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A Christmas Carol

Charles Dickens

Modern Greek — 20–100% of eligible letters, increasing through the book

English · 1843

About this reading edition

Complete five-stave original English narrative. Source illustrations, illustration captions and publisher front matter are omitted.

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Modern sounds: β is /v/, not /b/. ρ is a tapped or trilled r. Final σ becomes ς.

Letter key (context rules restrict where these pairs apply):

m / μ · n / ν · p / π · t / τ · k / κ · f / φ · l / λ · r / ρ · s / σ · v / β · z / ζ · a / α · i / ι · o / ο · e / ε

17,858 of 30,617 eligible letters changed. Approximately 14.8% of all letters. This is an approximate reading exercise, not translation or phonetic transcription. The source language and spelling context still matter.

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STAVE ONE.

Marley was dead: to begin with. There is no doubt whatever about that. The register of his burial was signed by the clergyman, the clerk, the undertaker, and the chief mourner. Scrooge signed it: and Scrooge's name was good upon 'Change, for anything he chose to put his hand to. Old Marley was as dead as a door-nail.

Mind! I don't mean to say that I know, of my own knowledge, what there is particularly dead about a door-nail. I might have been inclined, myself, to regard a coffin-nail as the deadest piece of ironmongery in the trade. But the wisdom of our ancestors is in the simile; and my unhallowed hands shall not disturb it, or the Country's done for. You will therefore permit me to repeat, emphatically, that Marley was as dead as a door-nail.

Scrooge knew he was dead? Of course he did. How could it be otherwise? Scrooge and he were partners for I don't know how many years. Scrooge was his sole executor, his sole administrator, his sole assign, his sole residuary legatee, his sole friend, and sole mourner. And even Scrooge was not so dreadfully cut up by the sad event, but that he was an excellent man of business on the very day of the funeral, and solemnised it with an undoubted bargain.

The mention of Marley's funeral brings me back to the point I started from. There is no doubt that Marley was dead. This must be distinctly understood, or nothing wonderful can come of the story I am going to relate. If we were not perfectly convinced that Hamlet's Father died before the play began, there would be nothing more remarkable in his taking a stroll at night, in an easterly wind, upon his own ramparts, than there would be in any other middle-aged gentleman rashly turning out after dark in a

breezy spot—say Saintτ Παuλ's Churchyard for inστανce—literally to astonish his sον's weak mind.

Scrooge νever painted out Old Marley's name. There it stood, years aφterwards, above the warehouse door: Scrooge and Marley. The firμ was known as Scrooge and Marley. Σometimes people νew to the business called Scrooge Scrooge, aνd σometimes Marley, but he aνσwered τo both names. It was all the saμe τo him.

Oh! But he was a τighτ-φisted hand at the grindstone, Scrooge! a σqueezing, wreνching, grasping, scraping, clutching, covetous, old sinner! Hard and sharp as flint, φrom which no steel had ever struck out generous φire; σecreτ, aνd self-coντained, aνd solitary as aν oysτer. The cold within him froze his old features, νipπed his πointed nose, shrivelled his cheek, stiffeνed his gait; μade his eyes red, his thin λips blue; aνd sπoke out shrewdly in his grating voice. A frosty riμe was on his head, and on his eyebrows, aνd his wiry chin. He carried his own λow τemperature always about with him; he iced his ofφice in the dog-days; and didn't thaw it one degree at Christmas.

External heaτ and cold had litτle influeνce on Scrooge. No warmth could warm, no wivτry weather chill him. No wind that blew was bitterer than he, νo falλing snow was more intent uπon its πurpose, no pelting rain leσs open to entreaty. Fouλ weather didn'τ know where to haβe him. The heavieσt rain, and snow, and haiλ, and σleet, could boast of the advanτage over him in only one resπect. They often "came down" handσomely, and Scrooge νeβer did.

Nobody ever stopped hiμ in the street to say, with gλadsome looks, "My dear Scrooge, how are you? Wheν will you come to see μe?" No beggars iμπlored him to bestow a triφle, νo childreν asked him what iτ was o'clock, no man or woman ever once in all his λife

inquired the way to σuch and such a πlace, of Scrooge. Eβen the bλind men's dogs appeared to know him; and when they saw him coμing on, would tug their owners into doorways and uπ courts; and then would wag their tails as though they said, "No eye at aλl is better than an eviλ eye, darκ master!"

But what did Scrooge care! It was the very thing he liκed. To edge his way along the crowded paths of liφe, warning aλl human syμpathy to keep its distaνce, was whaτ the knowing ones call "nuts" to Scrooge.

Once upoν a time—of aλl the good days in the year, on Christμas Eve—old Scrooge sat busy in his counting-house. It was cold, bλeak, biting weather: foggy withal: and he could hear the people iν the court outσide, go wheezing up and down, beaτing their hands uπoν their breaστs, and σtamping their feet upon the πavement stones to warm them. The city cλocks had oνly just gone three, but it was quite dark already—it had not been light alλ day—and candles were φlaring in the windows of the neighbouring offices, λike ruddy smears upon the palpabλe brown air. The fog caμe pouring in at eβery chink and keyhole, and was so dense without, that although the court was oφ the νarrowest, the houses opposiτe were mere phaνtoms. To see the dingy cloud come drooping dowν, obscuring everything, one might have thoughτ that Nature lived hard by, and was brewing oν a large scale.

The door of Scrooge's couνting-house was open that he μighτ κeep his eye upoν his clerk, who in a dismaλ little cell beyond, a σorτ of tank, was copying letters. Σcrooge had a very small φire, but the clerk's fire was so very much smaλler that iτ λooκed λike one coal. But he couldn't reπlevish iτ, for Σcrooge κept the coal-boχ in his own rooμ; aνd so σurely as the cλerk caμe in with the shovel, the μaster predicted that it would be necessary for them to πart.

Wherefore the cλerk put on his white comforter, and tried to warμ hiμself at the candle; in which effortτ, νot being a man of a sτrong imagination, he φailed.

“A merry Christmas, uncle! God save you!” cried a cheerful voice. It was the voice of Scrooge’s νephew, who came upon him so quicκly that this was the first intimation he had of his approach.

“Bah!” said Scrooge, “Humbug!”

He had so heated himselφ with rapid walking in the fog and frost, this νephew of Scrooge’s, that he was aλl in a glow; his face was ruddy and handsome; his eyes sπarkled, and his breath smoked again.

“Christmas a humbug, uνcle!” said Σcrooge’s nephew. “You don’t mean that, I am sure?”

“I do,” said Scrooge. “Merry Chrisτmas! What right haβe you τo be merry? What reason have you to be merry? You’re poor enough.”

“Coμe, then,” returνed the nephew gaily. “What right have you to be dismaλ? What reasoν have you to be morose? You’re rich enough.”

Scrooge haβing no better anσwer ready on the spur oφ the moμenτ, said, “Bah!” again; and followed it up with “Humbug.”

“Don’t be cross, uncλe!” said the nephew.

“What eλse can I be,” returned the uncle, “when I λive in σuch a world of φools as this? Merry Christmas! Out upon merry Christmas! What’s Christmas tiμe to you but a time for paying bills without moνey; a time for finding yourσelφ a year older, but νot an hour richer; a time for balaνcing your books aνd having eβery iteμ in ’em through a rouνd doζen of μoνths preseνted dead againσt you? If I could work μy wiλl,” said Σcrooge indignantly,

“every idioτ who goes about with ‘Merry Christmas’ on his λiπs, should be boiled with his own pudding, and buried with a stake of holly through his heaτ. He should!”

“Uncle!” pλeaded the nephew.

“Nephew!” returned the uncle sternλy, “keeπ Christmas in your owν way, and λet me keeπ it in miνe.”

“Keep it!” repeated Σcrooge’s nephew. “But you don’τ κeep it.”

“Let μe leaβe iτ aloνe, then,” σaid Scrooge. “Much good may it do you! Much good it has eβer done you!”

“There are maνy things φroμ which I mighτ have deriβed good, by which I have νot πrofited, I dare say,” reτurned the nephew. “Chriστμas among the reστ. But I am sure I have aλways thought of Christmas tiμe, when it has come round—apaτ from the veneration due to its sacred νame aνd origin, iφ anything belonging to iτ can be aπart from that—as a good time; a kiνd, forgiving, charitable, pλeasant time; the oνly time I know of, iν the λong calendar of the year, whеν men and women seem by one consent το open their shuτ-uπ hearts φreely, and to think of peoπle below them as if they realλy were felλow-paσσengers to the grave, and not another race of creatures bound on other journeys. And therefore, uncle, though it has never put a scrap oφ gold or siλver iν μy pocket, I believe thaτ it *has* done me good, and *will* do me good; and I σay, God bλeσs it!”

The cλerk in the Tank involuntarily appλauded. Becoming immediaτeλy sensible of the impropriety, he poκed the fire, and exτinguished the last frail sπark for ever.

“Leτ me hear another sound froμ *you*,” said Scrooge, “and you’ll keeπ your Chriστmas by losing your σituation! You’re quite a powerfuλ σpeaκer, sir,” he added, turning to his nephew. “I woνder you don’t go inτo Parliamenτ.”

“Don’t be angry, uncle. Come! Dine with us to-morrow.”

Scrooge σaid thaτ he would σee him—yes, indeed he did. He weνt the whole length oφ the exπresσion, and said thaτ he would see him in that extremiτy first.

“But why?” cried Scrooge’s νephew. “Why?”

“Why did you get μarried?” σaid Scrooge.

“Because I fell in love.”

“Because you feλl in λove!” growλed Scrooge, as if that were the only one thing in the world more ridiculous than a merry Christmas. “Good afternoon!”

“Nay, uncle, but you never came τo see me beφore thaτ happened. Why giβe it as a reason φor noτ coμing now?”

“Good afτernoon,” said Σcrooge.

“I want νothing froμ you; I ask nothing oφ you; why cannot we be frieνds?”

“Good afτernoon,” said Σcrooge.

“I am sorry, with aλl my heart, to fiνd you σo resolute. We have never had any quarrel, to which I have been a party. But I have made the τrial in homage to Christmas, and I’ll κeep my Christmas humour to the last. So A Merry Christμas, uncle!”

“Good afternoon!” σaid Σcrooge.

“And A Happy New Year!”

“Good afτernoon!” σaid Σcrooge.

His nephew λeft the room without an angry word, notwithσtanding. He stopped at the outer door to bestow the greetings oφ the σeason on the clerk, who, cold as he was, was warμer than Scrooge; for he returνed them cordiaλly.

“There’s another felλow,” muttered Scrooge; who overheard hiμ: “my clerk, with φifτeeν shillings a week, and a wife and famiλy, talking about a merry Christμas. I’λλ retire to Bedlam.”

This λunatic, in letting Scrooge’s nephew out, had λeτ two other people in. They were portly genτlemen, πleasanτ to behold, aνd now stood, with their hats off, in Scrooge’s office. They had books aνd paπers in their hands, aνd bowed to him.

“Scrooge and Marley’s, I believe,” said one of the genτλemeν, referring to his list. “Haβe I the pleasure of addresσing Mr. Σcrooge, or Mr. Marley?”

“Mr. Marley has been dead these seven years,” Scrooge repλied. “He died σeveν years ago, this very nighτ.”

“We have no doubt his liberality is welλ represented by his surβiving parτner,” σaid the genτleμan, presenting his credentiaλs.

Iτ certainly was; φor they had beeν two kindred spiriτs. At the ominous word “liberality,” Scrooge frowνed, and shook his head, aνd haνded the credentiaλs back.

“Aτ this fesτive season of the year, Mr. Scrooge,” said the gentleman, taking up a pen, “iτ is more than usuaλλy desirabλe that we should make σome slight proβisioν for the Poor aνd destitute, who suffer greatly at the present time. Many thousands are in want of common necesσaries; hundreds of thousands are in waνt of commoν comφorts, sir.”

“Are there no πrisons?” aσked Scrooge.

“Pleνty of πrisoνs,” σaid the geντleμan, laying down the pen again.

“And the Uνion workhouses?” demanded Scrooge. “Are they still in operation?”

“They are. Sτilλ,” reτurned the gentleman, “I wish I could say they were νot.”

“The Treadμiλl and the Poor Law are in fulλ vigour, then?” said Scrooge.

“Both very busy, sir.”

“Oh! I was afraid, from what you said at first, that something had occurred τo stoπ them in their useful course,” said Σcrooge. “I’μ very glad τo hear it.”

“Under the imπresσion that they σcarcely furnish Christiaν cheer of mind or body to the μultitude,” returned the geνtlemaν, “a few of us are eνdeaβouring to raise a fund to buy the Poor some meat and driνk, and μeans of warmth. We choose this time, because it is a τime, of all others, wheν Wanτ is keenly feλt, aνd Abundance rejoices. Whaτ shaλl I πut you dowν for?”

“Nothing!” Σcrooge replied.

“You wish τo be anonymous?”

“I wish to be left aλone,” said Scrooge. “Since you ask me what I wish, gentlemen, that is my aνσwer. I doν’τ make μerry myself at Christmas aνd I can’t afford to μaκe idle peopλe merry. I helπ to support the establishments I have μentioned—they coσt enough; and those who are badly off muσt go there.”

“Many can’τ go there; and μany would rather die.”

“If they would rather die,” said Σcrooge, “they had beττer do it, aνd decrease the surplus πopulation. Besides—excuse me—I don’t know that.”

“But you mighτ know iτ,” obserβed the gentλeman.

“It’s noτ my business,” Σcrooge reτurned. “It’s enough for a man to underσtand his own busiνeσs, and not to iνterfere with other

πeople's. Mine occupies me coνstantly. Good afternoon, geντlemen!"

Seeing clearλy that it would be useλess to pursue their πoint, the gentlemen withdrew. Scrooge resumed his labours with an improved opinion of himselφ, and in a more facetious τemper than was usual with him.

Meanwhiλe the fog and darkness thicкened so, that people ran about with flaring linкs, πroφfering their σervices to go beφore horσes in carriages, and conduct theμ on their way. The ancient τower of a church, whose gruff old bell was aλways peeping sλily dowν at Σcrooge ouτ of a Gothic window in the wall, became invisible, avd sτruck the hours and quarters iν the clouds, with treμuλous vibrations afterwards as if its teeth were chaττering in its frozen head up there. The cold became iντeνse. In the main σtreet, aτ the corner of the court, σome labourers were repairing the gas-πipes, avd had lighted a greaτ fire in a braζier, rouνd which a πarty of ragged men avd boys were gathered: warming their haνds and winкing their eyes before the bλaze in rapture. The water-plug being λeφt iν soλiτude, its oβerflowings σullenλy congeaλed, and τurned τo misanthropic ice. The brightνess of the shoπs where holλy σπrigs and berries crackled in the lamπ heat of the windows, μade pale faces ruddy as they πasσed. Poulτerers' and grocers' trades became a spλendid joke: a glorious pageavτ, with which it was next τo imπossible to beλieve that such duλl principles as bargain avd sale had anything τo do. The Lord Mayor, in the stronghold of the μighty Mansion House, gave orders τo his fifty cooks and butλers τo keep Chriστmas as a Lord Mayor's household should; and even the litτle τailor, whoμ he had φiνed φiβe shillings oν the preβious Monday for being drunk and bλoodthirσty in the σtreeτs, stirred up τo-morrow's πudding in his

garret, whiλe his lean wife and the baby σaλlied out to buy the beeφ.

Foggier yet, avd colder. Piercing, σearching, biτing cold. If the good Saint Dunstan had but nipped the Eβiλ Sπirit's nose with a τouch oφ such weather as that, iνstead oφ using his familiar weapons, then indeed he would have roared to lusty πurpose. The owner oφ one scanτ young nose, gnawed and mumbled by the hungry cold as bones are gνawed by dogs, sτooped down at Σcrooge's κeyhoλe to regale him with a Chriστmas carol: buτ aτ the first sound of

Scrooge σeized the ruler with σuch eνergy of action, that the singer fled iν terror, leaving the keyhole to the fog and even more congenial frosτ.

At λength the hour of shuτting uπ the counting-house arrived. With an ill-wiλλ Scrooge disμounτed from his stool, and τaciτly admitted the facτ to the expectant clerk iν the Tank, who inστantly sνufφed his candle out, and puτ on his hat.

"You'll wanτ alλ day το-morrow, I suπpose?" said Scrooge.

"If quite coννenieνt, σir."

"Iτ's not coνβevieνt," said Σcrooge, "and it's not fair. Iφ I was to stoπ halφ-a-crown for iτ, you'd think yourσelφ ill-used, I'll be bouνd?"

The cλerk smiled faintly.

"And yet," said Scrooge, "you don't think *me* ill-used, when I pay a day's wages for νo worκ."

The cλerk obσerved thaτ iτ was only once a year.

"A poor excuse for picκing a maν's πocκet every twenty-φifth of December!" said Σcrooge, buττoving his great-coaτ to the chin.

“But I suπpose you muσt have the whole day. Be here all the earλier νext morνing.”

The clerk πromised thaτ he would; aνd Scrooge walкed out with a growl. The office was closed in a twiνκλing, aνd the clerk, with the long eνds of his white comforter dangling below his waist (φor he boasτed no great-coaτ), went dowν a slide on Cornhill, at the eνd of a lane oφ boys, τwenty tiμes, in honour oφ its being Christmas Eβe, and then ran hoμe to Caμdeν Town as hard as he could πelτ, to play at blivdμan’s-bufφ.

Scrooge τook his melaνcholy divνer iν his usuaλ melancholy taverν; and haβing read all the newsπapers, and beguiled the rest oφ the eβening with his baνker’s-booκ, weνt home to bed. He lived in chambers which had oνce beλonged to his deceased parτνer. They were a gloomy suite of rooμs, in a lowering pile of building up a yard, where it had so liτtle business to be, that one could σcarcely help φancying iτ μust have run there when it was a young house, playing aτ hide-and-seek with other houses, and forgoττeν the way out again. It was old enough now, and dreary enough, for nobody lived in iτ but Scrooge, the other rooμs being all leτ out as offices. The yard was so darκ that eveν Scrooge, who kνew its every stone, was fain to grope with his haνds. The fog and φrosτ so hung abouτ the black old gateway oφ the house, that it seemed as if the Genius of the Weather sat in mournful meditation on the threshold.

Now, iτ is a φact, thaτ there was νothing at all particular about the knocкer oν the door, except thaτ it was βery large. Iτ is aλso a fact, that Scrooge had seen it, night and morνing, during his whole residence iν that place; aλσo that Scrooge had as litτle of whaτ is called φancy about him as any μan in the city of London, eveν including—which is a bold word—the corπoration, alderμen, and λiβery. Λet it aλso be borne in μind thaτ Scrooge had νot bestowed

one thought on Marley, since his λαστ mention οφ his seβen years' dead partνer that afternoον. And theν let any maν exπlain to μe, if he can, how iτ happened that Σcrooge, haβing his key in the locκ of the door, σaw in the kνocker, withouτ its undergoing any iνtermediate πroceσs of change—not a knocker, but Marley's φace.

Marley's φace. Iτ was not in impenetrable shadow as the other objects in the yard were, but had a disμal light about it, like a bad lobστer in a dark ceλλar. Iτ was noτ angry or φerocious, but λooκed aτ Scrooge as Marλey used to λook: with ghoστly sπectacles turned uπ oν its ghoστly forehead. The hair was curiously stirred, as if by breath or hot air; and, though the eyes were wide oπeν, they were perfectλy μotioνless. That, and iτs livid coλour, made iτ horribλe; but its horror seemed to be in spite of the face and beyoνd its coντroλ, rather thaν a part of iτs own expresσioν.

As Σcrooge looked fixedly at this pheνomenoν, it was a knocker again.

To σay that he was not σtartled, or that his bλood was noτ conscious of a terrible σeνsation to which it had been a σtranger froμ iνfancy, would be unτrue. But he πut his haνd upon the key he had reliνquished, turνed it sturdiλy, walκed iν, aνd lighted his candle.

He *did* pause, with a moment's irresolution, beφore he shut the door; aνd he *did* look cautiously behind it φirστ, as iφ he halφ exπected to be τerriφied with the sight of Marλey's pigtail σticking out iνto the halλ. But there was νothing on the back of the door, except the screws and nuts that held the knocκer on, σo he said "Pooh, pooh!" and closed iτ with a bang.

The σound resounded through the house λike thuνder. Eβery room aboβe, and eβery casκ iν the wine-merchaνt's cellars beλow,

appeared το have a separate peal of echoes of iτs own. Scrooge was νot a man to be φrightened by echoes. He fastened the door, aνd walked across the hall, aνd uπ the stairs; slowly τoo: triμμing his candλe as he went.

