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Upper Grades

# The Haunted Man

Ghost allows unhappy man to give up his memories—both good and bad—only to have him realize memories make us who we are. . . .

by Charles Dickens, and adapted by Carol D. Wise

## Characters

NARRATOR

REDLAW, *chemistry professor*

WILLIAM SWIDGER, *manservant*

MRS. WILLIAM, *his wife*

PEPPER SWIDGER, *his father*

TETTERBY, *newspaper shop owner*

MRS. TETTERBY, *his wife*

EDMUND DENHAM, *student*

BOY, *ragged orphan*

LONGFORD, *Denham's father*

GHOST, *likeness of REDLAW*

**SETTING:** 1850, London.

**BEFORE RISE:** NARRATOR enters to address audience.

**NARRATOR:** Anyone who had seen Professor Redlaw would describe him

as haunted. Who could have observed his hollow cheek, his sunken eyes, his black-attired figure, his grizzled hair hanging like tangled seaweed about his face and not have said he looked like a haunted man? One needed only to study his manner—taciturn, pensive, gloomy, shadowed by habitual reserve—to conclude it was the manner of a haunted man. And his voice—slow-speaking, deep, and grave—was the voice of a haunted man. But one would think that the cheer of Christmas would brighten him. . . perhaps not. . . . (*Exits as curtain rises*)

## SCENE 1

**SETTING:** Redlaw's home, with a fireplace, center, a chair and table. A door is right.

**AT RISE:** REDLAW is seated by the fire, lost in thought. A wind is heard blowing outside, and shadows appear to crisscross the room. There is a knock at door.

**REDLAW** (*Calling out*): Who's there?

**SWIDGER** (*Offstage*): It's Swidger, sir.

**REDLAW** (*Sighing*): Come in. (*SWIDGER enters, carrying tray with fruit.*)

**SWIDGER**: Merry Christmas, Professor Redlaw!

**REDLAW** (*Mumbling gruffly*): Swidger, you know I don't make merry at the Christmas season. It's just a time to remember all that one has lost.

**SWIDGER** (*Humbly*): Yes, sir. (*Sets tray on table*) I know it's a good bit past your supper time. Mrs. William and my father are coming directly. The wind is quite fearful tonight. Slows one down. Old Pepper—he's eighty-seven now, you know—doesn't move as fast as he used to.

**REDLAW** (*Solemnly*): Nothing is what it used to be, Swidger. Nothing.

**SWIDGER**: What with Old Pepper to take care of, it's just as well that the missus and I never had any children, (*Pauses*) but I sometimes see this look of sadness come over her, and I think that she would have been happy as a mother. Of course, the students stop in every day and have something to tell her. "Swidge," they call her. I'm sure she thinks of them as her children. Certainly the students drop by to see you as well, sir.

**REDLAW**: Only if they have questions about my chemistry assignments. They rarely make social calls.

**SWIDGER**: But they think the world of you, sir. They certainly do. I've heard them talking. (*MRS. WILLIAM and PEPPER enter right, bearing another tray of food and Christmas greens.*) Ah! Here come Mrs. William and Old Pepper now.

**MRS. WILLIAM** (*Looking around the room*): My, it has gotten so dark in here, Professor. Do you want me to light some more candles, sir? I'd be happy to.

**REDLAW** (*Morosely*): Leave them be. (*To PEPPER*) What's that you've got in your arms, old man?

**PEPPER**: Holly, sir. My mother always said that holly could brighten any room.

**MRS. WILLIAM**: Berries are so seasonable this time of year. (*She sets tray down on table and helps PEPPER decorate the room.*)

**REDLAW** (*Sighing heavily*): Another Christmas come, another year gone! More dismal memories to add to our torment until death idly jumbles all together and rubs them out.

**MRS. WILLIAM** (*Cheerfully*) Oh, sir, Christmas is a time of happiness, it is.

**PEPPER**: These greens will cheer you and bring you a merry Christmas. I've had eighty-seven of them. Merry and happy ones.

**REDLAW** (*Studying him*): Have all your Christmases been merry and happy?

**PEPPER**: Aye, sir, ever so many. All eighty-seven of them.

**REDLAW** (*To MRS. WILLIAM*): Is his memory impaired with age?

**MRS. WILLIAM**: Not a morsel of it, sir.

**SWIDGER**: Never was such a memory as my father's. He doesn't know what forgetting means.

**REDLAW** (*To PEPPER*): So you have

only happy memories of the past Christmases?

**PEPPER** (*Thoughtfully*): Well, when I was a very young lad, my mother did pass away at Christmas, but I have memories of her decorating our house with evergreens and berries. She loved the berries, she did. They remind me of her. Hm-m, of course, William's mother has passed as well—and several of our little ones, and my son George is very ill—but I can see them all, alive and healthy, as they used to be. It's a blessed thing for me to cherish my memories at eighty-seven.

