy (ready before in a little saucepan) hissing hot; Peter mashed the potatoes; Belinda sweetened the apple sauce; Martha dusted the hot plates; Bob took Tiny Tim beside him in a tiny corner at the table; and the two little Cratchits (come home with the goose) set chairs for everybody, cramming spoons in their mouths lest they should

shriek for goose before it came their turn to be served.

There never was such a goose! Bob said he didn't believe there ever was such a goose cooked. With the apple sauce and the mashed potatoes there was sufficient dinner for the whole family. Indeed, Mother Cratchit said, as she looked at one small atom of a bone upon the dish: "They hadn't eaten it all, at last." The little Cratchits were steeped in sage and onions to the eyebrows. But presently Belinda changed the plates and Mother Cratchit left the room—alone—to take up the pudding and bring it in!

Suppose it should not be done. Suppose it should break. Suppose some one had come over the back wall and stolen it while they were making merry with the goose. Hello! a great deal of steam. The pudding was out of the copper. A smell like a washing-day! That was the cloth. A smell like an eating-house and a pastry cook's next door to each other, with a laundress's next door to that! That was the pudding.

In half a minute Mother Cratchit entered with the pudding like a speckled cannon-ball, so hard and firm, and blazing, and bedight with Christmas holly stuck into the top! Everybody had something to say about it, but nobody thought it at all a small pudding for a large family. Any Cratchit would have blushed to hint at such a thing.



At last the dinner was all done, the cloth was cleared, the hearth swept and the fire made up. A whole pile of apples and oranges was put upon the table; and a shovelful of chestnuts upon the fire, beginning at once to sputter and crackle noisily. Then all the Cratchit family drew around the hearth, and Tiny Tim sat very close to his father's side upon his little stool. Bob held his withered little hand in his, for he loved the child, and he said:

"A merry Christmas to us all, my dears; God bless us!"

"Merry Christmas! Merry Christmas!" said all the Cratchit family.

And: "God bless us—every one!" said Tiny Tim, the last of all.

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