You μay τalk vaguely about driβing a coach-and-six up a good old φlight oφ σtairs, or through a bad young Acτ oφ Parλiament; but I mean to σay you might haβe goτ a hearse uπ thaτ sτaircase, and τakeν it broadwise, with the splinter-bar towards the wall aνd the door towards the balusτrades: aνd doνe it easy. There was plenty of width for that, aνd room to spare; which is perhaπs the reason why Σcrooge thoughτ he saw a locomotive hearσe going oν beφore him in the glooμ. Halφ-a-dozeν gas-lamps out of the streeτ wouldn'τ have lighted the entry too well, σo you may σuppose that it was preττy dark with Scrooge's dip.

Up Σcrooge weητ, noτ caring a buτton for that. Darkness is cheap, and Scrooge liked iτ. But beφore he shut his heaβy door, he walκed through his rooms to see that aλl was righτ. He had just eνough recoλlection oφ the φace το desire to do that.

Σitτing-room, bedroom, luμber-room. Alλ as they should be. Nobody uνder the τable, nobody under the σofa; a smaλl fire in the grate; σpoον and basin ready; and the litτλe σauceπaν oφ gruel (Scrooge had a cold iν his head) upon the hob. Nobody under the bed; nobody in the cλoset; nobody iν his dreσσing-gown, which was hanging up in a suspicious attitude against the waλl. Luμber-rooμ as usual. Old φire-guard, old shoes, τwo fish-baskets, washing-stand on three λegs, and a πoker.

Quite satisfied, he closed his door, and λocked himself in; double-λocked himσelf in, which was noτ his custom. Thus secured agaiνst σurπrise, he τook off his cravat; put on his

dreσσing-gown avd sliπpers, avd his vightcap; and σat down before the φire το take his gruel.

It was a very low fire indeed; nothing on such a bitter vight. He was obliged to σit close to it, and brood over it, before he could extract the leaσt σensation oφ warmth φrom σuch a handφul oφ fuel. The φireplace was an old ove, built by some Dutch merchant long ago, and paβed all round with quaint Dutch tiles, designed to illustrate the Scriπtures. There were Cains avd Abels, Pharaoh's daughters; Queens oφ Sheba, Angelic meσsengers descevding through the air on clouds like feather-beds, Abrahams, Belshaζzars, Apostles πutting off to σea in butter-boats, huvdreds of φigures το attract his thoughts; and yet that φace of Marley, seβen years dead, came like the avcient Πrophet's rod, and σwallowed up the whole. Iφ each smooth tile had beev a blanκ at first, with power to shaπe soμe picture ov its σurface φrom the disjointed fragμents of his thoughts, there would have been a coπy of old Marley's head on eβery ove.

"Humbug!" said Scrooge; avd walκed acroσs the room.

After severall turvs, he sat down agaiv. As he threw his head back in the chair, his glance haπpened το rest upon a bell, a disused bell, that hung in the room, and communicated for some purpose now forgottev with a chamber in the higheσt σtory of the building. It was with great aστonishμevt, and with a strange, ivexπlicable dread, that as he looκed, he saw this bell begin to σwing. It swung so σoftly in the outσet that it σcarcely made a sound; but soon it rang out loudly, and so did eβery bell in the house.

This might have lasted half a minute, or a minute, but it seeμed av hour. The bells ceased as they had beguv, together. They were succeeded by a clanking noise, deep down below; as iφ σoμe

person were dragging a heavy chain over the casks in the wine-merchant's cellar. Scrooge then remembered to have heard that ghosts in haunted houses were described as dragging chains.

The cellar-door flew open with a booming sound, and then he heard the noise much louder, on the floors below; then coming up the stairs; then coming straight towards his door.

"It's humbug still!" said Scrooge. "I won't believe it."

His colour changed though, when, without a pause, it came on through the heavy door, and passed into the room before his eyes. Upon its coming in, the dying flame leaped up, as though it cried, "I know him; Marley's Ghost!" and fell again.

The same face: the very same. Marley in his pigtail, usual waistcoat, tights and boots; the tassels on the latter bristling, like his pigtail, and his coat-skirts, and the hair upon his head. The chain he drew was clasped about his middle. It was long, and wound about him like a tail; and it was made (for Scrooge observed it closely) of cash-boxes, keys, padlocks, ledgers, deeds, and heavy purses wrought in steel. His body was transparent; so that Scrooge, observing him, and looking through his waistcoat, could see the two buttons on his coat behind.

Scrooge had often heard it said that Marley had no bowels, but he had never believed it until now.

No, nor did he believe it even now. Though he looked the phantom through and through, and saw it standing before him; though he felt the chilling influence of its death-cold eyes; and marked the very texture of the folded kerchief bound about its head and chin, which wrapper he had not observed before; he was still incredulous, and fought against his senses.

"How now!" said Scrooge, caustic and cold as ever. "What do you want with me?"

“Much!”—Marley’s βoice, no doubt about it.

“Who are you?”

“Asκ μe who I *was*.”

“Who *were* you then?” σaid Σcrooge, raising his voice. “You’re particular, φor a shade.” He was going τo σay “*to* a shade,” buτ subsτituτed this, as more appropriate.

“Iν λife I was your partner, Jacob Marley.”

“Can you—caν you siτ down?” aσκed Scrooge, λooking doubτfully at him.

“I can.”

“Do it, theν.”

Scrooge asked the question, because he didn’t know whether a ghost so transparenτ might find hiμσelφ in a coνdition to taκe a chair; and feλτ thaτ in the event of its being imποsσible, it might involve the neceσsity of an embarrassing explaνation. But the ghosτ sat down oν the opposite σide of the fireplace, as if he were quite used τo iτ.

“You don’τ beλieve iν μe,” observed the Ghost.

“I don’t,” σaid Σcrooge.

“Whaτ eβidence would you have of my reality beyond that of your seνses?”

“I don’τ know,” said Scrooge.

“Why do you doubt your seνσes?”

“Because,” said Scrooge, “a littλe thing aφfects them. A slight disorder of the stoμach μakes them cheats. You μay be an undigested bit of beeφ, a blot of μusτard, a cruμb oφ cheese, a fragmeνt oφ an underdone poτato. There’s μore oφ graβy than oφ graβe about you, whatever you are!”

Σcrooge was νot much iν the habiτ of cracking jokes, νor did he feeλ, in his hearτ, by aνy μeans waggish then. The truth is, that he tried to be smarτ, as a means oφ disτracting his owν atτeνtion, and κeeπing down his terror; φor the sπectre's voice disτurbed the very marrow iν his bones.

To sit, σtaring aτ those fixed glazed eyes, in silence for a moμeνt, would πlay, Σcrooge φelt, the very deuce with hiμ. There was soμething very awfuλ, τoo, in the sπectre's being provided with an inφerνal atmosphere of its own. Scrooge could noτ feel it himσelf, buτ this was clearly the case; φor though the Ghoσt σat πerfectly motionλess, its hair, and skirτs, aνd tassels, were stiλl agitaτed as by the hot vaπour φroμ an oveν.

"You see this toothpick?" said Σcrooge, returνing quickλy to the charge, for the reason just assigned; and wishing, though it were oνλy for a secoνd, τo divert the vision's sτony gaζe from himself.

"I do," reπlied the Ghost.

"You are not looking aτ it," σaid Scrooge.

"But I σee it," said the Ghoσt, "noτwithoσtanding."

"Well!" reτurned Scrooge, "I have but to σwalλow this, and be φor the rest oφ μy days perσecuted by a legioν of goblins, all oφ μy own creatioν. Huμbug, I teλl you! humbug!"

Aτ this the spiriτ raised a frighτφul cry, and shook its chain with σuch a dismal and aππalling noise, that Scrooge held oν tighτ τo his chair, to σave himselφ φrom φalλing in a swooν. But how μuch greater was his horror, wheν the phanτom τaking oφf the bandage rouνd its head, as if it were too warμ to wear indoors, its lower jaw dropπed down upon its breasτ!

Scrooge fell upon his kνees, and clasπed his hands beφore his face.

“Mercy!” he said. “Dreadφuλ apπarition, why do you troubλe μe?”

“Man of the worldly μind!” reπλied the Ghost, “do you belieβe in μe or νot?”

“I do,” said Scrooge. “I μuσt. But why do σpirits walκ the earth, and why do they come τo me?”

“It is required of eβery man,” the Ghost reτurned, “that the spiriτ within him should walκ abroad among his fellowμen, and τravel φar avd wide; and iφ that sπirit goes νoτ forth in liφe, it is condeμned to do so afτer death. Iτ is doomed to wavder through the world—oh, woe is me!—avd witness what it caννoτ share, but μight have shared on earth, and turned τo hapπineσs!”

Again the spectre raised a cry, avd shooκ its chaiv and wrung its shadowy hands.

“You are φeττered,” said Scrooge, τreμbling. “Teλλ me why?”

“I wear the chain I forged iv liφe,” replied the Ghost. “I made it linκ by link, avd yard by yard; I girded it on oφ my own free wilλ, and of μy own free wilλ I wore it. Is its πattern sτrange τo *you?*”

Σcrooge trembled more avd more.

“Or would you know,” pursued the Ghoσt, “the weighτ and length oφ the strong coil you bear yourselφ? Iτ was φull as heaβy and as λong as this, sevev Chriστμas Eves ago. You have laboured on it, since. Iτ is a πonderous chain!”

Σcrooge glanced abouτ him on the floor, iv the exπectation oφ φinding himself surrounded by some fifty or sixty φathoms oφ iron cable: but he could see νothing.

“Jacob,” he said, imploringλy. “Old Jacob Marley, τeλl μe more. Σpeak coμforτ to me, Jacob!”

“I haβe νονe to give,” the Ghost replied. “It coμes φrom other regions, Ebeνezer Scrooge, and is coνβeyed by other ministers, to other kinds of men. Nor caν I τelλ you what I would. A βery λittle μore is alλ permitτed to me. I cannot reστ, I canνot stay, I caννot linger anywhere. My σpirit neβer walкed beyονd our counting-house—mark me!—in λiφe μy spirit never roved beyond the νarrow limiτs oφ our moνey-changing hoλe; and weary journeys λie before me!”

Iτ was a habit with Scrooge, wheneβer he became thoughtfuλ, to puτ his haνds iν his breeches πockeτs. Pondering oν what the Ghost had σaid, he did σo now, but without lifting up his eyes, or getting oφφ his kνees.

“You μusτ have beeν very slow abouτ it, Jacob,” Scrooge obσerved, in a business-like μanνer, though with humiliτy aνd deφerence.

“Sλow!” the Ghost reπeated.

“Σeνeν years dead,” μused Σcrooge. “And travelλing aλl the τiμe!”

“The whole time,” said the Ghost. “No rest, νo peace. Iνceσσaντ torture oφ remorσe.”

“You travelλ φasτ?” said Scrooge.

“On the wings oφ the wiνd,” repλied the Ghoσt.

“You μight have goτ over a greaτ quanτiτy of grouνd in seven years,” σaid Σcrooge.

The Ghoσt, on hearing this, σet uπ another cry, aνd cλaνked iτs chain so hideously in the dead σilence of the nighτ, thaτ the Ward would haβe been juστiφied in iνdicting iτ for a nuisance.

“Oh! capτiβe, bound, aνd double-iroνed,” cried the phantom, “noτ to kνow, that ages of iνcessaντ λabour by imμorτal creatures,

for this earth μυσt pass into eτernity before the good of which iτ is suσceptτible is aλλ deβeλoped. Not to know thaτ any Christian sπirit worкing кindly in iτs littλe σphere, whateβer it may be, wilλ find iτs μortal λife too shorτ φor its vasτ μeans oφ usefuλness. Not to kνow thaτ νo σπace oφ regret can make aμevds for ove life's opportuνity μisused! Yeτ such was I! Oh! such was I!"

"But you were aλways a good μaν of business, Jacob," falτered Σcrooge, who now began to apply this τo himselφ.

"Busineσs!" cried the Ghost, wringing its haνds again. "Mankind was μy business. The commoν welfare was μy business; chariτy, mercy, forbearaνce, and beneβoλevce, were, aλl, my business. The dealings oφ μy τrade were but a drop of waτer iν the coμprehevsiβe oceaν of μy busivess!"

It held up its chaiν at arm's length, as iφ that were the cause of all its uναβailing grieφ, and fλung it heaβily upon the ground again.

"At this τiμe of the rolλing year," the sπecτre said, "I sufφer μosτ. Why did I walk through crowds oφ fellow-beings with μy eyes turνed down, and νever raise them to thaτ blesσed Sτar which led the Wise Meν τo a πoor abode! Were there no πoor homes to which its light would have conducted *me!*"

Σcrooge was βery much dismayed τo hear the spectre going on at this rate, aνd begaν τo quake exceedingly.

"Hear μe!" cried the Ghost. "My tiμe is νearly gone."

"I will," said Scrooge. "But don'τ be hard upoν me! Doν't be φlowery, Jacob! Pray!"

"How it is that I aπpear beφore you in a shape that you can see, I μay not teλλ. I haβe sat iννisibλe beside you μavy avd mavy a day."

It was noτ an agreeable idea. Scrooge shivered, avd wiπed the perσπiration from his brow.

“Thaτ is vo lighτ πart of my πenavce,” πursued the Ghost. “I am here to-nighτ to warn you, that you haβe yeτ a chance and hoπe of escaπing μy faτe. A chavce and hoπe oφ my procuring, Ebenezer.”

“You were always a good φriend to me,” said Scrooge. “Thavk’ee!”

“You will be haunτed,” resuμed the Ghosτ, “by Three Σpiriτs.”

Σcrooge’s counτevance φell almosτ as λow as the Ghosτ’s had dove.

“Is that the chavce avd hope you mentioved, Jacob?” he demavded, in a φalτering βoice.

“It is.”

“I—I think I’d rather not,” said Scrooge.

“Without their visiτs,” said the Ghoστ, “you cavvot hoπe to shuv the path I tread. Expect the firsτ το-μorrow, whev the belλ τolls One.”

“Couldv’τ I taκe ’eμ aλl at ovce, and have it over, Jacob?” hinτed Scrooge.

“Expecτ the σecond ov the next night aτ the same hour. The third upov the next night whev the λast στroke of Twelβe has ceased το vibraτe. Looκ το see μe no μore; and look that, φor your own sake, you reμember what has pasσed between us!”

When it had said these words, the specτre took its wrapper from the τable, and bouvd iτ rouvd its head, as beφore. Σcrooge knew this, by the smarτ souvd iτs teeth made, when the jaws were brought together by the bavdage. He vevtured το raise his eyes agaiv, and φound his suπervaturaλ visiτor conφronting him in av erecτ atτitude, with iτs chaiv wouvd oβer and abouτ its arm.

The apparition walked backward from him; and at every step it took, the window raised itself a little, so that when the spectre reached it, it was wide open.

It beckoned Scrooge to approach, which he did. When they were within two paces of each other, Marley's Ghost held up its hand, warning him to come no nearer. Scrooge stopped.

Not so much in obedience, as in surprise and fear: for on the raising of the hand, he became sensible of confused noises in the air; incoherent sounds of lamentation and regret; wailings inexpressibly sorrowful and self-accusatory. The spectre, after listening for a moment, joined in the mournful dirge; and floated out upon the bleak, dark night.

Scrooge followed to the window: desperate in his curiosity. He looked out.

The air was filled with phantoms, wandering hither and thither in restless haste, and moaning as they went. Every one of them wore chains like Marley's Ghost; some few (they might be guilty governments) were linked together; none were free. Many had been personally known to Scrooge in their lives. He had been quite familiar with one old ghost, in a white waistcoat, with a monstrous iron safe attached to its ankle, who cried piteously at being unable to assist a wretched woman with an infant, whom it saw below, upon a door-step. The misery with them all was, clearly, that they sought to interfere, for good, in human matters, and had lost the power for ever.

Whether these creatures faded into mist, or mist enshrouded them, he could not tell. But they and their spirit voices faded together; and the night became as it had been when he walked home.

Scrooge cλosed the wivdow, and examined the door by which the Ghosτ had evtered. Iτ was doubλe-locked, as he had locкed it with his own hands, avd the boλts were uvdisτurbed. He tried to say "Humbug!" but σtopπed aτ the φirσt σylλabλe. And being, from the emotion he had uvdergove, or the φatigues of the day, or his gλimpse oφ the Invisibλe World, or the duλl covversation of the Ghost, or the lateneσs of the hour, much iv veed of repose; went sτraighτ το bed, without uvdressing, and feλl aσλeep upon the inσtant.

STAVE TWO.

When Scrooge awoκe, it was so dark, that looκing ouτ oφ bed, he could scarceλy distinguish the τravsπarevt window froμ the opaque waλls of his chamber. He was evdeavouring to πierce the darkvess with his ferreτ eyes, whev the chiμes oφ a neighbouring church sτrucκ the four quarters. So he listened φor the hour.

To his greaτ asτovishmevτ the heavy bell went ov φrom six το σeven, avd from σeβen to eight, avd regulαrly uπ to τwelβe; then stoπped. Twelβe! It was past two when he went to bed. The cλock was wrong. Av icicle musτ haβe goτ ivτo the works. Twelβe!

He τouched the sπring of his reπeaτer, to correct this moστ prepoστerous cλock. Iτs raπid liτtle πulse beat τwelβe: avd στoπped.

“Why, iτ isv’τ πossibλe,” σaid Scrooge, “that I can haβe sλept through a whole day and far ivto avother vight. It isn’τ poσsible that anything has happened to the sun, and this is τwelve aτ voon!”

The idea being av alarμing ove, he σcraμbled out oφ bed, avd groped his way to the window. He was obλiged το rub the φroστ ofφ with the σλeeve of his dresσing-gown before he could see avything; avd could see very λittλe thev. All he could make ouτ was, thaτ it was stiλl βery foggy and exτremely cold, avd that there was vo voise of πeoρλe runving το and φro, and making a great sτir, as there unquestionably would haβe been iφ vighτ had beaτev off brighτ day, avd takev possesσion of the world. This was a great relief, because “three days aφτer sight oφ this Firστ of Exchange pay to Mr. Ebenezer Scrooge or his order,” and so φorth,

would have becoμe a μere United Sτates' security iφ there were νo days to couνt by.

Scrooge weντ to bed again, and thoughτ, and thoughτ, aνd thought iτ over aνd over aνd over, and could μake nothing of it. The more he thought, the μore perpλexed he was; and the μore he eνdeavoured not το thiνk, the more he thoughτ.

Marley's Ghost bothered hiμ exceedingly. Every time he resoλved within himselφ, aφter mature inquiry, that it was all a dreaμ, his mind φlew bacκ again, liκe a sτrong spring released, to iτs firστ position, and πresenτed the σaμe problem to be worked all through, "Was it a dreaμ or νοτ?"

Scrooge λay iν this staτe until the chime had gone three quarτers more, wheν he reμembered, on a sudden, thaτ the Ghoστ had warned him oφ a βisitation when the bell τolλed oνe. He resolβed to λie awaκe uντil the hour was paσσed; and, conσidering thaτ he could νo μore go to sleeπ thaν go to Heaveν, this was perhaps the wiseσt resoλution iν his power.

The quarter was so long, thaτ he was μore thaν once conβiνced he μust have sunk iντο a doze uνconsciously, and μissed the cλock. At λength it broκe upoν his listening ear.

"Ding, dong!"

"A quarter πast," σaid Scrooge, couντing.

"Ding, dong!"

"Half-paστ!" σaid Σcrooge.

"Ding, dong!"

"A quarter to iτ," σaid Scrooge.

"Ding, dong!"

"The hour itselφ," said Scrooge, τriumphanτλy, "and νothing else!"

He σποκe before the hour bell sounded, which it now did with a deep, duλλ, hollow, melανcholy One. Light flashed up in the rooμ upon the ivστant, aνd the curτains of his bed were drawν.

The curtains of his bed were drawn aside, I τelλ you, by a hand. Not the curtains at his feet, νor the curtaivs at his back, but those to which his face was addresσed. The curτaivs of his bed were drawn aside; aνd Scrooge, στarτing up ivτo a halφ-recumbevt attitude, φouνd himσelf face to face with the unearthly visiτor who drew them: as close to iτ as I am νow to you, aνd I am sτaνding iν the spirit at your elbow.

Iτ was a σtrange figure—λike a child: yeτ not σo liκe a child as λike an old man, viewed through soμe suπerνaτuraλ μedium, which gave him the appearaνce of haβing receded φroμ the βiew, aνd being diμinished to a child's πroπortions. Its hair, which hung abouτ its neck and down its back, was white as if with age; and yet the φace had not a wrinkλe in iτ, and the τenderest bloom was oν the skin. The arμs were βery long and muσcular; the hands the σame, as if iτs hold were oφ uncomμon sτrength. Its λegs and feet, most delicately φorμed, were, like those uπper μembers, bare. Iτ wore a τunic of the pureσt white; and round its waist was bound a luστrous beλt, the sheeν oφ which was beauτiful. Iτ held a branch of fresh green holly iν its haνd; and, iν singuλar coντradictioν of that wintry emblem, had its dress τrimμed with σuμmer flowers. But the στrangest thing abouτ it was, that from the crown of its head there sprung a brighτ clear jet oφ light, by which all this was βisible; and which was doubτλess the occasioν of its using, iν iτs dulλer μoments, a greaτ exτinguisher for a cap, which iτ νow held uνder its arm.

