

Charles Dickens

Eguarri Abestia

“Luzear”ek euskeratua

EIZIE



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Inazio Mujika Iraolak prestatutako edizioa



Jatorrizko izenburua:
A Christmas Carol



Diseinua: J.L. Agote

© Itzulpena: Ander Arzelus Toledo

© Hitzaurrea eta edizioa: Inazio Mujika Iraola

© Argitalpen honena: EIZIE
Zurriola hiribidea, 14 - 1. esk
20002 Donostia

ISBN: 84-XXXXXX-XX

Legezko gordailua: SS-XXXX

Inprimatzaile: Itxaropena, S.A. – Araba kalea, 45 – 20800 Zarautz



Ander Arzelus "Luzear"

Ander Arzelus Toledo “Luzear” (1898 - 1949)

Sei Eguberriren abestia

Berandu dator trena Donostiako geltokira. Bost urte eta erdi berandutu da. Eta ez dator Santoña aldetik, 1937ko abuztuan bidea hasi zuen lekutik. Burgostik barrena baizik. Bost urte eta erdi. Geltokiburuaren bulegoa zabalik dago. Egutegia ageri da horman: “El Corazón de Jesús. 1943 / Enero / 13”.

Bi lagun jaitsi dira trenetik. Zaharrenak berrogeiak ongi paseak izango ditu; gazteenak, hogeita hamarrik ez. Goizean atera dira Burgosko kartzelatik, elurretan. Isilik datoz. Zaharrenak txapela jantzita dakar, buru ongi soildua estaltzeko eran. Gazteenari ilea sendo datorkio, zuztarretik gora askorik ez bazaio ere ageri. “Bulebarreraino lagunduko dizut”, esan du gazteenak. Maleta zahar bana daramate, eta noizean behin geldiarazi egiten ditu kargaren handiak. Bost urte eta erdi. Ez da asko maleta zahar bana. Kale ize-netan erreparatzen dute. Hermanos Iturrino. Avenida de España.

Diputazio parean, zaharrenak beste espaloira bultzatu du laguna. Gazteak segituan ulertu du ikusi nahi ez lukeenen bat zetorrela espaloian aurrez aurre. Alameda de Calvo Sotelo. Bulebarreko musika-kioskoraino iritsi dira. “Orduan ez duzu gure etxean afaldu nahi?”, esan du zaharrak, nonbait lehen ere erabili duten kontua berrituta. Gazteenak txanpon bat atera du patrikatik eta “zau-de” esan nahi duen keinua egin dio. Telefono kabina batera joan, eta handik aritu da hizketan. Labur. Txanpon bat. Atera egin da gero. “Estimatuta dago, Ander, baina zain dauzkat Erreterian. Agur, Ander”. Besarkada bat eman diote elkarri. “Agur, Koldo. Toporik ez bada, gurera etorri. Bihar joango zara”. Anderrek San

Jeronimo kale aldera egin du. Begi bistatik aienatu zaion arte jarraitu du Koldok Anderren eta bere maleta zaharraren errainua.

Bertatik bertara, Kontxa aldera jo du Koldok. Itsasoa. Ez du nahi, baina kresal usainak Duesoko giroa ekarri dio zaplada batean. Ez da itsasoari begira geratu. Utikan Santoña eta Dueso. Easo kalean barrena... ez, Victor Praderan barrena, Toporaino. Karmeldarren elizaren parean bonbilla hori bat poste batetik zintzilik, hai-zeak hara eta hona darabilena. Harantzago, Amarako zingiradia noski. Geltokian galdetu du: "¿El próximo?". Ordu erdi barru. Azkena. *Beniton* hartuko luke kafesne bero bat. Tabakoa erosteko xahutu ditu, ordea, gelditzen zitzaizkion sos apurrak. Zigarroa piztu, jakaren lepoa jaso, eta paretaren kontra bermatu du bizkarra. Ordu erdi.