**MRS. WILLIAM**: We're finished decorating, sir. I hope the greens will bring you some cheer.

**PEPPER** (*To MRS. WILLIAM*): Milly, you need to check on that sick student at the Tetterbys'.

**REDLAW** (*Surprised*): What sick student?

**MRS. WILLIAM**: Oh, yes, poor lad. Not much rest to be had there. The Tetterbys just had their eighth child—a girl finally—after seven boys. Such a wild tribe they are, but the Tetterbys adore them all. What a happy family, they are!

**REDLAW**: But this student—who is he? I should at least give him some money.

**MRS. WILLIAM** (*Upset*): Oh no, sir! He did not want me to mention him. He said that of all in the world, he would not take help from you.

**REDLAW** (*Puzzled*): Me? Why not from me?

**MRS. WILLIAM** (*Shrugging*): He did

not say why. Perhaps he was embarrassed.

**SWIDGER**: Mrs. William is always looking out for those less privileged.

**PEPPER**: Why, this very night she found a ragged child shivering on a doorstep. What does she do but bring him home for warmth and food. Poor lad.

**MRS. WILLIAM**: What better time to help others than at Christmas? If you don't need anything else, we will be on our way. (*REDLAW waves them away.*) Wishing you a merry Christmas, sir.

**REDLAW** (*Grumbling*): Unlike you, I find little to be merry about.

**MRS. WILLIAM**: Blessings to you then, sir. (*They exit. The room becomes even darker. GHOST, looking very much like REDLAW, only deathly pale, enters left.*)

**REDLAW** (*Gasping*): Who are you? What do you want from me?

**GHOST**: I mean you no harm. Look closer. Do I look familiar to you?

**REDLAW** (*Leaning closer*): You are myself—my very image!

**GHOST**: We are one—you and I. Look upon me! We were neglected in our youth and miserably poor. We struggled and suffered. No mother's self-denying love, no father's counsel aided us. We struggled upward, saved by the love of one young gentle woman.

**REDLAW** (*Hoarsely*): My dear sister. She was the only light of home I had ever known—so young and fair. She came into the darkness of my life and made it bright until Longford—one I

considered a friend—betrayed me and led her astray. Let me blot her from my mind. Why is it my doom to remember her and the enemy who destroyed her? I know that all men and women have their troubles. Who would not want to forget their sorrows?

**GHOST:** I can erase your sorrows with a wave of my hand.

**REDLAW:** Tempter, your hollow look and voice I dread more than words can express. A dim foreshadowing of greater fear is stealing over me.

**GHOST:** Receive it as a proof that I am powerful. Hear what I offer! I have the power to cancel your remembrance of sorrows—to leave but very faint, confused traces of them.

**REDLAW:** I tremble with distrust and doubt of you, and the dim fear you cast upon me deepens into a nameless horror I can hardly bear.

**GHOST** (*Firmly*): Decide—before the opportunity is lost!

**REDLAW** (*Nervously pondering to himself*): If there be poison in my mind and body, and this fearful shadow can cast it out, shall I not cast it out?

**GHOST:** No other men have been given this choice! Say the word and it will be done.

**REDLAW:** Yes, then! Alas, I, want to forget my troubles!

**GHOST** (*Waving his arms*): Then it is done! The gift that I have given, you shall give again to others whenever they come near to you. Some may be more resistant to the spell than others, but all will ultimately succumb.

**REDLAW** (*Hesitant*): I shall pass this gift to others?

**GHOST:** You say that life would be happier without memories. Think of the service you do them. Go! They need only look into your empty eyes to be transformed. Be happy in the gift you have won! (*Room becomes dark and GHOST disappears.*)

**REDLAW** (*Sighing*): My life will be restored now. I will know peace at last. (*Curtain. NARRATOR reenters before curtain to address audience.*)

**NARRATOR:** Redlaw slept with the contentment of knowing that his memories would torment him no longer, although broken thoughts questioned the merit of passing this gift to others who may not wish to have it—particularly the cheerful Mrs. William, who seemed so joyful with her simple lot in life. Upon awakening on the eve of Christmas possessed of newfound peace, he decided to pay a visit to the home of the Tetterbys and see the ailing student who had avoided contact with him. (*Exits*)

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## SCENE 2

**SETTING:** *Simple home/shop of the Tetterbys. A sign reading, A. TETTERBY & CO., NEWSMEN hangs by the door, left. A screen separates the “shop” and bedroom, which has a cot.*

**AT RISE:** *Bedroom area, where DENHAM lies sleeping on cot, is darkened at the beginning of the scene. Noise of many children laughing is heard in the background. TETTERBY sits reading a newspaper in shop as REDLAW enters.*

**TETTERBY** (*Jumping up*): Professor Redlaw! Seasons greetings, sir! How can I help you?