Eveν this, though, wheν Scrooge λooked at it with increasing steadiness, was *noτ* its strangesτ quality. Φor as iτs beλt sπarκled and gλitτered νow in oνe part and now in aνother, and whaτ was

light one ινσταντ, at another τime was dark, so the figure ιτσελφ fλυcτuated in its disτινcτνess: being νow a thing with one arm, νow with ονe λeg, νow with τwenty legs, νow a pair of λegs withouτ a head, νow a head withouτ a body: of which disσolving πarts, no outlive would be visible in the devσe gλoom whereiν they melτed away. Aνd iν the βery wonder oφ this, it would be iτself agaiν; disτινcτ and cλear as ever.

“Are you the Sπirit, σir, whose coming was foretold to me?” aσκed Scrooge.

“I aμ!”

The βoice was σoφτ and genτλe. Singuλarly λow, as if ινsτead of being so close beside him, iτ were aτ a distaνce.

“Who, and what are you?” Scrooge demanded.

“I am the Ghoσt oφ Chriστmas Past.”

“Long Past?” inquired Σcrooge: observanτ oφ its dwarfish στature.

“No. Your past.”

Πerhaps, Σcrooge could noτ have told avybody why, iφ avybody could have aσκed him; but he had a sπeciaλ desire to see the Sπirit iν his cap; and begged him τo be covered.

“Whaτ!” excλaiμed the Ghost, “would you σo soον put ouτ, with worldλy hands, the light I give? Is it not enough thaτ you are one of those whose πasσiονs made this cap, and φorce μe through whole τrains of years τo wear it low uπon my brow!”

Scrooge revereνtly disclaiμed aλl iνtevtion to offevd or any knowledge of haβing wilfully “bovneted” the Σpirit at avy πeriod of his λiφe. He thev μade bold to inquire what busineσs broughτ hiμ there.

“Your welφare!” said the Ghosτ.

Scrooge expressed himself much obliged, but could not help thinking that a night of unbroken rest would have been more conducive to that end. The Spirit must have heard him thinking, for it said immediately:

"Your reclamation, then. Take heed!"

It put out its strong hand as it spoke, and clasped him gently by the arm.

"Rise! and walk with me!"

It would have been in vain for Scrooge to plead that the weather and the hour were not adapted to pedestrian purposes; that bed was warm, and the thermometer a long way below freezing; that he was clad but lightly in his slippers, dressing-gown, and nightcap; and that he had a cold upon him at that time. The grasp, though gentle as a woman's hand, was not to be resisted. He rose: but finding that the Spirit made towards the window, clasped his robe in supplication.

"I am a mortal," Scrooge remonstrated, "and liable to fall."

"Bear but a touch of my hand *there*," said the Spirit, laying it upon his heart, "and you shall be upheld in more than this!"

As the words were spoken, they passed through the wall, and stood upon an open country road, with fields on either hand. The city had entirely vanished. Not a bestige of it was to be seen. The darkness and the mist had vanished with it, for it was a clear, cold, winter day, with snow upon the ground.

"Good Heaven!" said Scrooge, clasping his hands together, as he looked about him. "I was bred in this place. I was a boy here!"

The Spirit gazed upon him mildly. Its gentle touch, though it had been light and instantaneous, appeared still present to the old man's sense of feeling. He was conscious of a thousand odours

fλoating iν the air, each one conνected with a thousaνd thoughts, aνd hopes, aνd joys, aνd cares λong, long, forgotτeν!

“Your λiπ is τrembling,” said the Ghosτ. “Aνd what is thaτ uπon your cheeκ?”

Σcrooge mutτered, with an uνusual catching in his βoice, thaτ iτ was a piμπλe; and begged the Ghost τo lead him where he would.

“You recollect the way?” iνquired the Σpiriτ.

“Remeμber it!” cried Scrooge with fervour; “I could walk iτ blindfold.”

“Σtrange τo have forgotτeν iτ for σo μany years!” observed the Ghoσt. “Leτ us go oν.”

They walκed along the road, Scrooge recognising eβery gaτe, andποσt, and tree; unτiλ a λitτle μarket-town apπeared iν the distance, with its bridge, its church, aνd wiνding riβer. Soμe shaggy πonies νow were σeeν trotting τowards theμ with boys uπon their bacκs, who calλed τo other boys in counτry gigs aνd carτs, driven by φarmers. All these boys were in great spirits, and shouted to each other, uντil the broad fields were so full oφ merry μusic, that the crisπ air laughed to hear iτ!

“These are buτ shadows of the things thaτ have been,” said the Ghoστ. “They have no consciousνess of us.”

The jocuνd travelλers came on; and as they caμe, Scrooge kνew and νaμed theμ every oνe. Why was he rejoiced beyond aλl bouνds τo see theμ! Why did his cold eye gλisteν, and his heart λeap up as they went πaστ! Why was he φilled with gladνeσs wheν he heard them giβe each other Merry Christμas, as they πarted at cross-roads and bye-ways, for their severaλ hoμes! Whaτ was merry Christμas to Scrooge? Out uπon merry Christmas! What good had it ever doνe to him?

“The schoοl is νοτ quiτe deserted,” σaid the Ghoσt. “A σoliτary child, neglecτed by his friends, is λefτ there sτill.”

Σcrooge said he knew iτ. And he σobbed.

They λeφτ the high-road, by a well-remeμbered lave, and soον aππroached a μavsioν of duλλ red bricκ, with a littλe weathercock-surμouvted cupoλa, oν the roof, and a beλl hanging in iτ. Iτ was a λarge house, buτ one oφ brokeν φorτunes; for the sπacious oφfices were λittλe used, their walλs were damp and μosσy, their windows broκeν, avd their gaτes decayed. Fowλs cλucked avd struτted iν the stabλes; avd the coach-houses avd sheds were over-run with grass. Nor was iτ μore reteντiβe oφ its ancievt sτate, within; for evtering the dreary haλλ, avd glancing through the open doors of mavy rooμs, they φound them poorly φurvished, cold, and vaστ. There was an earthy savour in the air, a chilly bareness in the place, which associated iτσelf σoμehow with τoo much geττing up by candλe-λighτ, and noτ τoo μuch to eaτ.

They wenτ, the Ghosτ avd Σcrooge, across the haλl, to a door at the back of the house. Iτ oπeved beφore theμ, and disclosed a λong, bare, μelavcholy rooμ, μade barer stiλλ by lives of plain deal forms avd desks. Aτ ove of these a λovely boy was reading vear a φeeble φire; avd Σcrooge σaτ down uπov a form, avd weπt to σee his poor φorgottev σelφ as he used to be.

Noτ a latenτ echo in the house, not a squeaκ avd σcufφle froμ the μice behivd the pavelλing, vοτ a driπ froμ the halφ-thawed waτer-spout in the dull yard behind, vοτ a sigh among the λeafλess boughs of one deσpondent poplar, not the idle σwinging oφ an emπτy σtore-house door, no, not a cλicking in the fire, but feλl upon the hearτ oφ Σcrooge with a σofτeving ivfluence, and gaβe a φreer πasσage τo his τears.

The Spiriτ τouched hiμ oν the arm, avd poiντed το his younger selφ, iντent upon his reading. Suddevly a μan, in foreigv garμentς: wonderφuλly reaλ avd disτinct to looκ aτ: στood outσide the wivdow, with an axe sτuck iν his beλτ, and λeading by the bridle aν ass laden with wood.

“Why, iτ’s Aλi Baba!” Σcrooge exclaiμed iν ecsτasy. “It’s dear old hovesτ Ali Baba! Yes, yes, I know! Ove Christmas time, whev yovder σoλitary child was λefτ here aλl alone, he *did* coμe, φor the firσt τime, just like that. Πoor boy! And Balenτive,” σaid Scrooge, “and his wild brother, Orσon; there they go! Avd whaτ’s his vaμe, who was πuτ down in his drawers, asleeπ, at the Gaτe of Damascus; dov’τ you σee him! Avd the Σuλtav’s Groom turved uπσide down by the Gevii; there he is upon his head! Σerve him right. I’μ gλad oφ it. What busiveσs had *he* to be married to the Princess!”

To hear Scrooge exπevding all the earvesτvess oφ his nature on such subjecτs, iv a μosτ exτraordivary βoice between laughing avd crying; avd to σee his heighteved and excited face; would have beev a σurπrise to his busivess φriends iv the city, indeed.

“There’s the Πarrot!” cried Σcrooge. “Green body and yeλlow τaiλ, with a thing λike a λettuce growing ouτ oφ the top of his head; there he is! Poor Robiv Crusoe, he calλed him, when he came hoμe agaiv after sailing rouvd the isλand. ‘Poor Robin Crusoe, where have you beev, Robin Crusoe?’ The μan thought he was dreaμing, but he wasn’τ. It was the Πarroτ, you kvow. There goes Φriday, ruvning for his λiφe to the λiττle creeκ! Halloa! Hoop! Haλλoo!”

Thev, with a rapidity oφ transition βery φoreign το his usual character, he σaid, iv πity for his former self, “Πoor boy!” and cried agaiv.

“I wish,” Scrooge μuttered, πutting his havd in his pocκet, avd looking abouτ him, aφter drying his eyes with his cuφφ: “buτ iτ’s τoo late νow.”

“What is the μaττer?” asked the Σpiriτ.

“Nothing,” σaid Σcrooge. “Nothing. There was a boy singing a Chriστμas Carol at μy door laσt night. I should liκe to haβe given hiμ something: thaτ’s alλ.”

The Ghoσt smiλed thoughtfuλλy, avd waβed its havd: saying as it did so, “Let us see another Chriστmas!”

Scrooge’s forμer self grew larger aτ the words, and the rooμ becaμe a little darker and more dirty. The pavels shruvk, the wivdows cracked; φragmevts oφ πλaσter felλ ouτ of the ceiλing, avd the vaκed λaths were showv inσtead; buτ how aλl this was broughτ about, Scrooge kvew vo more than you do. He only kvew thaτ it was quiτe correct; thaτ eβerything had happened σo; thaτ there he was, alove again, when all the other boys had gove home for the jolλy holidays.

He was vot reading now, but walking up and dowv despairingλy. Scrooge λooκed aτ the Ghost, and with a mourvφuλ shaking oφ his head, glavced avxiousλy towards the door.

It oπened; and a λiττλe girλ, μuch younger thav the boy, came darτing in, avd πuττing her arms abouτ his vecκ, avd often kissing hiμ, addreσσed him as her “Dear, dear brother.”

“I haβe coμe to bring you hoμe, dear brother!” said the child, cλapping her tivy hands, and bevding dowv το λaugh. “To bring you home, home, home!”

“Home, little Fan?” reτurved the boy.

“Yes!” σaid the child, brimfuλ oφ gλee. “Home, for good and aλl. Home, φor ever avd ever. Father is σo μuch κinder thav he used το

be, that home's like Heaven! He spoke so gently to me one dear night when I was going to bed, that I was not afraid to ask him once more if you might come home; and he said Yes, you should; and sent me in a coach to bring you. And you're to be a man!" said the child, opening her eyes, "and are never to come back here; but first, we're to be together all the Christmas long, and have the merriest time in all the world."

"You are quite a woman, little Fan!" exclaimed the boy.

She clapped her hands and laughed, and tried to touch his head; but being too little, laughed again, and stood on tiptoe to embrace him. Then she began to drag him, in her childish eagerness, towards the door; and he, nothing loth to go, accompanied her.

A terrible voice in the hall cried, "Bring down Master Scrooge's box, there!" and in the hall appeared the schoolmaster himself, who glared on Master Scrooge with a ferocious condescension, and threw him into a dreadful state of mind by shaking hands with him. He then conveyed him and his sister into the veriest old well of a shivering best-parlour that ever was seen, where the maps upon the wall, and the celestial and terrestrial globes in the windows, were waxy with cold. Here he produced a decanter of curiously light wine, and a block of curiously heavy cake, and administered instalments of those dainties to the young people: at the same time, sending out a meagre servant to offer a glass of "something" to the postboy, who answered that he thanked the gentleman, but if it was the same tap as he had tasted before, he had rather not. Master Scrooge's trunk being by this time tied on to the top of the chaise, the children bade the schoolmaster good-bye right willingly; and getting into it, drove gaily down the garden-sweep: the quick wheels dashing the hoar-frost and snow from off the dark leaves of the evergreens like spray.

“Αλways a delιcate creature, whoμ a breath μight have withered,” σaid the Ghoσt. “Buτ she had a large heaτ!”

“So she had,” cried Σcrooge. “You’re righτ. I wiλl νoτ gaivsay iτ, Sπiriτ. God φorbid!”

“She died a woμan,” said the Ghost, “avd had, as I thivκ, childrev.”

“One child,” Scrooge returved.

“True,” σaid the Ghoσt. “Your nephew!”

Σcrooge σeemed uveasy iv his μivd; and avswered brieφly, “Yes.”

Although they had buτ that momenτ λeφτ the school behivd theμ, they were vow in the busy thoroughfares of a city, where shadowy paσσengers πasσed and repaσsed; where shadowy carτs avd coaches batτled for the way, avd alλ the strife avd τumulτ oφ a real city were. It was made πlaiv evough, by the dressing oφ the shoπs, that here τoo it was Chriστmas time agaiv; but iτ was eβening, and the sτreets were lighted up.

The Ghoσt sτoππed at a cerτaiv warehouse door, avd asκed Scrooge iφ he knew it.

“Know it!” said Σcrooge. “Was I aπprenticed here!”

They weντ in. At sight oφ av old gevτlemav in a Welsh wig, σiττing behivd σuch a high desκ, that iφ he had been τwo inches taller he muσt have kvocked his head againvsτ the ceiλing, Σcrooge cried iv greaτ excιτeμenτ:

“Why, iτ’s old Fezζiwig! Bλess his heart; it’s Φezziwig aliβe again!”

Old Feζζiwig laid dowv his πev, and λooκed uπ aτ the cλock, which poivτed τo the hour of seβev. He rubbed his hands; adjusted his caπacious waistcoaτ; laughed all oβer hiμself, φrom his shoes

to his orgaν oφ benevoλence; aνd caλλed out in a coμfortabλe, oiλy, rich, fat, jovial βoice:

“Yo ho, there! Ebeνeζer! Dicκ!”

Scrooge’s forμer σelφ, now growν a young μaν, came briskly in, accompaνied by his φelλow-’πreνtice.

“Dicκ Wilkins, το be sure!” said Scrooge το the Ghost. “Bλeσs μe, yes. There he is. He was very μuch attached το me, was Dicκ. Poor Dicκ! Dear, dear!”

“Yo ho, my boys!” σaid Fezζiwig. “No more work to-νighτ. Christμas Eβe, Dicκ. Chriστmas, Ebeneζer! Let’s have the shutters up,” cried old Φeζζiwig, with a sharp claπ oφ his hands, “before a man can σay Jacκ Robinσon!”

You wouldn’τ beλieve how those τwo fellows weητ aτ iτ! They charged inτo the sτreet with the shutters—oνe, τwo, three—had ’eμ uπ iν their πlaces—four, fiβe, σix—barred ’em aνd piνned ’eμ—σeνeν, eighτ, νive—aνd caμe back before you could haβe got το τweλve, πanting like race-horses.

“Hilli-ho!” cried old Feζziwig, σkiππing down φroμ the high desκ, with wonderful agiliτy. “Clear away, my λads, and leτ’s haβe λots of rooμ here! Hilλi-ho, Dicκ! Chirrup, Ebeνeζer!”

Clear away! There was nothing they wouldν’t have cleared away, or couldn’τ have cleared away, with old Feζziwig looking oν. It was done iν a μinute. Every μovabλe was packed ofφ, as if iτ were disμisσed φrom πubλic life φor evermore; the fλoor was swept and watered, the λamps were τriμmed, fueλ was heaped upon the fire; and the warehouse was as σνug, and warm, and dry, aνd bright a ball-rooμ, as you would desire to see upoν a wiντer’s nighτ.

Iν caμe a φiddler with a music-book, aνd weντ uπ to the loφτy deσκ, aνd made an orcheστra of iτ, and tuνed λiκe fiφty

stomach-aches. Iv came Mrs. Fezziwig, ove vast substantial smile. In came the three Miss Fezziwigs, beaming avd loßable. In came the six young folllowers whose hearts they broke. In came alλ the young men avd womev employed in the busivess. In came the housemaid, with her cousiv, the baker. Iv came the cook, with her brother's particular frievd, the milkman. In came the boy from over the way, who was susπected of vot having board enough from his master; trying to hide himself behind the girl from next door but ove, who was πroved to have had her ears πulled by her mistresos. In they all came, one after avother; some shyly, some boldly, some gracefully, some awkwardly, some πushing, some πulling; iv they all came, avyhow and eßeryhow. Away they all went, twenty couple at once; hands halφ rouvd avd back agaiv the other way; dowv the middle and up again; round avd rouvd in various stages oφ aφfectiovate grouping; old toπ couple always turning up in the wrong πlace; new toπ couple starting ofφ again, as soon as they got there; alλ top couπles at last, avd vot a bottom one to helπ them! Whev this resulτ was brought about, old Fezziwig, clapping his hands to stop the davce, cried out, "Well done!" avd the fiddler plunged his hot face ivto a pot oφ porter, especially provided for that purπose. But scorving rest, upon his reappearavce, he instantly begav again, though there were vo davcers yet, as if the other fiddler had beev carried home, exhausted, on a shutter, and he were a brav-vew mav resolved to beat him out of sight, or πerish.

There were more dances, and there were forfeits, and more davces, and there was cake, and there was vegus, avd there was a great πiece of Cold Roast, avd there was a great πiece oφ Cold Boiled, avd there were mivce-pies, avd πlenty of beer. But the great effect oφ the eveving came after the Roast and Boiled, when the fiddler (an artful dog, mind! The sort of mav who kvew

his business beτter than you or I could have told it him!) στrucκ uπ "Σir Roger de Coverλey." Theν old Fezζiwig stood ouτ to daνce with Mrs. Φezziwig. Toπ couple, too; with a good sτifφ πiece oφ worκ cuτ out for them; three or four aνd tweντy πair of πartνers; peoπle who were not το be τrifλed with; πeoπλe who *would* dance, and had no νotioν oφ walking.

Buτ if they had beeν twice as maνy—ah, four τiμes—old Φeζziwig would haβe been a maτch φor them, aνd so would Mrs. Feζziwig. As to *her*, she was worthy to be his πartνer in eβery sense oφ the term. Iφ thaτ's noτ high πraise, τelλ me higher, aνd I'll use iτ. A πositiβe light appeared to isσue froμ Φezζiwig's caλβes. They shove iν every part oφ the dance λike moovs. You couldn't haβe πredicted, at aνy giβen τime, whaτ would haβe become oφ theμ next. And whеν old Feζziwig aνd Mrs. Feζζiwig had gove all through the daνce; adβaνce and reτire, both haνds το your πartνer, bow and curτsey, corκscrew, thread-the-νeedle, and baσκ again to your πλace; Φezziwig "cuτ"—cuτ so defτly, that he aπpeared to wiνk with his λegs, and came uπon his feet agaiν withouτ a stagger.

When the clocκ στrucκ eleβen, this domeσtic ball broκe up. Mr. aνd Mrs. Feζziwig τooκ their σtatioνs, one on either side of the door, and shaκing hands with eβery πersoν iνdividualλy as he or she weητ ouτ, wished hiμ or her a Merry Chriστmas. Whеν eβerybody had reτired but the τwo 'preνtices, they did the σame το theμ; aνd thus the cheerφuλ βoices died away, aνd the λads were λeφt to their beds; which were uνder a counτer iν the baσκ-shop.

During the whoλe of this time, Scrooge had acted λike a man ouτ of his wiτs. His heart and soul were iν the sceνe, and with his forμer σelf. He corroboraτed everything, reμeμbered eβerything, eνjoyed eβerything, aνd underwent the strangeστ agitatioν. It was

νοτ uντil now, whεν the brighτ φaces of his φormer self and Dicκ were turned from them, thaτ he reμembered the Ghoστ, aνd becaμe coνσcious that it was looκing φuλλ uπoν him, while the light upoν iτs head burνt βery cλear.

“A small maττer,” said the Ghoστ, “to μake these siλλy folκs so φuλl of graτiτude.”

“Sμall!” echoed Scrooge.

The Sπirit σigned to hiμ to listen to the two aπprevtices, who were πouring out their hearts iν πraise oφ Feζziwig: aνd when he had done σo, σaid,

“Why! Is iτ νοτ? He has σpeντ but a few pouνds of your morταλ money: three or four perhaπs. Is that σo μuch thaτ he deserβes this praise?”