Ez du nahi, baina kresalak ekarri dio berriz ere Duesoko garaia. Han ezagutu zuen Ander, seguru-etxe batek bezerotzat ez hura eta ez bera hartuko ez zituzkeen garaian. Ander gutxiago, aurrera samar zebilen-eta alderdian, Ajuria, Rezola, Lukirekin. Eta Markiegirekin. Markiegi zenarekin. Teniente izatera iritsi zen bera. Mitxelena tenientea. A ze tenientea, arraioa! "Beherako" Batailoian, azken putz. Hala ere, heriotza agindu zuten berarentzat ere. Mitxelena tenientea, paretara. Zain egon zitzaion Herioari, bere inguruko asko bezala, Ander ere bezala; ez zen etorri, ordea. Lan handia nonbait aurretik. Egidazurekin hasi ziren, "Perezagua"koa. Otamendi, gero; berarekin epaituak biak ere. Ezin konta ahala, handik aurrera.

Paretaren kontra zeramatenen bati entzun ziola uste du Anderri "Luzear" deitzen. "Luzear, Ajuriak esan dit... Gaur ni". Gau osoa pasatu zuen gizajoarekin errezatzen. Biak ikusi zituen joaten. Goizaldean itzuli zen Ander. Bakarrik. Zuri. Bazkalorduan ausartu zen hitz beste egitera. "Zu al zara Luzear?". Haren baiezkokoak barru-barruan sentiarazi zion poza du gogoan. "Zu zara orduan *El Díako* Euskal Orriaren arduraduna". "Nintzen, gazte; hala nintzen bai". "Etxean gordeta daukat zuk euskaratu zenuen Dickensen *Eguarri abestia*, izparringitik moztu eta neronek josia". Beste erre-

alitate bat bazegoela, izan zela behintzat, eta hartaz hitz egiteak on egiten zien.

Topoaren traka-trakak ekarri du berriz Koldo oroitzapenen erresumatik urtarril hartako iluntze haize finak erasanera. “La Herrera”. Uztarrria eta geziak. Karramarroa... Nahiago oroitzapenen erresumara bidaia atzera egin.

Hamasei urte egin gabe, Erreterian. Martxoa zen. Epaila. Egunero bezala *El Día* erosi, eta *Euskal Orrian* iragarki hau: “IGANDEAN asiko gera noski, ingeleraetik itzulitako ‘nobelatxo’ bizi, irakurgarri, labur bat argitaratzen. Ebaki ta jasotzeko eran azalduko da”. Jakin-minak egon zen igandea noiz etorriko. Larunbatean beste iragarki bat: “Dollorkeria... Eguarri... Alaitasuna... Illunpea... Kate soñuak... Sorginkeria... Atzo... Gaur... Biyar... Dickens-en ‘Eguarri Abestia’ biyar ezkeru ‘Euskal Orria’n”.

Ordurako hasita zegoen euskal gauzak irakurtzen. *Argia* batez ere. Liburutxoren bat edo beste ere bai. Baina Dickens... Hainbeste aldiz irakurritako *David Copperfielden* egilea, euskaratuta! Ezin galdu inola ere. Igandean, goizean goiz jaitsi zen egunkariaren bila. Alamedan zabaldu zuen. Aulki batean eserita ikusi zuen orri barrenean, “EGUARRI ABESTIA / Charles Dickens / ‘Luzear’ek euskera-tua / El Día / 1931 / Donostia”. Dickensen irudia zetorren aldameneko orrian. Nobelaren hasierarik ez. Ohar bat: “Gaur asten gera, egunkari au eraberritu genunean agindutakoa, betetzen. Ez degu gure asmoa osoro egiterik izan. Euskal irakurgairik atsegiñe-netako bat argitaratzekotan baigebiltzan. Baña ori ezin izan dan ezkeru, beste bide batetik jo degu: arrotz elertietara juan eta idazle ospetsuenen idaztirik gallenenak euskeratzeko gogo biziak garabil. Saio bidez, Dickens, idazle bikañaren ipui bat dakartzutegu. Aur biurturik irakur ezazute biotzikaraz dardar jarri zaitezten; baña larrientzat ere ikasbide egokirik arkituko dezute aur-ipuitxo azalpean. Zuei dagokizute, saio au atsegin zaizuten ala ez azaltzea: txaloak, izatekotan, idazlearentzat bitez... euskeratzalleak ez baitio akats pilla bat besterik erantsi. Gure idazti-zatiak gaurko neurri berean azalduko dira. Ara nola jaso bear dituzuten: Aurrena, guzia ixten duten lerrotatik kontuz ebaki. Gero, ezkertera daukazuten

