

A CHRISTMAS TAIL

by Donna Marie Bayer

As I wandered beneath the ice-laden trees I could feel the spirit of Christmas floating in the air around me. The sound of chimes from the fake bell tower assailed my ears with Christmas fellowship and I could see the snow on the Commons roof. I was content with being alone, for at this moment I felt at one with nature and the winter wonderland surrounding me. The sunlight was reflecting off the icicles high over my head and

the entire scene was faintly reminiscent of the "fairyl-land" that one imagines as a small child.

I was totally immersed in my reflections of Christmases long past, when I espied a squirrel standing on the pavement in front of me, glaring at me as if to say that I had no business invading his private domain. Not wishing to appear rude (and also being possessed of a rather strange sense of humor) I kowtowed to him and said, "Good afternoon, Mr. Squirrel."

He glared up at me again and his little eyes glittered red. "What's good about it?"

Taken totally aback by such a negative reply (in fact, any reply at all) from such a cute and cuddly little creature (forgive me, Mr. Squirrel, I didn't mean to insult you), I stammered, "Well....I uh...that is..."

"Well, miss, is it, or is it not a good afternoon?"

"Well, sir, you see... I had thought so...but..."

"And don't you think so now?"

"Well, to be perfectly honest, sir, at this point, I don't know what to think."

He glared again. "Not at all consistent, are you?"

"Well, not usually, but--"

"But nothing! Do you know why this is not a good afternoon?"

"No, sir."

"This is not a good afternoon because I should have been hibernating four weeks ago, and I am very, very tired."

"Well, sir, I don't mean to pry, but--"

"Why aren't I sleeping? Well, listen, miss, and I'll tell you. I am not permitted to hibernate this year until everyone on this campus has the Christmas spirit."

"Oh, how awful....and doesn't everyone have it?"

"No, unfortunately not. There is one man who doesn't. He is your Assistant Dean and we will call him Mr. Scrooge."

"Oh, surely, sir, he must have the spirit."

He curled his upper lip over his teeth and snarled at me. "I say he doesn't. And I should know."

"Just how should you know, sir?"

"I am the ghost of Jacob Marley, and I am waiting for three spirits to visit our Assistant Dean and convince him of the error of his ways."

I shuddered, for suddenly the cold air seemed colder. "Indeed, sir. Three spirits? Whatever for? Couldn't you convince him yourself?"

He sneered at me. "How many people do you know that would stand and talk to a squirrel?"

I looked around to make sure no one was watching. Sure enough, I was talking to a squirrel. I wondered how my analyst would react to this. I decided he probably would not believe me at all. "Er... not many, sir...."

"And do you think that Scrooge is nutty enough to talk to a squirrel? Sorry about the pun."

"It wasn't a pun, sir. It was merely a poor attempt at one."

"Mind your manners, girl. Respect your elders. Now, would Mr. Scrooge talk to a squirrel?"

"I doubt it, sir."

"So I had to find another way of convincing him of his wrongdoings and giving him the feeling of love and fellowship of Christmas. Three spirits was recommended by my public relations man. Besides, spirits to give him the spirit it has a nice ring to it."

"So do the chimes, sir."

"Will you stop interrupting me? Now. Mr. Scrooge



continued next page

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