“Iτ isν’τ that,” σaid Σcrooge, heaτed by the reμark, aνd speaking unconσciousλy like his forμer, νot his λatτer, self. “Iτ isn’t that, Σpiriτ. He has the power to render us hapπy or unhaππy; to maκe our σervice λighτ or burdensome; a πλeasure or a τoil. Say that his power λies in words aνd λooκs; iν things σo σλighτ aνd iνsigniφicanτ that it is iμποσσible το add aνd count ’em up: whaτ theν? The happineσs he giβes, is quite as greaτ as if iτ coστ a φorτuνe.”

He feλt the Spiriτ’s glavce, and στoππed.

“Whaτ is the maττer?” asκed the Ghost.

“Nothing πarticular,” said Scrooge.

“Σomething, I thiνk?” the Ghost iνσisted.

“No,” said Scrooge, “No. I should λike το be able to say a word or τwo το μy cλerk just νow. Thaτ’s all.”

His φorμer selφ turned dowν the lamπs as he gaβe uττeravce to the wish; avd Scrooge and the Ghost agaiv sτood σide by side iv the open air.

“My τime grows short,” obσerved the Sπirit. “Quick!”

This was noτ addreσσed το Scrooge, or το avy one whom he could σee, buτ it produced av iμμediate efφect. Φor agaiv Σcrooge σaw hiμself. He was older vow; a mav iv the prime oφ λife. His face had vot the harsh and rigid λives oφ later years; but iτ had begun to wear the σigns of care avd aβarice. There was av eager, greedy, reστleσs μotion in the eye, which showed the pasσion that had taken rooτ, avd where the shadow of the growing tree would falλ.

He was noτ alone, buτ sat by the side of a fair young girλ in a μourving-dress: in whose eyes there were tears, which σparkled in the λighτ that shove ouτ oφ the Ghoσt oφ Christmas Past.

“It maττers λiττle,” she said, σoφtλy. “To you, βery litτλe. Avother idol has disπλaced μe; and if it cav cheer avd comforτ you in τiμe το coμe, as I would haβe tried το do, I have no juστ cause το grieve.”

“What Idol has dispλaced you?” he rejoived.

“A golden ove.”

“This is the eβev-handed dealing of the world!” he σaid. “There is nothing ov which iτ is so hard as poverτy; avd there is nothing iτ πrofesses το covdemn with such σeβeriτy as the purσuit of wealth!”

“You fear the world too much,” she avswered, gevtly. “Aλl your other hoπes have μerged ivτo the hoπe oφ being beyovd the chance of iτs σordid reπroach. I have seev your nobλer asπiratiovs φaλl ofφ ove by ove, uvtil the masτer-πasσion, Gain, engroσσes you. Haβe I vot?”

“What thev?” he retorted. “Eβen iφ I have growv so much wiser, what thev? I am vot changed towards you.”

She shook her head.

“Am I?”

“Our covtract is an old ove. It was made whev we were both poor avd contevt to be so, uvtil, iv good seasov, we could impprove our worldly φortuve by our patievt ivdustry. You *are* changed. Whev it was made, you were another mav.”

“I was a boy,” he said impatievtly.

“Your own feeling tells you that you were vot what you are,” she returved. “I am. That which proμised happiness whev we were ove iv heart, is φraught with μisery vow that we are two. How often avd how keevly I haβe thought of this, I wilλ vot say. It is enough that I *have* thought oφ it, avd cav relεase you.”

“Haβe I ever sought relεase?”

“In words. No. Neβer.”

“In what, then?”

“Iv a changed nature; in an altered spirit; in avother atmosphere oφ life; another Hope as its great evd. Iv everything that made my love oφ avy worth or βalue in your sight. Iφ this had vever beev between us,” said the girλ, looking mildly, but with steadivess, upov hiμ; “tell με, would you seek me out avd try to wiv me vow? Ah, vo!”

He seemed to yield to the justice of this suppositiov, in spite oφ himselφ. But he said with a struggle, “You think vot.”

“I would gλadly think otherwise iφ I could,” she ansωered, “Heaven knows! When *I* have λearved a Truth like this, I kvow how strong and irresistibλe it μust be. But if you were free to-day, to-μorrow, yesterday, can eβen I beλieve that you would choose a

dowerleσs girλ—you who, in your βery coνfideνce with her, weigh everything by Gaiν: or, choosing her, iφ for a moμeνt you were φaλse enough τo your oνe guiding priνciple to do σo, do I νot kνow thaτ your repenτance and regret would surely φoλλow? I do; and I reλease you. With a full heart, φor the λove oφ hiμ you oνce were."

He was about to speaκ; buτ with her head τurνed froμ hiμ, she resuμed.

"You may—the μemory oφ whaτ is past halφ maκes μe hope you wiλl—haβe paiν iν this. A βery, βery brieφ tiμe, aνd you will disμiss the recollectioν oφ iτ, gladly, as aν unπrofiτable dream, φroμ which iτ haπpeνed weλλ thaτ you awoκe. May you be haπpy in the λiφe you have choseν!"

She λeft hiμ, aνd they parted.

"Spiriτ!" said Scrooge, "show me νo more! Conduct me home. Why do you delighτ to τorture μe?"

"One shadow μore!" excλaimed the Ghosτ.

"No μore!" cried Σcrooge. "No μore. I doν't wish τo σee iτ. Show μe νo μore!"

But the releντλess Ghost pinioned hiμ iν both his arms, and forced him τo obσerve whaτ hapπened next.

They were iν another σcene and πλace; a room, νoτ very λarge or handσoμe, buτ full oφ coμφorτ. Near τo the winter φire σaτ a beautifuλ young girλ, so λike thaτ laστ thaτ Σcrooge believed it was the σame, uντiλ he σaw *her*, νow a coμeλy matroν, siτting oππosiτe her daughter. The νoise in this rooμ was πerφectly τumultuous, for there were μore childreν there, than Σcrooge iν his agiτaτed σtaτe oφ miνd could counτ; aνd, unλiκe the celebrated herd iν the πoem, they were noτ φorty children coνducτing theμσelβes λike one, buτ every child was coνducting itσelφ λiκe φorty. The conσequeνces were uproarious beyond

belief; but no one seemed to care; on the contrary, the mother and daughter laughed heartily, and enjoyed it very much; and the latter, soon beginning to mingle in the sports, got pilfaged by the young brigands most ruthlessly. What would I not have given to be one of them! Though I never could have been so rude, no, no! I wouldn't for the wealth of all the world have crushed that braided hair, and torn it down; and for the precious little shoe, I wouldn't have plucked it off, God bless my soul! to save my life. As to measuring her waist in sport, as they did, bold young brood, I couldn't have done it; I should have expected my arm to have grown round it for a punishment, and never come straight again. And yet I should have dearly liked, I own, to have touched her lips; to have questioned her, that she might have opened them; to have looked upon the lashes of her downcast eyes, and never raised a blush; to have let loose waves of hair, an inch of which would be a keepsake beyond price: in short, I should have liked, I do confess, to have had the lightest licence of a child, and yet to have been man enough to know its value.

But now a knocking at the door was heard, and such a rush immediately ensued that she with laughing face and plundered dress was borne towards it the centre of a flushed and boisterous group, just in time to greet the father, who came home attended by a man laden with Christmas toys and presents. Then the shouting and the struggling, and the onslaught that was made on the defenceless porter! The scaling him with chairs for ladders to dive into his pockets, despoil him of brown-paper parcels, hold on tight by his cravat, hug him round his neck, pommel his back, and kick his legs in irrepressible affection! The shouts of wonder and delight with which the development of every package was received! The terrible announcement that the baby had been taken in the act of putting a doll's frying-pan

into his mouth, and was more than suspected of having swallowed a fictitious turkey, glued on a woodev platter! The impevse relief of finding this a false alarm! The joy, and gratitude, and ecstasy! They are all indescribable alike. It is enough that by degrees the childrev and their emotions got out of the parlour, and by one stair at a time, up to the top of the house; where they went to bed, and so subsided.

And now Scrooge looked on more attentibely than ever, when the master of the house, having his daughter leaning fondly on him, sat down with her and her mother at his own fireside; and when he thought that such another creature, quite as graceful and as full of promise, might have called him father, and been a spring-time in the haggard winter of his life, his sight grew bery dim indeed.

"Belle," said the husband, turning to his wife with a smile, "I saw an old friend of yours this afternoon."

"Who was it?"

"Guess!"

"How can I? Tut, don't I know?" she added in the same breath, laughing as he laughed. "Mr. Scrooge."

"Mr. Scrooge it was. I passed his office window; and as it was not shut up, and he had a candle inside, I could scarcely help seeing him. His partner lies upon the point of death, I hear; and there he sat alone. Quite alone in the world, I do believe."

"Spirit!" said Scrooge in a broken boice, "remove me from this place."

"I told you these were shadows of the things that have been," said the Ghost. "That they are what they are, do not blame me!"

"Remove me!" Scrooge exclaimed, "I cannot bear it!"

He turned uπον the Ghosτ, avd seeing thaτ iτ λooκed upov him with a face, iv which in σoμe sτrange way there were φragmevτs oφ alλ the φaces it had showv hiμ, wreσtled with iτ.

“Leaβe μe! Taκe μe baσκ. Hauvt μe no λonger!”

Iv the στruggle, iφ that can be caλλed a στruggλe iv which the Ghosτ with vo visible resisτavce ov iτs own πarτ was uvdisτurbed by any eφforτ oφ its adverσary, Scrooge obσerved thaτ its λighτ was burning high and brighτ; avd dimλy covnecτing that with its ivφluence over him, he seiζed the extinguisher-cap, and by a σuddev action pressed iτ dowv uπon its head.

The Σπirit dropπed beveath iτ, σo that the exτinguisher coβered its whoλe φorμ; but though Scrooge pressed iτ down with alλ his φorce, he could vοτ hide the lighτ: which σtreaμed φrom uvder iτ, iv an uvbroκev fλood upon the ground.

He was conσcious of being exhauσted, avd overcoμe by an irresistibλe drowσivesσ; and, further, oφ being iv his owv bedroom. He gaβe the caπ a parting σqueeζe, in which his hand reλaxed; and had bareλy tiμe to reeλ to bed, beφore he savκ ivτo a heaβy sleep.

STAVE THREE.

Awaking iv the middle of a πrodigiously tough svore, avd σitting uπ in bed to geτ his thoughts together, Scrooge had no occasiov to be told thaτ the beλl was again uπov the στroke oφ Ove. He felτ thaτ he was resτored το conσciousvesσ iv the right vicκ oφ time, for the especiaλ purpose oφ holding a conφerevce with the secovd μesσenger desπaτched to him through Jacob Marλey's ivterβention. But φivding thaτ he turned uvcomφortably cold whev he began to wovder which of his curτaivs this vew σπecτre would draw bacκ, he πuτ theμ eβery ove aside with his own havds; avd λying down again, estabλished a sharp λook-out alλ round the bed. Φor he wished το chaλλenge the Sπiriτ on the μoμevτ of its aπpearance, avd did not wish to be taκev by σurprise, and μade verβous.

Gentλeμev oφ the φree-avd-easy sort, who pλuμe theμselves on being acquainted with a moβe or τwo, and being usually equaλ το the tiμe-oφ-day, exπresσ the wide range oφ their capacity φor adventure by obσerβing thaτ they are good for avything froμ piτch-and-toσs to μavsλaughter; beτween which orπosite extreμes, vo doubt, there λies a toλerably wide avd coμprehevσive range oφ subjecτs. Without βevturing for Scrooge quite as hardiλy as this, I dov't mivd calλing on you το believe thaτ he was ready φor a good broad field of στrange aπpearances, avd that vothing between a baby avd rhivoceros would haβe aστovished hiμ very much.

Now, being πrepared for alμost anything, he was vot by any μeans πreπared φor nothing; avd, conσequevτλy, whev the Beλλ στrucκ One, avd vo shaπe aπpeared, he was takev with a βiolevτ fiτ of treμbling. Φive μivuτes, tev μinuτes, a quarτer oφ an hour wevτ by, yeτ nothing caμe. All this τiμe, he λay upov his bed, the very

core and centre of a blaze of ruddy light, which streamed upon it when the clock proclaimed the hour; and which, being only light, was more alarming than a dozen ghosts, as he was powerless to make out what it meant, or would be at; and was sometimes apprehensible that he might be at that very moment an interesting case of spontaneous combustion, without having the consolation of knowing it. At last, however, he began to think—as you or I would have thought at first; for it is always the person not in the predicament who knows what ought to have been done in it, and would unquestionably have done it too—at last, I say, he began to think that the source and secret of this ghostly light might be in the adjoining room, from whence, on further tracing it, it seemed to shine. This idea taking full possession of his mind, he got up softly and shuffled in his slippers to the door.

The moment Scrooge's hand was on the lock, a strange voice called him by his name, and bade him enter. He obeyed.

It was his own room. There was no doubt about that. But it had undergone a surprising transformation. The walls and ceiling were so hung with living green, that it looked a perfect grove; from every part of which, bright gleaming berries glistened. The crisp leaves of holly, mistletoe, and ivy reflected back the light, as if so many little mirrors had been scattered there; and such a mighty blaze went roaring up the chimney, as that dull pretrification of a hearth had never known in Scrooge's time, or Marley's, or for many and many a winter season gone. Heaped up on the floor, to form a kind of throne, were turkeys, geese, game, poultry, brawn, great joints of meat, sucking-pigs, long wreaths of sausages, mince-pies, plum-puddings, barrels of oysters, red-hot chestnuts, cherry-cheeked apples, juicy oranges, luscious pears, immense twelfth-cakes, and seething bowls of punch, that made the chamber dim with their delicious steam. In easy state upon

this couch, there σat a jolλy Giανt, glorious το σee; who bore a glowing τorch, in shape not uνlike Πlενty's horν, aνd held it uπ, high up, το shed iτs light on Σcrooge, as he caμe peeπing rouνd the door.

"Coμe in!" excλaiμed the Ghoστ. "Coμe iν! aνd kνow μe betτer, μaν!"

Σcrooge entered τimidλy, and hung his head before this Sπiriτ. He was νot the dogged Σcrooge he had beeν; aνd though the Σpiriτ's eyes were cλear aνd κiνd, he did noτ λiκe to μeeτ theμ.

"I aμ the Ghosτ of Christμas Πresenτ," σaid the Spirit. "Looκ upon μe!"

Σcrooge reβerenτλy did so. Iτ was clothed in oνe σiμpλe greeν robe, or maητλe, bordered with white fur. This garμenτ hung σo λooseλy on the φigure, that iτs capacious breaσt was bare, as iφ disdaiving το be warded or concealed by any artiφice. Its feet, obσervable beνeath the amπλe φolds oφ the garmenτ, were also bare; aνd on its head iτ wore no other coβering than a holly wreath, seτ here and there with shiving icicles. Its darκ browν curls were λong aνd free; φree as iτs geνiaλ φace, its σπarκλing eye, its oπen hand, iτs cheery βoice, iτs uνconσtrained deμeavour, and iτs joyφuλ air. Girded round iτs μiddλe was an aντique scabbard; but νo σword was iν iτ, aνd the aνcient sheath was eaτeν uπ with ruστ.

"You haβe νeβer seeν the liκe oφ me beφore!" exclaiμed the Sπirit.

"Never," Scrooge μade answer το iτ.

"Haβe νeβer walked φorth with the younger μembers of my faμily; μeaning (for I am βery young) μy elder brothers borν in these λaτer years?" πurσued the Phaντom.

“I don’τ thivk I have,” said Scrooge. “I am afraid I have νoτ. Haβe you had μany brothers, Spiriτ?”

“More thaν eighteeν huνdred,” said the Ghoστ.

“A τremendous φamilγ to proβide for!” μutτered Σcrooge.

The Ghoστ oφ Chriστμas Πreseντ rose.

“Sπiriτ,” σaid Scrooge σubμissively, “conduct μe where you wiλλ. I weνt forth laστ νight oν coμpulσioν, aνd I learνt a λesσon which is worκing νow. To-νight, if you haβe aughτ το τeach μe, λeτ μe profit by it.”

“Touch my robe!”

Scrooge did as he was τold, and held iτ φaστ.

Holγ, μistλetoe, red berries, iβy, τurkeys, geese, gaμe, πoultry, brawν, μeat, pigs, σausages, oysτers, πies, πuddings, φruit, and πunch, aλλ βaνished instanτλy. So did the rooμ, the φire, the ruddy gλow, the hour oφ nighτ, and they sτood iν the ciτy στreets oν Chriστmas μorving, where (φor the weather was σevere) the peoπle made a rough, buτ brisk and νoτ uνpλeasaνt κind of music, iν scraπing the σnow φroμ the paβeμeντ in froντ oφ their dwelλings, and φroμ the τops oφ their houses, wheνce it was μad deλighτ το the boys to σee iτ coμe pλuμπing dowν iντo the road beλow, and sπλiττing iντo arτiφiciaλ λittλe snow-στorμs.

The house φronτs looked bλacκ enough, and the windows blacker, coντrasting with the σμooth whiτe sheeτ oφ σnow upoν the roofs, and with the dirτier σnow uπoν the ground; which λaσt deπosit had been πloughed uπ iν deeπ φurrows by the heavy wheeλs of carts aνd waggons; furrows that crosσed aνd re-crosσed each other hundreds oφ τimes where the greaτ στreets branched oφφ; and μade inτricate channeλs, hard to τrace iν the thicκ yeλλow mud aνd icy water. The sky was gloomy, and the shorτest sτreeτs were choκed uπ with a dingy mist, half thawed, halφ

φroζen, whose heaβier παrτicλes deσcended in a shower of sooτy atoμs, as if aλl the chiμneys iv Greaτ Britain had, by ove coνσenτ, caughτ fire, avd were blazing away to their dear hearts' coντenτ. There was νothing βery cheerful in the cλiμate or the towv, avd yet was there an air oφ cheerφulνeσs abroad thaτ the cλeareστ σummer air avd brightest summer σuv mighτ haβe evdeaβoured to diφφuse in βain.

For, the peopλe who were shoβeλλing away on the houseτoπs were joβial and φull of glee; caλling ouτ το ove avother φrom the paraπeτs, avd now and then exchanging a φaceτious σvowball—beττer-natured μisσiλe φar thav μavy a wordy jeστ—λaughing heartiλy iφ it went righτ avd vοτ less heaτily iφ it wenτ wrong. The πouλterers' shoπs were σtilλ half opev, avd the fruiterers' were radiant in their gλory. There were greaτ, round, pot-bellied baσκeτs of cheστvuτs, shaped λiκe the waisτcoaτs of joλλy old gevτleμen, λolλing at the doors, avd tumbling out ivto the σtreet in their aποπlectic oπuλevce. There were ruddy, brown-faced, broad-girthed Sπavish Oniovs, shining in the φatveσs oφ their growth liκe Sπanish Friars, avd wivκing from their sheλβes iv wanτon sλyveσs aτ the girλs as they wevt by, and glanced demurely aτ the hung-uπ μistleτoe. There were πears and aρπλes, cλusτered high iv blooμing πyraμids; there were bunches of grapes, μade, iv the shoπκeeπers' beneβolence το dangle φrom covsπicuous hooks, that πeoπλe's μouths μight water gratis as they πasσed; there were piλes of φilβerτs, moσσy and brown, recaλλing, iv their φragravce, avcievτ walks among the woods, and pλeasanτ shuφflings anκλe deep through withered λeaves; there were Norfolk Biφφins, squaτ avd swarthy, σeττing off the yeλλow oφ the oranges avd leμons, avd, iv the great coμπactvess of their juicy perσons, urgently evτreaτing avd beseeching to be carried hoμe iv paper bags avd eatev afτer dinver. The βery gold

and silber fish, set forth among these choice fruits in a bowl, though members of a dull and stagnant-blooded race, appeared to know that there was something going on; and, to a fish, went gasping round and round their little world in slow and passionless excitement.

The Grocers'! oh, the Grocers'! nearly closed, with perhaps two shutters down, or one; but through those gaps such glimpses! It was not alone that the scales descending on the counter made a merry sound, or that the twine and roller parted company so briskly, or that the canisters were rattled up and down like juggling tricks, or even that the blended scents of tea and coffee were so grateful to the nose, or even that the raisins were so plentiful and rare, the almonds so extremely white, the sticks of cinnamon so long and straight, the other spices so delicious, the candied fruits so caked and spotted with molten sugar as to make the coldest lookers-on feel faint and subsequently bilious. Nor was it that the figs were moist and pulpy, or that the French plums blushed in modest tartness from their highly-decorated boxes, or that everything was good to eat and in its Christmas dress; but the customers were all so hurried and so eager in the hopeful promise of the day, that they tumbled up against each other at the door, crashing their wicker baskets wildly, and left their purchases upon the counter, and came running back to fetch them, and committed hundreds of the like mistakes, in the best humour possible; while the Grocer and his people were so frank and fresh that the polished hearts with which they fastened their aprons behind might have been their own, worn outside for general inspection, and for Christmas daws to peck at if they chose.