goitik-berako lerrotxo ortatik goruntz zuenganuntz tolestu (doblatu). Erdi-erdiko lerrotik berriz beste aldera, atzeruntz tolestu. Eta ortan, onela geldituko zaizute gaurko zatitxoa: Ezkerrera idaztia josteko utsunea (*El día* ta abar diona). Aurrez-aurre, idazti gaña. Atzera tolestuta, Dickens-en irudia. Ta egunero auxe egiten dezutela idazti polit baten jabe zerate laster. Agur ba, ta egunero artu *El Día*".

Nobelaren hasierarik ez, ordea. Astelehenean, berriz, egunkaririk ez. Asteartekoan, bi orri mozteko: "Lenengo aapaldia: Marlegiren Mamutzarra". Ahoz gora hasi zen ohe gainean irakurtzen: "Marlegi illa zan. Au iñork zalantza apurrik gabe sinisteko eran idatzi nai nuke aurren-aurrena..."

Bi hilabete iraun zuen kontuak. Apirilaren azkena arte, hogeita bost emanaldi, Aste Santuko etena eta Errepublikari berriaren aldarrikapena tartean. Hogeita bostak ebaki, tolestu, eta jostarazi egin zituen. Bera-Lopez Mendizabalen hiztegia ezkerrean, eta koardernotxo bat eskuinean, ipuin osoa segidan irakurri eta ulertzen ez zituen hitzak apuntatu zituen. Gozatu egin zuen liburua.

Sei Eguberri jai igaro dituzte elkarrekin itzalpean. Koldok, Villarrealgo guda-oinan, euri, odol eta basatza artean pasatu zue-narekin, zazpi. Elkarrekin pasatu zuten aurrenekoa, Larrinagakoa, laborriz oharkabean pasatu zen, azkena izan zitekeelako uste osoan baitzeuden; eta Burgosko azkena, berriz, esperantza betean joan berri zaie. Sei Eguberritan ez zaie gogoutsik agertu. Ezkurak edo Scroogeak bai, makina bat, zintzotze handirik gabeak gainera. "Kartzelarik ez al dago?" galdetzen duen jende modua, asko. "Gehiegi bezala" erantzuten duena, gutxi. Sekulan ez du ahaztuko Burgosko espetxera zihoazela, tren geltokitik abiatu eta kartzelairaino herri barrutik nola eraman zituzten preso guztiak binaka elkarri lotuak, eta nola Burgosko jendeak iraindu, karkaxa bota eta jo arterainoko guztiak egin zizkieten. Anderri txapela bota zioten esku-ukaldi batez, eta, ez makurtzeagatik, bertan utzi zuen.

Ikasteko erabili du kartzela Koldok. Eta ez du gizalegea ikasgairik kaxkarrena izan. Betiko atxiki nahi du gai horretan maisu, beste gutxi batzuen artean, Ander. Luzearek euskara irakasten

zuen kartzelan. Irakasbide bat ere taxutu zuen osorik ez bada ere askotxo. Koldok “au maia da” eta horrelakoez aurrerakoak behar zituen, ordea. Aditzaren malkarretan gora egin nahi zuen, eta horretarako Felipe Lizaso hartu zuen maisu (“El verbo alemán” jarri zioten irakasbideari azalean, zaindarien susmo txarrik har ez zezaten); Paco Jordá eta Aguado komunista, latinerako eta grezierarako; baina gehiago ere nahi zuen: idazkortza, luma, zorroztu. Idatzi. Esaldi bat besteari josi, *Eguarri abestian* bezala, irakurri eta gozatzeko moduko testuak sortu. Horretan Anderrek zekien, inork jakitekotan. Gai horretan ordu arte egin zenaz asko zekien; egin nahi zuenaz, ez gutxi. Gustura hartuko zuten *Eguarri abesti* hura elkarrekin lantzeko berriz. Ezin, ordea. Modurik ez, hura itzalpera sartzeko. Dickensen beste Eguberri ipuin bat oinarri hartuta, Anderrek antzerki lan bat idatzi zuen, *Kilkir abestia*, “Eresidun antzerkia”. Beste preso batek, Bengoak, jarri zion eresia, musika.