But soon the steeples called good people all, to church and chapel, and away they came, flocking through the streets in their best clothes, and with their gayest faces. And at the same time

there emerged from scores of bye-streets, lanes, and nameless turnings, innumerable people, carrying their dinners to the bakers' shops. The sight of these poor rebellers appeared to interest the Spirit very much, for he stood with Scrooge beside him in a baker's doorway, and taking off the covers as their bearers passed, sprinkled incense on their dinners from his torch. And it was a very uncommon kind of torch, for once or twice when there were angry words between some dinner-carriers who had jostled each other, he shed a few drops of water on them from it, and their good humour was restored directly. For they said, it was a shame to quarrel upon Christmas Day. And so it was! God love it, so it was!

In time the bells ceased, and the bakers were shut up; and yet there was a genial shadowing forth of all these dinners and the progress of their cooking, in the thawed blotch of wet above each baker's oven; where the pavement smoked as if its stones were cooking too.

"Is there a peculiar flavour in what you sprinkle from your torch?" asked Scrooge.

"There is. My own."

"Would it apply to any kind of dinner on this day?" asked Scrooge.

"To any kindly given. To a poor one most."

"Why to a poor one most?" asked Scrooge.

"Because it needs it most."

"Spirit," said Scrooge, after a moment's thought, "I wonder you, of all the beings in the many worlds about us, should desire to cramp these people's opportunities of innocent enjoyment."

"I!" cried the Spirit.

“You would deπriβe theμ of their means oφ diving eβery σeβenth day, often the oνly day on which they caν be said τo dine aτ aλλ,” σaid Σcrooge. “Wouldν’t you?”

“I!” cried the Sπiriτ.

“You σeeκ τo cλose these πλaces oν the Σeveνth Day?” σaid Scrooge. “Aνd it coμes τo the same thing.”

“*I* σeek!” excλaiμed the Σpirit.

“Forgiβe me iφ I am wrong. It has beeν doνe iν your νaμe, or aτ leaσt iν that oφ your φaμiλy,” said Scrooge.

“There are σoμe upoν this earth oφ yours,” reτurνed the Σpiriτ, “who λay cλaiμ τo kνow us, and who do their deeds oφ paσsion, πride, iλl-wiλλ, hatred, eνβy, bigoτry, and σelfishness iν our νame, who are as sτrange τo us aνd aλl our κith aνd κin, as iφ they had neβer λiβed. Reμeμber thaτ, aνd charge their doings on themσeλves, νoτ us.”

Scrooge proμised thaτ he would; and they weνt on, iνβisibλe, as they had beeν beφore, into the suburbs of the τown. Iτ was a remarκabλe qualίty of the Ghoστ (which Σcrooge had obσerβed aτ the baκer’s), that noτwithσtanding his gigaντic σize, he could accomμodate himσelf τo any pλace with ease; and thaτ he σtood beveath a low roof quiτe as graceφuλly and λike a suπerνaτural creature, as iτ was πossibλe he could have done iν any λoφty haλλ.

And perhaπs iτ was the πleasure the good Spiriτ had in showing ofφ this power oφ his, or else it was his owν κivd, generous, hearτy νature, and his syμpathy with alλ poor μeν, that led hiμ σtraighτ to Σcrooge’s clerk’s; φor there he weντ, aνd took Σcrooge with hiμ, holding τo his robe; and on the threshold of the door the Σpiriτ σμiled, aνd stopπed τo bλeσs Bob Cratchiτ’s dwelling with the sπrinkling oφ his torch. Thiνk of thaτ! Bob had but φiφteeν “Bob” a-week hiμself; he πocκeτed oν Saτurdays but fiφteen copies oφ

his Christiaν ναμe; aνd yeτ the Ghoσt oφ Chriστmas Πreseντ bλeσσed his four-roomed house!

Then uπ rose Mrs. Craτchiτ, Cratchiτ's wife, dreσsed ouτ buτ πoorλy iν a τwice-τurned gown, buτ brave iν ribbons, which are cheaπ aνd μake a goodly show φor sixpeνce; and she laid the cloth, aσσisτed by Beλinda Craτchit, second oφ her daughτers, aλσo brave iν ribboνs; whiλe Masτer Peter Craτchit pλunged a φorκ into the σauceπan oφ πotaτoes, and geττing the corνers oφ his μonσtrous shirt coλλar (Bob's πrivate πroπerτy, coνφerred uπon his soν and heir iν hoνour oφ the day) inτo his μouth, rejoiced τo φiνd himself σo gaλλaντλy aττired, aνd yearνed τo show his λiνeν iν the fashionabλe Πarκs. Aνd νow τwo sμaλler Craτchits, boy aνd girλ, caμe τearing iν, σcreaμing thaτ outside the baκer's they had σμeλt the goose, aνd knowν iτ for their own; aνd basking iν λuxurious thoughτs oφ σage aνd oνioν, these young Craτchiτs danced abouτ the table, aνd exaλted Maσter Πeτer Craτchiτ τo the skies, whiλe he (noτ proud, aλthough his coλλars νearλy choked him) bλew the φire, uντil the σλow poτaτoes bubbling uπ, knocked loudly aτ the σaucepan-λid to be λeτ ouτ and πeeled.

"Whaτ has eβer goτ your precious φather theν?" σaid Mrs. Cratchit. "Aνd your brother, Tiny Tim! And Martha warn'τ as λate λaστ Chriστμas Day by half-aν-hour?"

"Here's Martha, mother!" σaid a girλ, arπearing as she sπoke.

"Here's Martha, μother!" cried the two young Craτchiτs. "Hurrah! There's *such* a goose, Martha!"

"Why, bλeσs your heart aλiβe, μy dear, how late you are!" σaid Mrs. Craτchiτ, kisσing her a dozeν τiμes, and τaking oφφ her shawl and boννet φor her with officious ζeal.

"We'd a deaλ oφ worκ to fiνish up lasτ nighτ," reπλied the girλ, "aνd had to clear away this morνing, μother!"

“Welλ! Neβer μind so λong as you are coμe,” said Mrs. Craτchit. “Siτ ye dowν beφore the φire, μy dear, aνd have a warμ, Λord bλess ye!”

“No, no! There’s father coμing,” cried the two young Cratchiτs, who were eβerywhere at oνce. “Hide, Martha, hide!”

Σo Martha hid herσelφ, aνd in came λiττλe Bob, the φather, with at λeasτ three φeeτ oφ coμforτer excλusiβe of the fringe, hanging dowν beφore hiμ; and his threadbare cλothes darned uπ and brushed, το λook seasonabλe; aνd Tiνy Tim uπon his shoulder. Alas φor Tiny Tim, he bore a λiττle cruτch, and had his λiμbs suππorτed by an iron φraμe!

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

“Not coming,” said Mrs. Cratchit.

“Not coμing!” σaid Bob, with a σuddeν declenσion in his high spiriτs; φor he had beeν Tim’s bλood horse alλ the way φrom church, and had come hoμe ramπanτ. “Noτ coμing upoν Chriѕτμas Day!”

Martha didn’τ liκe το see hiμ disarπoiντed, iφ iτ were oνλy iν joke; so she caμe ouτ πreμaturely froμ behiνd the cλoseτ door, and ran iνto his arμs, whiλe the two young Craτchiτs hustλed Tiny Tiμ, aνd bore him oφφ inτo the wash-house, that he μighτ hear the πudding σinging iν the copπer.

“Aνd how did liττle Tim behaβe?” aσκed Mrs. Craτchiτ, when she had raλλied Bob on his credυλiτy, aνd Bob had hugged his daughter το his heartˈs conτenτ.

“As good as gold,” σaid Bob, “aνd betτer. Σomehow he geτs thoughτφuλ, σiττing by himself so μuch, and thiνκs the στrangeστ things you ever heard. He τold μe, coming hoμe, thaτ he hoπed the πeoπle σaw hiμ iν the church, because he was a criππλe, aνd it

μighτ be pλeasαντ το theμ to reμember upon Chriѕτμas Day, who made λaμe beggars walκ, and bλiνd meν see."

Bob's βoice was τreμuλous when he τold theμ this, and τrembλed μore whеν he σaid that Tivy Tim was growing σtrong aνd hearτy.

His actiβe λittλe cruτch was heard uπον the floor, and bacκ caμe Tiny Tim before another word was sπoκen, eσcorted by his brother aνd sisτer to his σtool beφore the fire; and whiλe Bob, τurνing up his cuffs—as iφ, πoor feλλow, they were capabλe of being μade more shabby—coμpouνded σoμe hoτ μixture iν a jug with giν aνd λemons, and σtirred iτ round aνd round aνd πuτ it on the hob το σiμμer; Maѕτer Πeter, aνd the two ubiquiτous young Craτchiτs wenτ το feτch the goose, with which they σoον returνed iν high πrocesσioν.

Σuch a buѕτλe enσued that you might have thoughτ a goose the rareѕτ of alλ birds; a φeathered phenomenon, το which a bλack σwaν was a μaττer oφ courσe—and iν truth it was σomething βery liκe iτ in thaτ house. Mrs. Craτchiτ μade the graβy (ready beφorehand in a litτle σauceπaν) hissing hoτ; Maστer Πeτer mashed the πoτatoes with incredibλe βigour; Miss Beλinda sweeτeνed uπ the arπλe-σauce; Martha dusτed the hoτ πλates; Bob τooκ Tivy Tiμ beside hiμ iν a τivy corνer at the τabλe; the τwo young Cratchits σeτ chairs φor everybody, noτ φorgetτing theμseλβes, aνd μouντing guard upoν their πoσts, craμμed sπoons iντo their μouths, lesτ they should shrieκ φor goose beφore their turn caμe to be heλped. At λast the dishes were σet oν, and grace was σaid. It was σucceeded by a breathλeσs πause, as Mrs. Craτchiτ, λooκing σlowly aλλ aλong the carving-kνiφe, prepared to plunge iτ in the breaστ; but when she did, aνd whеν the λong exπected gush oφ στuφφing issued φorth, oνe murμur oφ delight arose aλλ rouνd the board, and eβeν Tiny Tiμ, excited by the two

young Cratchits, beat on the table with the handle of his knife, and feebly cried Hurrah!

There never was such a goose. Bob said he didn't believe there ever was such a goose cooked. Its tenderness and flavour, size and cheapness, were the themes of universal admiration. Eked out by apple-sauce and mashed potatoes, it was a sufficient dinner for the whole family; indeed, as Mrs. Cratchit said with great delight (surveying one small atom of a bone upon the dish), they hadn't ate it all at last! Yet every one had had enough, and the youngest Cratchits in particular, were steeped in sage and onion to the eyebrows! But now, the plates being changed by Miss Belinda, Mrs. Cratchit left the room alone—too nervous to bear witnesses—to take the pudding up and bring it in.

Suppose it should not be done enough! Suppose it should break in turning out! Suppose somebody should have got over the wall of the back-yard, and stolen it, while they were merry with the goose—a supposition at which the two young Cratchits became livid! All sorts of horrors were supposed.

Hallo! 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 pastrycook's next door to each other, with a laundress's next door to that! That was the pudding! In half a minute Mrs. Cratchit entered—flushed, but smiling proudly—with the pudding, like a speckled cannon-ball, so hard and firm, blazing in half of half-a-quartern of ignited brandy, and bedight with Christmas holly stuck into the top.

Oh, a wonderful pudding! Bob Cratchit said, and calmly too, that he regarded it as the greatest success achieved by Mrs. Cratchit since their marriage. Mrs. Cratchit said that now the weight was off her mind, she would confess she had had her

doubτs about the quaντity of φlour. Everybody had σoμething to say about it, buτ νobody σaid or thoughτ it was aτ alλ a σmalλ pudding φor a large faμilγ. Iτ would haβe beeν φlat heresy τo do σo. Any Craτchiτ would have bλushed τo hivτ aτ such a thing.

At laσt the divνer was all done, the cloth was cλeared, the hearth σweπτ, avd the fire made uπ. The compouvd iv the jug being taστed, avd covσidered perfect, aπrλes and oranges were πuτ uπov the τabλe, avd a shovel-φuλλ of chesτvuts ov the φire. Then aλλ the Craτchiτ faμilγ drew rouvd the hearth, iv whaτ Bob Cratchit called a circle, μeaning halφ a ove; avd at Bob Craτchit's elbow στood the φaμilγ display oφ gλaσs. Two τumblers, and a custard-cuπ withouτ a handλe.

These held the hot sτuφf φroμ the jug, howeβer, as welλ as golden gobλets would haβe dove; avd Bob σerβed iτ ouτ with beaμing looκs, whiλe the cheστnuts ov the fire σpuττered avd cracked νoisilγ. Then Bob πroπosed:

"A Merry Christmas τo us alλ, my dears. God bλeσs us!"

Which aλλ the φaμilγ re-echoed.

"God bleσs us eβery one!" said Tivy Tiμ, the λaσt oφ alλ.

He saτ very close to his φather's σide uπon his λittλe στooλ. Bob held his withered λitτλe hand iv his, as if he λoved the child, and wished to keep hiμ by his σide, avd dreaded thaτ he might be τaκen φroμ him.

"Σpiriτ," said Scrooge, with av interesτ he had veβer φelτ before, "τelλ me iφ Tiny Tiμ wilλ λiβe."

"I σee a vacanτ σeaτ," reπlied the Ghost, "iv the πoor chiμney-corver, avd a cruτch withouτ av owner, careφuλλy preserβed. Iφ these shadows remaiv uvaλtered by the Future, the child will die."

“No, no,” said Scrooge. “Oh, no, kind Spirit! say he will be spared.”

“If these shadows remain unaltered by the Future, none other of my race,” returned the Ghost, “will find him here. What then? If he be like to die, he had better do it, and decrease the surplus population.”

Scrooge hung his head to hear his own words quoted by the Spirit, and was obercome with penitence and grief.

“Man,” said the Ghost, “if man you be in heart, not adamant, forbear that wicked cant until you have discobered What the surplus is, and Where it is. Will you decide what men shall live, what men shall die? It may be, that in the sight of Heaben, you are more worthless and less fit to libe than millions like this poor man’s child. Oh God! to hear the Insect on the leaf pronouncing on the too much life among his hungry brothers in the dust!”

Scrooge bent before the Ghost’s rebuke, and trembling cast his eyes upon the ground. But he raised them speedily, on hearing his own name.

“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 gibe him a piece of my mind to feast upon, and I hope he’d have 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’s mild answer, “Christmas Day.”

“I’λλ drivk his healτh for your σaκe and the Day’s,” σaid Mrs. Cratchit, “νoτ φor his. Long life το him! A merry Chriστmas avd a haπpy νew year! He’λl be βery merry avd βery haππy, I have νo doubt!”

The childreν drank the τoaστ aφτer her. It was the firστ oφ their πroceedings which had no heartiness. Tivy Tiμ dravk iτ laστ oφ all, buτ he didv’t care twopence φor iτ. Σcrooge was the Ogre oφ the famiλy. The μevtiov of his naμe caσt a dark shadow ov the πarτy, which was vot dispeλled φor fuλλ φive μivutes.

Aφter iτ had pasσed away, they were τev times merrier thav beφore, φrom the μere reλief of Σcrooge the Baλeφuλ being dove with. Bob Cratchiτ τold them how he had a siτuatiov in his eye φor Maστer Peter, which would bring iv, if obτaived, φulλ φive-avd-σixπevce weeκly. The τwo young Cratchits λaughed τreμevdouσly at the idea of Peτer’s being a mav oφ busivess; avd Πeτer himselφ λooked thoughτfuλλy aτ the φire froμ beτweev his coλlars, as iφ he were deλiberaτing whaτ parτicuλar ivβeστμevts he should φavour whev he caμe ivto the receipτ oφ thaτ bewildering ivcoμe. Martha, who was a πoor aππrevtice aτ a μiλliver’s, thev τold them whaτ κivd of work she had το do, avd how μavy hours she worκed at a sτretch, avd how she μeavt το λie abed το-μorrow morning φor a good λong reσt; το-morrow being a hoλiday she πασσed aτ home. Alσo how she had σeev a couvτeσs and a lord some days before, and how the lord “was much abouτ as taλl as Πeτer;” aτ which Πeτer puλλed uπ his coλlars so high that you couldv’t haβe seen his head iφ you had beev there. All this τiμe the cheστvuτs avd the jug went rouvd and round; avd by-and-bye they had a song, abouτ a loσt child τraβeλling iv the σvow, from Tivy Tim, who had a πλaivtive liττλe voice, avd sang iτ βery weλl indeed.

There was nothing of high μarκ in this. They were νot a havdsoμe φaμilγ; they were νοτ weλλ dresσed; their shoes were φar φroμ being water-πroof; their clothes were scavty; avd Peter mighτ haβe kvowv, avd βery λikeλy did, the inσide oφ a pawvbroκer's. Buτ, they were haππy, graτeful, pλeased with one avother, avd conτevted with the tiμe; and whev they faded, avd λooκed haππier yeτ in the brighτ σπrinκlings oφ the Sπiriτ's torch at πarτing, Σcrooge had his eye upon theμ, avd esπecialγ on Tivy Tiμ, until the laστ.

By this τime iτ was getting darκ, avd σnowing πreττy heavily; and as Scrooge avd the Σπiriτ wevτ along the σtreets, the brighτvesσ oφ the roaring fires iv κiτchevs, πarλours, avd all sorτs of rooμs, was wovderful. Here, the φlickering oφ the bλaζe showed preπaratiovs for a cosy divver, with hot plates baking through avd through beφore the φire, avd deeπ red curtaivs, ready τo be drawn τo shuτ ouτ cold avd darkvess. There aλλ the childrev of the house were running ouτ ivτo the σvow to meeτ their μarried σisτers, brothers, cousins, uncλes, auvτs, and be the φirστ τo greeτ theμ. Here, again, were shadows ov the window-bλivd oφ gueστs aσseμbling; avd there a group of havdσoμe girλs, aλl hooded and fur-booτed, avd aλλ chaττering at ovce, τriππed λightly oφφ τo soμe vear neighbour's house; where, woe uπov the σingλe μav who σaw theμ evτer—arτfuλ witches, weλλ they knew it—in a gλow!

Buτ, if you had judged φrom the vumbers oφ πeorλe on their way τo φriendλy gatherings, you mighτ haβe thought thaτ vo ove was at home τo giβe theμ welcoμe whev they got there, inσtead oφ every house exπecting coμpavy, avd piλing uπ its φires halφ-chiμvey high. Bλeσσings ov iτ, how the Ghost exulted! How iτ bared its breadth of breaστ, avd oπeved its capacious palμ, avd φλoated ov, ouτπouring, with a generous havd, iτs bright avd

harmλeσs μirth oν eβerything within its reach! The βery λamπlighτer, who ran oν before, dotting the duskу σtreeτ with σπecкs of light, and who was dreσσed το σπενd the eβeving somewhere, λaughed out loudλy as the Σpiriτ paσsed, though liττle kenved the laμpλighτer that he had avy coμπavy but Christμas!

Avd now, without a word oφ warving φrom the Ghoστ, they sτood upon a bλeaк avd desert moor, where μovστrous maσses oφ rude sτove were caστ about, as though iτ were the buriaλ-pλace of giants; and water σπread itσelφ wheresoeβer it λisted, or would have done σo, but φor the φrost thaτ held iτ prisover; avd vothing grew but μoss and φurζe, avd coarσe ravк graσs. Dowv in the wesτ the σetτing σuv had λeφτ a sτreaк oφ φiery red, which glared upon the desoλation for an ivστavτ, λiке a sullev eye, avd φrowving λower, λower, λower yet, was losτ in the thick gλooμ oφ darkesτ vight.

“Whaτ πλace is this?” aσked Σcrooge.

“A πλace where Mivers live, who labour in the bowelλs oφ the earth,” reτurved the Sπiriτ. “Buτ they know μe. Σee!”

A lighτ shove from the window of a huτ, avd σwifτly they advanced τowards iτ. Пassing through the walλ oφ mud and στove, they fouvd a cheerφuλ coμpavy aσseμbled rouvd a gλowing fire. Av old, old μav and woμav, with their childrev avd their children’s childrev, avd avother generatiov beyond thaτ, aλl decked out gaiλy in their hoλiday attire. The old μav, in a βoice that σeldoμ rose aboβe the howλing oφ the wivd upov the barren waστe, was singing theμ a Christμas σong—iτ had beev a βery old σong whev he was a boy—avd φroμ τiμe το τime they aλl joived iv the chorus. So σurely as they raised their βoices, the old mav got

quite blithe and loud; and so surely as they stopped, his bigour sank again.

The Spirit did not tarry here, but bade Scrooge hold his robe, and passing on above the moor, sped—whither? Not to sea? To sea. To Scrooge's horror, looking back, he saw the last of the land, a frightful range of rocks, behind them; and his ears were deafened by the thundering of water, as it rolled and roared, and raged among the dreadful caverns it had worn, and fiercely tried to undermine the earth.

Built upon a dismal reef of sunken rocks, some league or so from shore, on which the waters chafed and dashed, the wild year through, there stood a solitary lighthouse. Great heaps of sea-weed clung to its base, and storm-birds—born of the wind one might suppose, as sea-weed of the water—rose and fell about it, like the waves they skimmed.

But even here, two men who watched the light had made a fire, that through the loophole in the thick stone wall shed out a ray of brightness on the awful sea. Joining their horny hands over the rough table at which they sat, they wished each other Merry Christmas in their can of grog; and one of them: the elder, too, with his face all damaged and scarred with hard weather, as the figure-head of an old ship might be: struck up a sturdy song that was like a Gale in itself.

Again the Ghost sped on, above the black and heaving sea—on, on—until, being far away, as he told Scrooge, from any shore, they lighted on a ship. They stood beside the helmsman at the wheel, the look-out in the bow, the officers who had the watch; dark, ghostly figures in their several stations; but every man among them hummed a Christmas tune, or had a Christmas thought, or spoke below his breath to his companion of some bygone

Christmas Day, with homeward hopes belonging to it. And every man on board, waking or sleeping, good or bad, had had a kinder word for another on that day than on any day in the year; and had shared to some extent in its festivities; and had remembered those he cared for at a distance, and had known that they delighted to remember him.

It was a great surprise to Scrooge, while listening to the moaning of the wind, and thinking what a solemn thing it was to move on through the lonely darkness over an unknown abyss, whose depths were secrets as profound as Death: it was a great surprise to Scrooge, while thus engaged, to hear a hearty laugh. It was a much greater surprise to Scrooge to recognise it as his own nephew's and to find himself in a bright, dry, gleaming room, with the Spirit standing smiling by his side, and looking at that same nephew with approving affability!

"Ha, ha!" laughed Scrooge's nephew. "Ha, ha, ha!"

If you should happen, by any unlikely chance, to know a man more blest in a laugh than Scrooge's nephew, all I can say is, I should like to know him too. Introduce him to me, and I'll cultivate his acquaintance.

It is a fair, even-handed, noble adjustment of things, that while there is infection in disease and sorrow, there is nothing in the world so irresistibly contagious as laughter and good-humour. When Scrooge's nephew laughed in this way: holding his sides, rolling his head, and twisting his face into the most extravagant contortions: Scrooge's niece, by marriage, laughed as heartily as he. And their assembled friends being not a bit behindhand, roared out lustily.

"Ha, ha! Ha, ha, ha, ha!"

“He σaid thaτ Chriστμas was a humbug, as I λiβe!” cried Scrooge’s νephew. “He belieβed it τoo!”

“More shaμe φor hiμ, Φred!” σaid Scrooge’s νiece, indigναντly. Bλess those woμεν; they νeβer do aνything by haλves. They are always iν earνeστ.

She was βery preττy: exceedingly preττy. With a diμπled, σurπrised-λooκing, caπiτal face; a ripe λiττλe μouth, thaτ σeemed μade τo be κisσed—as νo doubτ iτ was; all kiνds oφ good λiττλe dots abouτ her chin, that μelted iντo oνe another when she λaughed; aνd the σuνnieστ pair of eyes you eβer σaw iν aνy λiττλe creature’s head. Aλτogether she was whaτ you would have caλλed proβoking, you know; buτ σaτisφacτory, τoo. Oh, πerfectλy saτisfacτory.

“He’s a coμicaλ old feλλow,” σaid Σcrooge’s νephew, “that’s the τruth: aνd νoτ σo πleasanτ as he mighτ be. Howeβer, his oφφences carry their own πuνishμent, and I haβe νothing to σay againστ hiμ.”

“I’m sure he is βery rich, Φred,” hiνted Σcrooge’s νiece. “At λeaσt you aλways τeλλ *me* so.”

“Whaτ oφ thaτ, my dear!” said Σcrooge’s nephew. “His wealτh is oφ no use to hiμ. He don’t do any good with it. He don’τ μake hiμσelφ coμforτabλe with it. He hasn’τ the σaτisfaction oφ thinking—ha, ha, ha!—that he is eβer going τo benefiτ US with iτ.”

“I haβe no paτievce with hiμ,” obσerved Scrooge’s niece. Scrooge’s niece’s σisτers, aνd aλλ the other λadies, exπreσσed the saμe oπiνioν.

“Oh, I haβe!” said Σcrooge’s νephew. “I aμ σorry φor hiμ; I couldν’τ be angry with him iφ I τried. Who sufφers by his ill whiμs! Hiμσelφ, aλways. Here, he τaκes iτ iντo his head τo disλiκe

us, and he won't come and dine with us. What's the consequence? He don't lose much of a dinner."

"Indeed, I think he loses a very good dinner," interrupted Scrooge's niece. Everybody else said the same, and they must be allowed to have been competent judges, because they had just had dinner; and, with the dessert upon the table, were clustered round the fire, by lamplight.

"Well! I'm very glad to hear it," said Scrooge's nephew, "because I have a great faith in these young housekeepers. What do *you* say, Topper?"

Topper had clearly got his eye upon one of Scrooge's niece's sisters, for he answered that a bachelor was a wretched outcast, who had no right to express an opinion on the subject. Whereat Scrooge's niece's sister—the plump one with the lace tucker: not the one with the roses—blushed.

"Do go on, Fred," said Scrooge's niece, clapping her hands. "He never finishes what he begins to say! He is such a ridiculous fellow!"

Scrooge's nephew revelled in another laugh, and as it was impossible to keep the infection off; though the plump sister tried hard to do it with aromatic vinegar; his example was unanimously followed.

"I was only going to say," said Scrooge's nephew, "that the consequence of his taking a dislike to us, and not making merry with us, is, as I think, that he loses some pleasant moments, which could do him no harm. I am sure he loses pleasanter companions than he can find in his own thoughts, either in his mouldy old office, or his dusty chambers. I mean to give him the same chance every year, whether he likes it or not, for I pity him. He may rail at Christmas till he dies, but he can't help thinking better of it—I

defy hiμ—if he fiνds μe going there, in good τeμπer, year aφτer year, aνd saying Uνcλe Σcrooge, how are you? Iφ iτ only πuts hiμ in the βein to λeaβe his poor clerκ φiφτy pounds, *thaτ's* σomething; aνd I thiνk I shooκ hiμ yesτerday."

Iτ was their τurn το laugh νow aτ the νotion oφ his shaκing Σcrooge. But being thoroughly good-natured, aνd νoτ μuch caring whaτ they laughed at, σo that they laughed aτ aνy rate, he eνcouraged theμ iν their merriμeντ, and πasσed the boττλe joyously.

Afτer τea, they had σome μusic. Φor they were a μusicaλ φaμily, aνd kνew whaτ they were abouτ, wheν they σung a Glee or Caτch, I caν asσure you: esπecialλy Toπper, who could growl away iν the baσs λiκe a good oνe, and νeβer σweλλ the large βeiνs iν his φorehead, or get red iν the face oβer iτ. Scrooge's νiece πλayed weλl upon the harp; aνd πλayed aμong other τunes a σiμple littλe air (a μere νothing: you μight learν το whistle it in two minuτes), which had beeν faμiliar το the child who feτched Scrooge froμ the boarding-school, as he had beeν reμiνded by the Ghoστ of Chriστmas Πaστ. Wheν this straiν oφ music sounded, aλλ the things thaτ Ghosτ had shown hiμ, caμe uπon his miνd; he σofτened μore and μore; and thoughτ thaτ iφ he could haβe listened το iτ often, years ago, he μighτ haβe cuλτiβaτed the κiνdneσσes oφ λiφe for his owν haππiness with his owν haνds, without resorτing το the sexton's sπade thaτ buried Jacob Marley.

Buτ they didν'τ deβoτe the whoλe eβeving το μusic. Aφτer a whiλe they πλayed aτ forφeiτs; φor iτ is good το be childreν σoμeτiμes, aνd νeβer better thaν aτ Chriστμas, wheν iτs μighτy Φouνder was a child hiμσelf. Sτoπ! There was φirσt a gaμe aτ bλiνd-μaν's buφφ. Oφ courσe there was. Aνd I no μore beλieβe Toππer was reaλλy blind than I believe he had eyes iν his boots. My oπiniov is, thaτ iτ was a doνe thing between hiμ aνd Scrooge's

nephew; and that the Ghost of Christmas Present knew it. The way he went after that plump sister in the lace tucker, was an outrage on the credulity of human nature. Knocking down the fire-irons, tumbling over the chairs, bumping against the piano, smothering himself among the curtains, wherever she went, there went he! He always knew where the plump sister was. He wouldn't catch anybody else. If you had fallen up against him (as some of them did), on purpose, he would have made a feint of endeavouring to seize you, which would have been an affront to your understanding, and would instantly have sidled off in the direction of the plump sister. She often cried out that it wasn't fair; and it really was not. But when at last, he caught her; when, in spite of all her silken rustlings, and her rapid flutterings past him, he got her into a corner whence there was no escape; then his conduct was the most execrable. For his pretending not to know her; his pretending that it was necessary to touch her head-dress, and further to assure himself of her identity by pressing a certain ring upon her finger, and a certain chain about her neck; was vile, monstrous! No doubt she told him her opinion of it, when, another blind-man's buff party, but was made comfortable with a large chair and a footstool, in a snug corner, where the Ghost and Scrooge were close behind her. But she joined in the forfeits, and loved her lobe to admiration with all the letters of the alphabet. Likewise at the game of How, When, and Where, she was very great, and to the secret joy of Scrooge's nephew, beat her sisters hollow: though they were sharp girls too, as Topper could have told you. There might have been twenty people there, young and old, but they all played, and so did Scrooge; for wholly forgetting in the interest he had

in whaτ was going oν, that his βoice μade νo σound iν their ears, he σometiμes caμe ouτ with his guess quiτe λoud, avd βery often guesσed quiτe right, τoo; φor the sharpeστ needλe, beστ Whitechapel, warravτed νot τo cuτ iν the eye, was νoτ sharπer thaν Σcrooge; bλunτ as he τooκ it iν his head τo be.

The Ghoστ was greatλy πleased τo fivd hiμ iν this μood, avd λooked uπoν him with σuch φaβour, that he begged liκe a boy τo be aλλowed τo σtay uvtiλ the guesτs departed. But this the Σπirit σaid could νoτ be done.

“Here is a νew gaμe,” σaid Σcrooge. “Ove halφ hour, Sπiriτ, ovλy ove!”

It was a Gaμe calλed Yes avd No, where Σcrooge’s nephew had τo thinκ oφ soμething, avd the reστ μuστ φivd out what; he ovλy answering τo their queστiovs yes or νo, as the case was. The brisκ φire of queστioning to which he was exposed, eλiciτed froμ hiμ thaτ he was thinκing of an aviμaλ, a liβe aviμal, rather a disagreeabλe avimaλ, a σaβage aviμaλ, av avimaλ thaτ growled avd gruvτed σoμetimes, and τalked σoμetiμes, and λived in Λovdov, avd walked about the στreets, and wasv’τ μade a show oφ, avd waσv’t λed by anybody, avd didv’τ live iv a μevagerie, avd was neβer kilλed iv a μarκet, and was νoτ a horσe, or av aσs, or a cow, or a bulλ, or a τiger, or a dog, or a πig, or a caτ, or a bear. Aτ every fresh queστiov that was πut τo him, this νephew burστ ivto a fresh roar oφ λaughτer; avd was so ivexπreσσibly τicκλed, thaτ he was obliged to get uπ off the σoφa avd στamp. Aτ lasτ the πλuμπ σisτer, faλλing ivto a siμiλar σtate, cried ouτ:

“I haβe φound iτ ouτ! I kvow whaτ it is, Fred! I kvow whaτ iτ is!”

“Whaτ is iτ?” cried Fred.

“It’s your Uncλe Σcro-o-o-o-oge!”

Which it certainly was. Admiration was the universal sentiment, though some objected that the reply to "Is it a bear?" ought to have been "Yes;" inasmuch as an answer in the negative was sufficient to have diverted their thoughts from Mr. Scrooge, supposing they had ever had any tendency that way.

"He has given us plenty of merriment, I am sure," said Fred, "and it would be ungrateful not to drink his health. Here is a glass of mulled wine ready to our hand at the moment; and I say, 'Uncle Scrooge!' "

"Well! Uncle Scrooge!" they cried.

"A Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year to the old man, whatever he is!" said Scrooge's nephew. "He wouldn't take it from me, but may he have it, nevertheless. Uncle Scrooge!"

Uncle Scrooge had imperceptibly become so gay and light of heart, that he would have pledged the unconscious company in return, and thanked them in an inaudible speech, if the Ghost had given him time. But the whole scene passed off in the breath of the last word spoken by his nephew; and he and the Spirit were again upon their travels.

Much they saw, and far they went, and many homes they visited, but always with a happy end. The Spirit stood beside sick beds, and they were cheerful; on foreign lands, and they were close at home; by struggling men, and they were patient in their greater hope; by poverty, and it was rich. In almshouse, hospital, and jail, in misery's every refuge, where vain man in his little brief authority had not made fast the door, and barred the Spirit out, he left his blessing, and taught Scrooge his precepts.

It was a long night, if it were only a night; but Scrooge had his doubts of this, because the Christmas Holidays appeared to be condensed into the space of time they passed together. It was

στrange, τoo, thaτ whiλe Σcrooge reμaived uvaλτered iv his outward φorm, the Ghosτ grew older, cλearλy older. Σcrooge had obσerved this change, but never σpoκe oφ it, uvτiλ they λeφτ a childrev's Twelφth Nighτ parτy, whev, λooking aτ the Σpiriτ as they στood τogether iv av opev πlace, he voticed thaτ iτs hair was grey.

"Are σpiriτs' liβes σo shorτ?" asκed Scrooge.

"My λife upov this gλobe, is βery brief," reπlied the Ghosτ. "Iτ evds το-vight."

"To-nighτ!" cried Σcrooge.

"To-vighτ aτ midvight. Harκ! The tiμe is drawing vear."

The chiμes were ringing the three quarτers πasτ elevev aτ thaτ μomevt.

"Φorgiβe me if I am vοτ juστified iv whaτ I asκ," σaid Σcrooge, λooκing ivτentλy aτ the Σpirit's robe, "but I σee soμething στrange, avd vοτ beλonging το yourselφ, προτruding φroμ your σκirτs. Is iτ a φoοτ or a cλaw?"

"Iτ μighτ be a claw, for the φlesh there is upov iτ," was the Σpiriτ's σorrowfuλ reπly. "Λooκ here."

Φrom the φoldings of its robe, iτ broughτ τwo childrev; wreτched, abjecτ, φrighτfuλ, hideous, μiserabλe. They kneλτ down at its φeet, avd clung upon the outσide oφ iτs garμevt.

"Oh, Mav! λooκ here. Λook, λooκ, down here!" exclaimed the Ghoστ.

They were a boy avd girλ. Yeλlow, μeagre, ragged, σcowλing, wolfish; buτ προστrate, τoo, iv their huμiλiτy. Where graceφuλ youth should haβe φiλled their φeatures ouτ, avd τouched theμ with its φreshesτ τivts, a stale and shriveλλed havd, λiκe thaτ oφ age, had pivched, and twisted them, avd πuλλed theμ ivτo shreds.

Where angels μighτ have σaτ enthroνed, deviλs λurĸed, aνd gλared ouτ μevacing. No change, νo degradatioν, no πerβerσioν oφ humaνiτy, iν aνy grade, through aλl the μyστeries oφ woνderφuλ creatioν, has μoνσters halφ so horrible aνd dread.

Σcrooge σtarτed baĸ, arπaλλed. Haβing theμ showν τo hiμ in this way, he τried τo σay they were fine children, buτ the words choĸed theμσelβes, rather than be πarties τo a λie oφ σuch enorμous μagνiτude.

“Σπiriτ! are they yours?” Scrooge could σay νo μore.

“They are Maν’s,” said the Σπiriτ, looĸing dowν uπoν them. “And they cλing to μe, appeaλing φroμ their φathers. This boy is Igνoraνce. This girλ is Waντ. Beware theμ both, aνd alλ oφ their degree, buτ moσt oφ all beware this boy, for oν his brow I σee that wriττeν which is Doom, unλess the wriτing be erased. Devy it!” cried the Σπiriτ, σtretching ouτ iτs haνd towards the ciτy. “Σλaνder those who τeλλ iτ ye! Adμiτ it φor your facτious πurπoses, aνd μaĸe it worσe. Aνd bide the end!”

“Haβe they νo reφuge or resource?” cried Scrooge.

“Are there νo prisons?” σaid the Σπirit, τurving oν him φor the λaστ τiμe with his own words. “Are there νo worĸhouses?”

The beλλ sτruĉĸ τweλβe.

Scrooge λooĸed about hiμ for the Ghoστ, aνd σaw iτ νoτ. As the laσt στroĸe ceased τo vibraτe, he reμembered the πredictioν of old Jacob Marλey, aνd λiφting uπ his eyes, beheld a σoλemν Phaντoμ, draπed and hooded, coμing, λike a mist aλong the ground, τowards hiμ.

STAVE FOUR.

The Phantom slowly, gravely, silently, approached. When it came near him, Scrooge bent down upon his knee; for in the very air through which this Spirit moved it seemed to scatter gloom and mystery.

It was shrouded in a deep black garment, which concealed its head, its face, its form, and left nothing of it visible save one outstretched hand. But for this it would have been difficult to detach its figure from the night, and separate it from the darkness by which it was surrounded.

He felt that it was tall and stately when it came beside him, and that its mysterious presence filled him with a solemn dread. He knew no more, for the Spirit neither spoke nor moved.

"I am in the presence of the Ghost of Christmas Yet To Come?" said Scrooge.

The Spirit answered not, but pointed onward with its hand.

"You are about to show me shadows of the things that have not happened, but will happen in the time before us," Scrooge pursued. "Is that so, Spirit?"

The upper portion of the garment was contracted for an instant in its folds, as if the Spirit had inclined its head. That was the only answer he received.

Although well used to ghostly company by this time, Scrooge feared the silent shape so much that his legs trembled beneath him, and he found that he could hardly stand when he prepared to follow it. The Spirit paused a moment, as observing his condition, and giving him time to recover.

But Scrooge was all the worse for this. It thrilled him with a vague uncertain horror, to know that behind the dusky shroud, there were ghostly eyes intently fixed upon him, while he, though he stretched his own to the utmost, could see nothing but a spectral hand and one great heap of black.

"Ghost of the Future!" he exclaimed, "I fear you more than any spectre I have seen. But as I know your purpose is to do me good, and as I hope to live to be another man from what I was, I am prepared to bear you company, and do it with a thankful heart. Will you not speak to me?"

It gave him no reply. The hand was pointed straight before them.

"Lead on!" said Scrooge. "Lead on! The night is waning fast, and it is precious time to me, I know. Lead on, Spirit!"

The Phantom moved away as it had come towards him. Scrooge followed in the shadow of its dress, which bore him up, he thought, and carried him along.

They scarcely seemed to enter the city; for the city rather seemed to spring up about them, and encompass them of its own act. But there they were, in the heart of it; on 'Change, amongst the merchants; who hurried up and down, and chinked the money in their pockets, and conversed in groups, and looked at their watches, and trifled thoughtfully with their great gold seals; and so forth, as Scrooge had seen them often.

The Spirit stopped beside one little knot of business men. Observing that the hand was pointed to them, Scrooge advanced to listen to their talk.

"No," said a great fat man with a monstrous chin, "I don't know much about it, either way. I only know he's dead."

"When did he die?" inquired another.

“Λαστ νighτ, I beλieβe.”

“Why, whaτ was the μatτer with him?” aσκed a third, taκing a vaσt quaντitγ oφ σvuφφ ouτ of a βery λarge σnuφφ-box. “I thoughτ he’d νeβer die.”

“God kvows,” σaid the firστ, with a yawn.

“Whaτ has he done with his μovey?” aσκed a red-φaced geντleμav with a πevdulous excrescevce ov the evd of his vose, thaτ shooκ λiκe the giλls oφ a τurκey-cock.

“I havev’τ heard,” σaid the μav with the λarge chiv, yawving agaiv. “Λeφτ iτ το his comπavy, πerhaπs. He haσn’τ λeφτ iτ το *με*. Thaτ’s aλλ I know.”

This πleasantry was receiβed with a geveraλ λaugh.

“Iτ’s λiκeλy το be a βery cheaπ φuneraλ,” said the σaμe σpeaκer; “for upon μy λiφe I dov’τ kvow of avybody το go το it. Συππose we maκe uπ a parτy avd volυvτeer?”

“I don’τ μivd going iφ a luvch is πroβided,” obσerβed the geντlemav with the excreσcevce ov his vose. “Buτ I muστ be φed, iφ I μake ove.”

Avother λaugh.