Espetxeak anaitasun-lokarriak sortzen baititu idazle izan diren eta ez direnen artean, gogoan du Koldok Wilderen ipuin hura itzultzea pentsatu zuen garaia. *Erraldoi berekoia*. Gogoan ditu atera zituen izerdi hotzak testu ustez xume hura euskaratzen. Gogoan ditu Anderren aholkuak, eta haren zuzenketak ere gogoan. Gogoa du, batez ere, Anderren umorea, 1940ko estropaden berri jakin zutenean, esaterako –gauza sakratuen zerrenda egiten hasi eta Jainkoa, euskara, aberria eta familiaren hurrena, estropadak jarriko zituen Anderrek–: urte hartakoak donostiarrek irabazi zituztela etorri zitzaizen gaztigua kanpotik. Koldok, erreteriarra izaki, bertso batzuk idatzi zituen donostiar panparroien kontura barre eginenez. Anderrek barrez irakurri zituen, eta baita kantatu ere Iradi eta Mendizabal donostiarrekin batera. Azkeneko arrazoi hura dator kio bat-batean: “Beste olakorik ikusterako / luza bear zaizu bizarra!”.

Kokotspea igurtzi du esku gainaz eta gogorapen gozo batek eragindako irribarrearekin sartu da trena Erreteriarreko geltokian. Zain dauzka aita pontekoaren semea, Pio Etxeberria, eta bere familiakoak. Besarkadak labur, eta etxe aldera abiatu dira. Biharamunean ikusiko dituela denak, orain uzteko amarekin bakarrik.

Mikela Zuloko arkupean pasatu da, ama alargunaren aurpegia gogoratu nahian, Larrinagako Eguberri haietatik ikusi gabea baitzuen; Gabon aurreko astean, ehun eta hogeitaka lagun fusilatu zituzten, eta suerte txarra da guztia, baina aste hartan egokitu behar kartzelaldi osoan amak egiterik izan zion bisita bakarra. Goiko kalera dator bueltan, zazpi Eguberriren buruan, xextogilearen semea. Atarian, eskua eraman du patrikara. Alferrik. Ez du giltzarik. Atea jo du. Ama jaitsi zaio. Irribarre murriz bat. "Etorri altzea?"

Ama afalduta dago. Begira egon zaio semeak afaldu duen bitartean. Ez dute kontu handirik erabili. "Etorri altzea?". Ohera baino lehen, ganbarara joan nahi du semeak. Han maletatxo gorri batean gorde zituela gauza batzuk. "Liburuak?", igarri dio amak. "Bai, haietako bat irakurri nahi nuke oheratu aurretik". "Sentitzen dut, seme, zu egon zaren lekua ez zen txukun-txukuna izango, baina hemen ere senperrenak ikusarazi dizkigute. Edozein huskeriagatik hiltzen zuten jendea...". "Bota egin zenituen...". "Ez, erre... Baina denak ez; euskarazkoak eta..."

Luzear eta Mitxelena

Gaur hemen aurkezten dudan *Eguarri Abestiaren* argitalpen hau ez litzateke irakurlearen eskuetara iritsiko, Koldo Mitxelena-ren seta berezi bat egon izan ez balitz tarteko: bai bere idatzietan, bai berari egindako hainbat elkarrizketetan maiz aipatzen du adiskide eta maisu izan zuenaren izena; eta Luzearrez ari dela, errenteriarrek beti edo gehienetan aipatzen du Arzelusek itzuli zuela Dickensen *A Christmas Carol*. Aipu horiek, harri txuri horiek utzi izan ez balitu han eta hemen itzulpen horren bilaketarako, orain arte bezala ahaztua egongo litzateke *El Día* gordetzen duten heme-roketetan. Nik behintzat Mitxelenak akuilatuta jo nuen orri mikrofilmatu horietara, eta kostatu bazitzaidan ere *-El Díak* iraun zuen urteetako Eguberri garaietatik hasi bainuen bilaketa, eta erre-alitatea ez baita askotan horren logikoa izaten-, azkenean behint-

zat aurkitu nuen, 1931ko martxoaren 15ean hasi eta apirilaren 30ean buka, *Eguarri Abestia* osorik.