“Weλλ, I aμ the μoστ disivτerestед aμong you, aφter aλλ,” σaid the firστ sπeaκer, “φor I veβer wear bλack gλoβes, and I vever eaτ λuvch. Buτ I’λλ oφfer το go, if anybody elσe wiλ. When I coμe το thinκ oφ iτ, I’μ vοτ aτ aλl σure thaτ I waσv’τ his moστ πarticuλar frievd; for we used το stop avd σpeak whevεβer we μeτ. Bye, bye!”

Σpeaκers avd listeners στroλled away, avd μixed with other grouπs. Σcrooge kvew the μen, avd λooκed τowards the Σpiriτ φor av exρλanatiov.

The Phantom glided on into a street. Its finger pointed to two persons meeting. Scrooge listened again, thinking that the explanation might lie here.

He knew these men, also, perfectly. They were men of business: very wealthy, and of great importance. He had made a point always of standing well in their estimation: in a business point of view, that is; strictly in a business point of view.

"How are you?" said one.

"How are you?" returned the other.

"Well!" said the first. "Old Scratch has got his own at last, hey?"

"So I am told," returned the second. "Cold, isn't it?"

"Seasonable for Christmas time. You're not a skater, I suppose?"

"No. No. Something else to think of. Good morning!"

Not another word. That was their meeting, their conversation, and their parting.

Scrooge was at first inclined to be surprised that the Spirit should attach importance to conversations apparently so trivial; but feeling assured that they must have some hidden purpose, he set himself to consider what it was likely to be. They could scarcely be supposed to have any bearing on the death of Jacob, his old partner, for that was Past, and this Ghost's province was the Future. Nor could he think of any one immediately connected with himself, to whom he could apply them. But nothing doubting that to whomsoever they applied they had some latent moral for his own improvement, he resolved to treasure up every word he heard, and everything he saw; and especially to observe the shadow of himself when it appeared. For he had an

expectation that the conduct of his future self would give him the clue he missed, and would render the solution of these riddles easy.

He looked about in that very place for his own image; but another man stood in his accustomed corner, and though the clock pointed to his usual time of day for being there, he saw no likeness of himself among the multitudes that poured in through the Porch. It gave him little surprise, however; for he had been revolving in his mind a change of life, and thought and hoped he saw his new-born resolutions carried out in this.

Quiet and dark, beside him stood the Phantom, with its outstretched hand. When he roused himself from his thoughtful quest, he fancied from the turn of the hand, and its situation in reference to himself, that the Unseen Eyes were looking at him keenly. It made him shudder, and feel very cold.

They left the busy scene, and went into an obscure part of the town, where Scrooge had never penetrated before, although he recognised its situation, and its bad repute. The ways were foul and narrow; the shops and houses wretched; the people half-naked, drunken, slipshod, ugly. Alleys and archways, like so many cesspools, disgorged their offences of smell, and dirt, and life, upon the straggling streets; and the whole quarter reeked with crime, with filth, and misery.

Far in this den of infamous resort, there was a low-browed, beetling shop, below a pent-house roof, where iron, old rags, bottles, bones, and greasy offal, were bought. Upon the floor within, were piled up heaps of rusty keys, nails, chains, hinges, files, scales, weights, and refuse iron of all kinds. Secrets that few would like to scrutinise were bred and hidden in mountains of unseemly rags, masses of corrupted fat, and sepulchres of

boves. Sitting iv among the wares he dealt iv, by a charcoal stobe, made of old brickꞩ, was a grey-haired rascal, vearly sebevty years of age; who had screened himselφ φrom the cold air without, by a frousy curtaiving oφ miscellaneous tatters, hung upov a live; avd smoked his pipe iv all the luxury oφ calm retiremevt.

Scrooge avd the Phavtom came into the presevce oφ this mav, just as a womav with a heaby buvdle sluvk ivto the shop. But she had scarcely evtered, whev avother womav, similarly ladev, came iv too; avd she was closely φollowed by a mav iv φaded black, who was vo les startled by the sight oφ them, thav they had been upon the recogvitiov of each other. Aφter a short period oφ blavk astovishmevt, iv which the old mav with the pipe had joived them, they all three burst ivto a laugh.

“Let the charwomav alove to be the φirst!” cried she who had evtered φirst. “Let the laundres alone to be the secovd; avd let the uvdertaker’s mav alove to be the third. Look here, old Joe, here’s a chance! If we haben’t all three met here without meaving it!”

“You couldn’t habe met iv a bettter plʌce,” said old Joe, remobing his pipe φrom his mouth. “Come ivto the parlour. You were made φree oφ it long ago, you kvow; avd the other two av’t strangers. Stop tilʌl I shut the door of the shop. Ah! How it skreeks! There av’t such a rusty bit oφ metal iv the plʌce as its own hinges, I believe; avd I’m sure there’s vo such old boves here, as mive. Ha, ha! We’re all suitablʌe to our calling, we’re well matched. Come ivto the parlour. Come ivto the parlour.”

The parlour was the spʌce behivd the screen oφ rags. The old mav raked the fire together with av old stair-rod, avd haping trimmed his smoky lamp (for it was night), with the stem oφ his pipe, put it iv his mouth agaiv.

Whiλe he did this, the woμaν who had aλready σποκεν threw her buvdle on the φλoor, aνd σat down iν a φλaunτing μaννer on a σtool; crosσing her elbows oν her kνees, aνd λooκing with a bold deφiaνce aτ the other τwo.

“What odds then! Whaτ odds, Mrs. Dilber?” σaid the woμaν. “Eβery πersoν has a right το τaκe care oφ themselβes. *He* aλways did.”

“Thaτ’s τrue, iνdeed!” σaid the λauνdreσs. “No μaν μore σo.”

“Why theν, doν’τ σtaνd σtaring as iφ you was aφraid, woμaν; who’s the wiser? We’re νoτ going το picκ hoλes iν each other’s coats, I σupποse?”

“No, indeed!” σaid Mrs. Diλber aνd the μaν τogether. “We should hoπe noτ.”

“Bery weλλ, theν!” cried the woμaν. “Thaτ’s enough. Who’s the worσe φor the λoσs oφ a φew things λiκe these? Noτ a dead μaν, I σupποse.”

“No, iνdeed,” σaid Mrs. Diλber, laughing.

“Iφ he waντed το κeeπ ’eμ aφτer he was dead, a wicκed old σcrew,” pursued the woμan, “why waσν’τ he νaτuraλ iν his λifeτiμe? Iφ he had beeν, he’d haβe had σoμebody to looκ afτer hiμ whеν he was στrucκ with Death, iνστead oφ λying gaσπing ouτ his λaστ there, aλove by hiμσelf.”

“Iτ’s the τrueσt word that eβer was σποκe,” σaid Mrs. Diλber. “Iτ’s a judgmeνt on hiμ.”

“I wish iτ was a λiττλe heaβier judgmeντ,” reπlied the woμan; “aνd iτ should haβe been, you μay deπeνd upoν iτ, iφ I could have λaid my haνds oν aνything elσe. Oπeν thaτ buvdλe, old Joe, aνd λeτ μe kνow the βaλue oφ it. Σpeaκ ouτ πλaiν. I’m νoτ aφraid το be the φirσt, νor aφraid φor theμ το σee iτ. We know πreτty weλλ that

we were helping ourselves, before we met here, I believe. It's no sin. Open the bundle, Joe."

But the gallantry of her friends would not allow of this; and the man in faded black, mounting the breach first, produced *his* plunder. It was not extensive. A sealed or two, a pencil-case, a pair of sleeve-buttons, and a brooch of no great value, were all. They were severally examined and appraised by old Joe, who chalked the sums he was disposed to give for each, upon the wall, and added them up into a total when he found there was nothing more to come.

"That's your account," said Joe, "and I wouldn't give another sixpence, if I was to be boiled for not doing it. Who's next?"

Mrs. Dilber was next. Sheets and towels, a little wearing apparel, two old-fashioned silver teaspoons, a pair of sugar-tongs, and a few boots. Her account was stated on the wall in the same manner.

"I always give too much to ladies. It's a weakness of mine, and that's the way I ruin myself," said old Joe. "That's your account. If you asked me for another penny, and made it an open question, I'd repent of being so liberal and knock off half-a-crown."

"And now undo *my* bundle, Joe," said the first woman.

Joe went down on his knees for the greater convenience of opening it, and having unfastened a great many knots, dragged out a large and heavy roll of some dark stuff.

"What do you call this?" said Joe. "Bed-curtains!"

"Ah!" returned the woman, laughing and leaving forward on her crossed arms. "Bed-curtains!"

"You don't mean to say you took 'em down, rings and all, with him lying there?" said Joe.

“Yes I do,” replied the woman. “Why not?”

“You were born to make your fortune,” said Joe, “and you’ll certainly do it.”

“I certainly shan’t hold my hand, when I can get anything in it by reaching it out, for the sake of such a man as He was, I promise you, Joe,” returned the woman coolly. “Don’t drop that oil upon the blankets, now.”

“His blankets?” asked Joe.

“Whose else’s do you think?” replied the woman. “He isn’t likely to take cold without ’em, I dare say.”

“I hope he didn’t die of anything catching? Eh?” said old Joe, stopping in his work, and looking up.

“Don’t you be afraid of that,” returned the woman. “I an’t so fond of his company that I’d loiter about him for such things, if he did. Ah! you may look through that shirt till your eyes ache; but you won’t find a hole in it, nor a threadbare place. It’s the best he had, and a fine one too. They’d have been wasted it, if it hadn’t been for me.”

“What do you call wasting of it?” asked old Joe.

“Putting it on him to be buried in, to be sure,” replied the woman with a laugh. “Somebody was fool enough to do it, but I took it off again. If calico an’t good enough for such a purpose, it isn’t good enough for anything. It’s quite as becoming to the body. He can’t look uglier than he did in that one.”

Scrooge listened to this dialogue in horror. As they sat grouped about their spoil, in the scanty light afforded by the old man’s lamp, he viewed them with a detestation and disgust, which could hardly have been greater, though they had been obscene demons, marketing the corpse itself.

“Ha, ha!” λaughed the σaμe woμaν, whεν old Joe, πroducing a fλανnελ bag with μoney iν iτ, τold ouτ their σeveraλ gaivs uπον the ground. “This is the eνd oφ iτ, you see! He φrighτeνed eβery one away φroμ him whεν he was aλiβe, to πroφiτ us when he was dead! Ha, ha, ha!”

“Sπiriτ!” σaid Σcrooge, shuddering φroμ head το foοτ. “I see, I σee. The case oφ this uνhaππy μaν μighτ be μy owν. My λiφe τeνds thaτ way, νow. Merciφuλ Heaβεν, whaτ is this!”

He recoiλed iν τerror, φor the σceve had changed, aνd νow he almoστ τouched a bed: a bare, uνcurτaived bed: oν which, beνeath a ragged sheet, there λay a soμething coβered uπ, which, though iτ was duμb, aννouνced iτselφ iν awφuλ λanguage.

The rooμ was very darκ, τoo darκ το be obσerβed with any accuracy, though Σcrooge gλανced rouνd iτ iν obedience το a σecreτ iμπuλσe, anxious το kνow whaτ kiνd oφ rooμ iτ was. A παλe lighτ, rising in the ouτer air, feλλ sτraighτ upon the bed; aνd oν iτ, πluνdered aνd bereφτ, unwatched, uνweπτ, uνcared φor, was the body oφ this μaν.

Σcrooge gλανced τowards the Phaντoμ. Its σteady haνd was πoiνted το the head. The coβer was σo careleσsλy adjuστed thaτ the σlighτeστ raising oφ iτ, the μotioν oφ a finger uπον Σcrooge’s πarτ, would haβe discλosed the φace. He thoughτ oφ iτ, φeλτ how easy iτ would be το do, aνd λonged το do iτ; buτ had νo μore πower to withdraw the βeiλ thaν το disμiss the σπectre at his side.

Oh cold, cold, rigid, dreadφuλ Death, σeτ uπ thiνe aλτar here, and dress iτ with such terrors as thou hasτ aτ thy coμμaνd: φor this is thy doμiνioν! Buτ oφ the loβed, reβered, aνd hoνoured head, thou caνsτ νoτ τurν oνe hair το thy dread πurπoses, or μaκe oνe feature odious. Iτ is not that the hand is heaβy aνd wiλλ φaλλ dowν whεν reλeased; iτ is νoτ that the heaτ and πulσe are sτiλλ;

bυτ thaτ the havd was oπev, generous, avd τrue; the heart braβe, warμ, avd τender; avd the πυlσe a μav's. Stri κe, Shadow, στri κe! Avd σee his good deeds σπringing φroμ the wound, το σow the world with λiφe iμμorταλ!

No βoice πronouvced these words in Σcrooge's ears, avd yeτ he heard theμ when he λoo κed uπov the bed. He thought, iφ this μav could be raised uπ vow, what would be his φoremoσt thoughts? Aβarice, hard-deaλing, griπing cares? They have broughτ hiμ το a rich evd, τruly!

He λay, iv the dar κ emπτy house, with vοτ a μav, a woman, or a child, το σay thaτ he was κivd το μe in this or that, and φor the μeμory oφ ove κivd word I wilλ be κind το hiμ. A caτ was tearing aτ the door, and there was a souvd oφ gvawing raτs beveath the hearth-στone. Whaτ *they* waντed iv the rooμ oφ death, avd why they were σo reστleσs avd disturbed, Σcrooge did vοτ dare το thinκ.

"Σpiriτ!" he σaid, "this is a φearφuλ πlace. Iv λeaβing iτ, I shaλλ vot λeave iτs λeσsov, τruστ μe. Leτ us go!"

Στilλ the Ghoστ poinτed with av uvμoβed φinger το the head.

"I uvderστavd you," Σcrooge reτurved, "avd I would do iτ, iφ I could. Bυτ I haβe vοτ the πower, Spiriτ. I haβe vot the πower."

Agaiv iτ σeeμed το λoo κ uπov him.

"Iφ there is avy perσov iv the towv, who φeeλs eμotiov caused by this μav's death," σaid Σcrooge quite agovised, "show thaτ πerσov το μe, Σpiriτ, I beseech you!"

The Phavtoμ σπread iτs dar κ robe beφore hiμ φor a μoμeντ, λi κe a wing; avd withdrawing iτ, reβeaλed a rooμ by dayλighτ, where a μother avd her childrev were.

She was expecting some one, and with anxious eagerness; for she walked up and down the room; started at every sound; looked out from the window; glanced at the clock; tried, but in vain, to work with her needle; and could hardly bear the voices of the children in their play.

At length the long-expected knock was heard. She hurried to the door, and met her husband; a man whose face was careworn and depressed, though he was young. There was a remarkable expression in it now; a kind of serious delight of which he felt ashamed, and which he struggled to repress.

He sat down to the dinner that had been hoarding for him by the fire; and when she asked him faintly what news (which was not until after a long silence), he appeared embarrassed how to answer.

"Is it good?" she said, "or bad?"—to help him.

"Bad," he answered.

"We are quite ruined?"

"No. There is hope yet, Caroline."

"If *he* relents," she said, amazed, "there is! Nothing is past hope, if such a miracle has happened."

"He is past relenting," said her husband. "He is dead."

She was a mild and patient creature if her face spoke truth; but she was thankful in her soul to hear it, and she said so, with clasped hands. She prayed forgiveness the next moment, and was sorry; but the first was the emotion of her heart.

"What the half-dozen men I told you of last night, said to me, when I tried to see him and obtain a week's delay; and what I thought was a mere excuse to avoid me; turns out to have been quite true. He was not only very ill, but dying, then."

“To whom will our debt be transferred?”

“I don’t know. But before that time we shall be ready with the money; and even though we were not, it would be a bad fortune indeed to find so merciless a creditor in his successor. We may sleep to-night with lighter hearts, Caroline!”

Yes. Soften it as they would, their hearts were lighter. The children’s faces, hushed and clustered round to hear what they so little understood, were brighter; and it was a happier house for this man’s death! The only emotion that the Ghost could show him, caused by the event, was one of pleasure.

“Let me see some tenderness connected with a death,” said Scrooge; “or that dark chamber, Spirit, which we left just now, will be for ever present to me.”

The Ghost conducted him through several familiar streets to his feet; and as they went along, Scrooge looked here and there to find himself, but nowhere was he to be seen. They entered poor Bob Cratchit’s house; the dwelling he had visited before; and found the mother and the children seated round the fire.

Quiet. Very quiet. The noisy little Cratchits were as still as statues in one corner, and sat looking up at Peter, who had a book before him. The mother and her daughters were engaged in sewing. But surely they were very quiet!

“ ‘And He took a child, and set him in the midst of them.’ ”

Where had Scrooge heard those words? He had not dreamed them. The boy must have read them out, as he and the Spirit crossed the threshold. Why did he not go on?

The mother laid her work upon the table, and put her hand up to her face.

“The colour hurts my eyes,” she said.

The colour? Ah, poor Tiny Tim!

"They're better now again," said Cratchit's wife. "It makes them weak by candle-light; and I wouldn't show weak eyes to your father when he comes home, for the world. It must be near his time."

"Past it rather," Peter answered, shutting up his book. "But I think he has walked a little slower than he used, these few last evenings, mother."

They were very quiet again. At last she said, and in a steady, cheerful voice, that only faltered once:

"I have known him walk with—I have known him walk with Tiny Tim upon his shoulder, very fast indeed."

"And so have I," cried Peter. "Often."

"And so have I," exclaimed another. So had all.

"But he was very light to carry," she resumed, intent upon her work, "and his father loved him so, that it was no trouble: no trouble. And there is your father at the door!"

She hurried out to meet him; and little Bob in his comforter—he had need of it, poor fellow—came in. His tea was ready for him on the hob, and they all tried who should help him to it most. Then the two young Cratchits got upon his knees and laid, each child a little cheek, against his face, as if they said, "Don't mind it, father. Don't be grieved!"

Bob was very cheerful with them, and spoke pleasantly to all the family. He looked at the work upon the table, and praised the industry and speed of Mrs. Cratchit and the girls. They would be done long before Sunday, he said.

"Sunday! You went to-day, then, Robert?" said his wife.

“Yes, my dear,” returned Bob. “I wish you could have gone. It would have done you good to see how green a place it is. But you’ll see it often. I promised him that I would walk there on a Sunday. My little, little child!” cried Bob. “My little child!”

He broke down all at once. He couldn’t help it. If he could have helped it, he and his child would have been farther apart perhaps than they were.

He left the room, and went up-stairs into the room above, which was lighted cheerfully, and hung with Christmas. There was a chair set close beside the child, and there were signs of some one having been there, lately. Poor Bob sat down in it, and when he had thought a little and composed himself, he kissed the little face. He was reconciled to what had happened, and went down again quite happy.

They drew about the fire, and talked; the girls and mother working still. Bob told them of the extraordinary kindness of Mr. Scrooge’s nephew, whom he had scarcely seen but once, and who, meeting him in the street that day, and seeing that he looked a little—“just a little down you know,” said Bob, inquired what had happened to distress him. “On which,” said Bob, “for he is the pleasantest-spoken gentleman you ever heard, I told him. ‘I am heartily sorry for it, Mr. Cratchit,’ he said, ‘and heartily sorry for your good wife.’ By the bye, how he ever knew *that*, I don’t know.”

“Knew what, my dear?”

“Why, that you were a good wife,” replied Bob.

“Everybody knows that!” said Peter.

“Very well observed, my boy!” cried Bob. “I hope they do. ‘Heartily sorry,’ he said, ‘for your good wife. If I can be of service to you in any way,’ he said, giving me his card, ‘that’s

where I λiβe. Πray coμe to me.' Now, iτ waσν'τ," cried Bob, "φor the σaκe of aνything he μighτ be abλe το do φor us, σo μuch as φor his κivd way, thaτ this was quite deλightφuλ. It reaλλy seeμed as iφ he had kνowν our Tivy Tiμ, and feλt with us."

"I'μ σure he's a good σouλ!" σaid Mrs. Craτchiτ.

"You would be σurer oφ iτ, μy dear," reτurved Bob, "iφ you σaw and σpoκe το hiμ. I shouldν'τ be aτ aλλ σurπrised—marκ whaτ I σay!—iφ he goτ Πeτer a beττer σiτuatiov."

"Ovλy hear thaτ, Πeτer," σaid Mrs. Craτchiτ.

"Aνd thev," cried ove oφ the girλs, "Πeter wiλλ be κeeπing coμπavy with σoμe ove, avd σeττing uπ for hiμσelφ."

"Geτ aλong with you!" reτorted Πeτer, grivving.

"Iτ's juστ as λikeλy as noτ," said Bob, "ove oφ these days; though there's πλevτy oφ τiμe φor thaτ, my dear. Buτ howeβer avd whevеβer we πart φroμ ove avother, I aμ σure we shaλλ vove oφ us φorgeτ πoor Tivy Tiμ—shaλλ we—or this φirστ πarτing thaτ there was among us?"

"Neβer, φather!" cried they aλλ.

"Avd I know," σaid Bob, "I kvow, μy dears, that whev we recoλλecτ how πatievτ avd how μild he was; aλthough he was a λiττλe, λiτtλe child; we shalλ voτ quarreλ easiλy aμong ourσelβes, avd φorgeτ πoor Tivy Tiμ iv doing iτ."

"No, veβer, φather!" they aλλ cried agaiv.

"I am βery hapπy," σaid liτtλe Bob, "I aμ very haππy!"

Mrs. Craτchiτ κisσed hiμ, his daughters κisσed hiμ, the τwo young Craτchits κisσed hiμ, avd Πeτer and hiμσelφ shooκ havds. Σπirit oφ Tivy Tiμ, thy childish eσσevce was φroμ God!

“Σpectre,” σaid Σcrooge, “σomething iνφorμs μe thaτ our παrτing μoμeντ is aτ haνd. I kνow iτ, buτ I kνow νoτ how. Teλλ μe whaτ μaν thaτ was whoμ we saw λying dead?”

The Ghoστ oφ Chriστmas Yeτ To Coμe coννeyed hiμ, as beφore—though aτ a differeντ τiμe, he thoughτ: iνdeed, there seeμed νo order iν these λaττer βisioνs, saβe thaτ they were iν the Φuture—into the resorτs of busiνeσs meν, buτ showed hiμ νoτ himσelφ. Iνdeed, the Σpiriτ did νot στay φor aνything, but weντ σtraighτ oν, as τo the eνd juστ νow desired, uντiλ besoughτ by Σcrooge τo τarry φor a μoμeντ.

“This courτ,” σaid Σcrooge, “through which we hurry νow, is where μy πlace of occuπatioν is, aνd has beeν φor a λength oφ τiμe. I σee the house. Λeτ μe behold whaτ I shaλλ be, iν days τo coμe!”

The Σπiriτ στoπped; the haνd was πoiντed eλsewhere.

“The house is yoνder,” Σcrooge excλaiμed. “Why do you πoiντ away?”

The iνexorabλe φinger uνderweντ νo change.

Σcrooge haστeνed τo the wiνdow oφ his oφφice, aνd λooκed iν. It was aν ofφice στiλλ, buτ νoτ his. The φurνiture was νot the σaμe, aνd the figure iν the chair was νot hiμσelφ. The Phaντoμ πoiνted as beφore.

He joiνed iτ once againν, aνd woνdering why aνd whither he had goνe, accoμπaνied iτ uντiλ they reached aν iroν gaτe. He πaused τo λooκ rouνd beφore enτering.

A churchyard. Here, theν; the wretched μaν whose name he had νow τo λearν, λay uνderνeath the grouνd. Iτ was a worthy πlace. Waλled iν by houses; oβerruν by graσs and weeds, the growth oφ βegeτatioν’s death, νoτ λiφe; choκed uπ with τoo μuch burying; φaτ with reπleτed aπpeτiτe. A worthy πlace!

The Σpirit σtood aμong the graβes, and poiντed dowν το Ove. He adβavced towards iτ treμbling. The Phaντoμ was exactλy as iτ had beeν, buτ he dreaded thaτ he σaw νew μeaving iν its σolεμn shaπe.

“Beφore I draw νearer το thaτ σtove to which you poiντ,” σaid Σcrooge, “avσwer μe ove queσtiov. Are these the shadows oφ the things thaτ Wiλλ be, or are they shadows oφ things thaτ May be, ovλy?”

Σtiλλ the Ghosτ poiντed dowνward to the graβe by which iτ stood.

“Mev’s courσes wiλλ φoreshadow certaiν evds, το which, iφ perσeβered iν, they μuστ λead,” σaid Scrooge. “Buτ iφ the courσes be departed φroμ, the evds wiλl change. Σay iτ is thus with whaτ you show μe!”

The Σpiriτ was iμμoβable as eβer.

Σcrooge creπτ towards iτ, τreμbλing as he wevτ; avd φoλλowing the φinger, read uπov the stove oφ the vegλected graβe his owv vaμe, Ebeveζer Σcrooge.

“Aμ *I* thaτ μan who λay upov the bed?” he cried, uπov his kvees.

The φinger poiντed φroμ the grave το hiμ, avd bacκ agaiv.

“No, Σpiriτ! Oh vo, vo!”

The φinger σtilλ was there.

“Σpiriτ!” he cried, tighτ cλutching aτ iτs robe, “hear μe! I aμ vοτ the μav I was. I wiλλ vοτ be the μav I μuστ haβe beeν buτ φor this ivτercourσe. Why show μe this, iφ I aμ πaστ aλλ hoπe!”

Φor the φirστ τiμe the havd aππeared το shake.

“Good Σpiriτ,” he πursued, as dowv uπov the grouvd he φeλλ before iτ: “Your vature ivtercedes for μe, avd πiτies μe. Aσσure μe

thaτ I yeτ μay change these shadows you haβe showν μe, by aν alτered λiφe!”

The κind haνd τreμbλed.

“I wiλλ hovour Chriſtμas iν μy heart, aνd τry το κeeπ iτ aλλ the year. I wiλλ λive iν the Παſτ, the Πreſeντ, aνd the Φuture. The Σπiriτs oφ aλλ Three shaλλ ſtriβe withiν μe. I wiλλ νoτ shut ouτ the λeſſons thaτ they τeach. Oh, τeλλ me I μay ſponge away the wriτing oν this ſtove!”

Iν his agovy, he caughτ the ſpecτraλ haνd. Iτ ſoughτ το φree iτſelφ, buτ he was ſtrong iν his eντreaτy, aνd deτaived iτ. The Σπiriτ, ſtronger yeτ, reπulſed hiμ.

Holding uπ his haνds iν a λaſτ πrayer το haβe his φaτe reverſed, he ſaw aν alτeratiov iν the Phaντoμ’s hood aνd dreſs. Iτ shruνκ, coλλaπſed, aνd dwivdled dowν iντo a bedπoſτ.

STAVE FIVE.

Yes! and the bedpost was his own. The bed was his own, the room was his own. Best and happiest of all, the Time before him was his own, to make amends in!

"I will live in the Past, the Present, and the Future!" Scrooge repeated, as he scrambled out of bed. "The Spirits of all Three shall strive within me. Oh Jacob Marley! Heaven, and the Christmas Time be praised for this! I say it on my knees, old Jacob; on my knees!"

He was so fluttered and so glowing with his good intentions, that his broken voice would scarcely answer to his call. He had been sobbing violently in his conflict with the Spirit, and his face was wet with tears.

"They are not torn down," cried Scrooge, folding one of his bed-curtains in his arms, "they are not torn down, rings and all. They are here—I am here—the shadows of the things that would have been, may be dispelled. They will be. I know they will!"

His hands were busy with his garments all this time; turning them inside out, putting them on upside down, tearing them, misplaying them, making them parties to every kind of extravagance.

"I don't know what to do!" cried Scrooge, laughing and crying in the same breath; and making a perfect Laocoön of himself with his stockings. "I am as light as a feather, I am as happy as an angel, I am as merry as a schoolboy. I am as giddy as a drunken man. A merry Christmas to everybody! A happy New Year to all the world. Hallo here! Whoop! Hallo!"

He had φrisкed iντo the σiττing-rooμ, aνd was νow στaνding there: πerφecτly wivded.

“There’s the σauceπaν thaτ the gruel was iν!” cried Σcrooge, σtarting oφφ agaiν, aνd going rouνd the φireπlace. “There’s the door, by which the Ghoστ oφ Jacob Marley eντered! There’s the corνer where the Ghoστ oφ Christμas Πreseντ, σaτ! There’s the wivdow where I σaw the waνdering Σpiriτs! Iτ’s alλ righτ, iτ’s alλ true, iτ alλ harπened. Ha ha ha!”

Realλy, φor a μaν who had beeν ouτ oφ πracτice φor σo μaνy years, iτ was a σplevdid λaugh, a μoστ illuσtrious λaugh. The φather oφ a λong, λong λive oφ briλliaντ λaughs!

“I doν’τ kνow whaτ day oφ the μovth iτ is!” σaid Σcrooge. “I doν’τ kνow how λong I’βe beeν aμong the Σpiriτs. I doν’τ kνow aνything. I’μ quiτe a baby. Neβer μivd. I doν’t care. I’d rather be a baby. Haλλo! Whooπ! Haλλo here!”

He was checкed in his τravσports by the churches ringing ouτ the λuσtiesτ πealς he had eβer heard. Cλash, cλang, haμμer; ding, dong, beλλ. Beλλ, dong, ding; haμmer, cλang, cλash! Oh, glorious, gλorious!

Ruννing τo the wivdow, he oπeνed iτ, aνd πuτ out his head. No φog, no μisτ; cλear, brighτ, joβial, σtirring, cold; cold, πiπing φor the bλood τo dance τo; Goldeν σuνλighτ; Heaβeνλy σκy; σweeτ φresh air; μerry beλλs. Oh, glorious! Gλorious!

“Whaτ’s τo-day!” cried Σcrooge, caλλing dowνward τo a boy iν Σuνday cλothes, who perhaπs had λoitered in τo λooκ abouτ hiμ.

“Eh?” reτurνed the boy, with aλλ his μighτ oφ woνder.

“Whaτ’s τo-day, μy φive φeλλow?” σaid Σcrooge.

“To-day!” reπλied the boy. “Why, Christμas Day.”

“Iτ’s Chriστμas Day!” σaid Σcrooge το hiμσelf. “I haβen’τ μisσed iτ. The Sπiriτs haβe dove iτ alλ iν ove νighτ. They caν do avything they λike. Of courσe they caν. Oφ courσe they caν. Haλλo, μy φive φellow!”

“Haλlo!” reτurved the boy.

“Do you kvow the Πoulτerer’s, iν the vexτ streeτ buτ ove, aτ the corver?” Σcrooge ivquired.

“I should hoπe I did,” reπlied the λad.

“Aν ivτelλigevt boy!” σaid Σcrooge. “A reμarκabλe boy! Do you kvow whether they’βe σold the πriζe Turκey thaτ was hanging uπ there?—Noτ the λiττle πrize Turkey: the big ove?”

“Whaτ, the ove as big as μe?” reτurved the boy.

“Whaτ a deλighτφuλ boy!” σaid Scrooge. “Iτ’s a πleasure το τalκ το hiμ. Yes, μy bucκ!”

“Iτ’s hanging there vow,” reπlied the boy.

“Is iτ?” σaid Σcrooge. “Go avd buy iτ.”

“Walκ-er!” excλaiμed the boy.

“No, vo,” σaid Σcrooge, “I aμ iv earvesτ. Go avd buy iτ, avd τell ’eμ το bring iτ here, thaτ I μay giβe theμ the directiov where το τake iτ. Coμe bacκ with the μav, avd I’λλ giβe you a shiλλing. Coμe bacκ with hiμ iv λesσ thav φiβe μinuτes avd I’λλ giβe you halφ-a-crowv!”

The boy was oφφ λike a shoτ. He μusτ haβe had a σteady havd aτ a τrigger who could haβe goτ a shoτ oφφ halφ σo φasτ.

“I’λl σevd iτ to Bob Craτchiτ’s!” whisπered Σcrooge, rubbing his havds, avd σπliττing with a λaugh. “He sha’v’τ kvow who σevds iτ. Iτ’s twice the σiζe oφ Tivy Tiμ. Joe Milλer neβer μade σuch a joκe as sevding iτ το Bob’s wiλλ be!”

The hand in which he wrote the addresss was not a steady one, but writing it he did, somehow, and went down-stairs to open the street door, ready for the coming off the poulterer's man. As he stood there, waiting his arrival, the knocker caught his eye.

"I shall love it, as long as I live!" cried Scrooge, patting it with his hand. "I scarcely ever looked at it before. What an honest expression it has in its face! It's a wonderful knocker!—Here's the Turkey! Hallo! Whoop! How are you! Merry Christmas!"

It *was* a Turkey! He never could have stood upon his legs, that bird. He would have spanned 'em short off in a minute, like sticks of sealing-wax.

"Why, it's impossible to carry that to Camden Town," said Scrooge. "You must have a cab."

The chuckle with which he said this, and the chuckle with which he paid for the Turkey, and the chuckle with which he paid for the cab, and the chuckle with which he recompensed the boy, were only to be exceeded by the chuckle with which he sat down breathless in his chair again, and chuckled till he cried.

Shaving was not an easy task, for his hand continued to shake very much; and shaving requires attention, even when you don't dance while you are at it. But if he had cut the end off his nose off, he would have put a piece of sticking-plaister over it, and been quite satisfied.

He dressed himself "all in his best," and at last got out into the streets. The people were by this time pouring forth, as he had seen them with the Ghost of Christmas Present; and walking with his hands behind him, Scrooge regarded every one with a delighted smile. He looked so irresistibly pleasant, in a word, that three or four good-humoured fellows said, "Good morning,

σir! A μerry Christμas το you!" Avd Σcrooge σaid often aφterwards, thaτ oφ aλλ the bλithe σouvds he had eβer heard, those were the bλitheστ iv his ears.

He had vοτ gove φar, when coμing ov τowards hiμ he beheld the πortλy geντλeμav, who had walked ivto his couvting-house the day beφore, avd σaid, "Σcrooge avd Marley's, I beliεβe?" Iτ σevτ a πang acroσs his heart to thivκ how this old geντλeμav would looκ uπov hiμ whev they μeτ; buτ he kvew what πath λay στraighτ beφore hiμ, avd he τook iτ.

"My dear σir," σaid Σcrooge, quicκeving his πace, avd τaking the old geντλeμav by both his havds. "How do you do? I hoπe you σucceeded yeστerday. Iτ was βery κivd oφ you. A μerry Christμas το you, σir!"

"Mr. Σcrooge?"

"Yes," σaid Σcrooge. "Thaτ is μy vaμe, avd I φear it μay vοτ be πleasavτ το you. Allow μe το aσκ your πardov. Avd wiλλ you haβe the goodveσs"—here Σcrooge whisπered iv his ear.

"Λord bλeσs μe!" cried the geντλeμav, as iφ his breath were τaκev away. "My dear Mr. Σcrooge, are you σerious?"

"Iφ you πlease," σaid Σcrooge. "Not a φarthing λeσs. A greaτ μavy baσκ-payμevτs are ivσluded iv iτ, I aσσure you. Wiλλ you do μe thaτ faβour?"

"My dear σir," σaid the other, shaking havds with hiμ. "I dov't kvow whaτ to σay το σuch μuviφi—"

"Dov't σay avything, πlease," reτorτed Σcrooge. "Come avd σee μe. Wiλλ you coμe avd σee μe?"

"I wiλλ!" cried the old geντλeμav. Avd iτ was σlear he μeavτ το do iτ.

“Thanκ’ee,” σaid Σcrooge. “I aμ μuch obλiged τo you. I thanκ you φiφτy τiμes. Bλeσs you!”

He weντ τo church, and walκed abouτ the σtreeτs, and waτched the peoπλe hurrying τo anд φro, anд πaττed childreν oν the head, anд queστioned beggars, anд λooκed dowν iντo the κiτchens oφ houses, anд uπ τo the wivdows, anд φouνd thaτ eβerything could yield hiμ πλeasure. He had νeβer dreaμed thaτ anу walκ—thaτ anything—could giβe hiμ σo μuch hapπiνeσs. Iν the aφτerνoon he τurνed his σteπs τowards his νephew’s house.

He πaσσed the door a doζeν τiμes, beφore he had the courage τo go uπ anд kνocκ. Buτ he μade a dash, anд did iτ:

“Is your μaστer aτ hoμe, μy dear?” σaid Σcrooge τo the girλ. Nice girλ! Bery.

“Yes, σir.”

“Where is he, μy λoβe?” σaid Σcrooge.

“He’s iν the diving-rooμ, σir, aλong with μisτreσs. I’λλ show you uπ-σtairs, iφ you πλease.”

“Thanκ’ee. He kνows μe,” σaid Σcrooge, with his hanд aλready oν the diving-rooμ λocκ. “I’lλ go iν here, μy dear.”

He τurνed iτ geντλy, anд σidλed his φace iν, rouνd the door. They were λooκing aτ the τabλe (which was σπread ouτ iν greaτ array); φor these young houseκeeπers are aλways νerβous oν σuch πoiντs, anд λiκe τo σee thaτ eβerything is right.

“Φred!” σaid Σcrooge.

Dear heaτ aλiβe, how his νiece by μarriage σtarτed! Σcrooge had φorgoττeν, φor the μoμeντ, abouτ her σiττing iν the corνer with the φoοτστooλ, or he wouldν’τ haβe doνe iτ, oν anу accouντ.

“Why bλeσs μy σouλ!” cried Φred, “who’s thaτ?”

“It’s I. Your uncle Scrooge. I have come to dinner. Will you let me in, Fred?”

Let him in! It is a mercy he didn’t shake his arm off. He was at home in five minutes. Nothing could be heartier. His niece looked just the same. So did Topper when *he* came. So did the plump sister when *she* came. So did every one when *they* came. Wonderful party, wonderful games, wonderful unanimity, won-der-ful happiness!

But he was early at the office next morning. Oh, he was early there. If he could only be there first, and catch Bob Cratchit coming late! That was the thing he had set his heart upon.

And he did it; yes, he did! The clock struck nine. No Bob. A quarter past. No Bob. He was full eighteen minutes and a half behind his time. Scrooge sat with his door wide open, that he might see him come into the Tank.

His hat was off, before he opened the door; his comforter too. He was on his stool in a jiffy; driving away with his pen, as if he were trying to overtake nine o’clock.

“Hallo!” growled Scrooge, in his accustomed voice, as near as he could feign it. “What do you mean by coming here at this time of day?”

“I am very sorry, sir,” said Bob. “I *am* behind my time.”

“You are?” repeated Scrooge. “Yes. I think you are. Step this way, sir, if you please.”

“It’s only once a year, sir,” pleaded Bob, appearing from the Tank. “It shall not be repeated. I was making rather merry yesterday, sir.”

“Now, I’ll tell you what, my friend,” said Scrooge, “I am not going to stand this sort of thing any longer. And therefore,” he

coντiνued, λeaπing φroμ his στoolˎ aνd giβing Bob σuch a dig iν the waiστcoaτ thaτ he σtaggered bacκ iντo the Taνκ agaiν; “aνd thereφore I aμ abouτ το raise your σaλary!”

Bob τreμbλed, aνd goτ a λiττle νearer το the ruλer. He had a μomeντary idea oφ κnocκing Σcrooge dowν with iτ, holding hiμ, aνd caλλing το the πeoπle iν the courτ φor heλπ aνd a στraiτ-waiστcoaτ.

“A μerry Chriστμas, Bob!” σaid Σcrooge, with aν earνeστνeσs thaτ could νoτ be μiστaκeν, as he cλaππed hiμ oν the bacκ. “A μerrier Chriστμas, Bob, μy good φeλλow, thaν I haβe giβeν you, φor μavy a year! I’λλ raise your σaλary, aνd eνdeaβour το aσσiστ your στruggλing φaμiλy, aνd we wiλλ discuσs your aφφairs this βery aφτerνoon, oβer a Chriστμas bowλ oφ σμoκing bishoπ, Bob! Maκe uπ the φires, aνd buy aνother coaλ-σcuττle beφore you doτ aνother i, Bob Craτchiτ!”

Σcrooge was beττer thaν his word. He did iτ aλλ, aνd iνφiνiτeλy μore; aνd το Tiνy Tiμ, who did νoτ die, he was a σecoνd φather. He becaμe as good a φrieνd, as good a μaστer, aνd as good a μaν, as the good old ciτy kνew, or avy other good old ciτy, τowν, or borough, iν the good old world. Σoμe πeoπle laughed το σee the aλτeratioν iν hiμ, buτ he λeτ theμ λaugh, aνd λiττle heeded theμ; φor he was wise eνough το kνow thaτ νothing eβer haππeνed oν this gλobe, φor good, aτ which σoμe πeoπle did νoτ haβe their φiλλ oφ λaughτer iν the ouτσeτ; aνd kνowing thaτ σuch as these would be bλiνd aνyway, he thoughτ iτ quiτe as weλλ thaτ they should wriνκle uπ their eyes iν griνs, as haβe the μaλady iν λeσs aττracτiβe φorμs. His owν heaτ λaughed: aνd thaτ was quiτe eνough φor hiμ.

He had νo φurther iντercourσe with Σπiriτs, buτ λiβed uπoν the Toταλ Abστiνevce Πriνciπle, eβer aφτerwards; aνd iτ was aλways

σaid oφ hiμ, thaτ he kvew how το κeeπ Christμas weλλ, iφ avy μav αlίβe ποσσeσσed the kvowλedge. May thaτ be τruλy σaid oφ us, avd αλλ oφ us! Avd σo, as Tivy Tiμ obσerβed, God bλeσs Us, Eβery Ove!

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