Osorik irakurri ondoren, garbi edukiko du irakurleak arrazoi zuela Mitxelenak bere setarekin. Arrazoa zuen, baita ere, inoiz errietan egiten zigularik ohartaraziz zein ahanzkorrak garen euskaldunok iraganean egindako lanekin eta zein eskergabe, onerako nabarmendutako pertsonekin.

Ander Arzelus Toledo

1898ko abuztuaren 15ean jaio zen Ander, Donostiako parte zaharrea, San Jeronimo kaleko 21ean. Hilabete gutxi zituela, kale bereko 23ra joan zen familiarekin bizitzera. Andres eta Naxari zituen gurasoak. Hamabi anai-arreben artean, bera zen zaharrena. Ikasketak Donostiako Marianistekin egin zituen. Hamasei urte bete zituenean jarri behar izan zuen lanean, Donostiako Aurrezki Kutxan, eta bertan aritu zen lanean, harik eta, 1936an, gerra piztu zen arte. 1923an, Amalia Arrietarekin ezkondu zen. Lau seme-alaba izan zituen.

Kulturgintza

1921ean sortu zen *Argia* asterokoa, Donostian. Hura izan zuen Arzelusek euskal idazle izateko aurreneko eskola. Horrela ematen du berak, 1931n, Gregorio Mujika hil dela eta, bere irakasleen berri: “Beste eriotz negargarri batek, Karrera apaiz jaun argiarenak, onen utsa betetzera eraman nindun [*Argiara*]. ‘Anabi’-ri [Augustin Anabitarteri] eskerrak, nere burua euskal elerti bidean arkitu nuanean, nere aldamenen neramazkien bidelagunai begiraturik, neronen ausardiak txunditu ninduan: ‘Garbi’ (Garitonandiatar Bitor), ‘Elurmendi’ (Intzagarai apaiz jauna), ‘Jeme’ (Mujikatar Gregorio), ‘Anabi’ bera, ‘Egizale’. Baña beingo ez nuan atzera egin, eta ‘Kirikiño’ elerti azikeran aurzai bezela izan banuan, oek izan ziran aurrera bideak urratu zizkidaten lagun ikasiagoak. *Argian*, ditadurako urteak zalantza bizian, ekaitzik gogo-

rreanean 'oraingo onek zapalduko gatxiok' esanaz olatu amorratuai begira itxaso erdian larritasunik gorrienak elkarrekin ikusi dituzten arrantzale gizajoak bezela bizitu geranok ezin inola ere elkar aztu, naiz ta gero, nola ez dakigula, oraindik ere garbi ikusten ez degun eran, elkarrengandik, bat-batean, sakabanatuta arkitu".

Idazten hasi eta berehala asmatu zuen, orduan ohikoa zen bezala (beharrezkoa ere bai, ez ahaztu diktadurapean zirela), bizitza osoan idazlanak izenpetzeko erabili zuen izenordea: "Luzear" (Arzeluz silabaka alderantziz jarria, alegia). Urteetan, herrietako berriemaileen saila, "Euskalerriko berriak", kudeatu zuen *Argian*. 1926tik aurrera, borroka pertsonal batean jardun zuen: *Txistu* proiektua, haurrentzako aldizkari bat komikiz eta ipuinez betea, *Argiarekin* batera banatu izan zena, ez eragozpenik gabe.

Argiaren zuzendari izatera ere iritsi zen, Bitor Garitaonandia hil zenean (1929), baina denbora gutxiko. Hain zuzen ere, beste proiektu handi batean sartu baitzen buru-belarri. 1930eko ekainean sortu zen *El Día* egunkaria. Bertan "Euskal Orria"ren arduradun jarri zuten Luzear. Eta bertako arduradun izaten jarraitu zuen gerra piztu zen arte. Primo de Riveraren diktaduraren azken urteetan, eztabaida bat sortu zen Euskaltzaleak bazkunaren eta Eusko Ikaskuntzaren baitan, eta guregana heldu da, gehienbat, Lizardiren hainbat artikuluren bidez, euskal egunkari baten beharrari buruzkoa, hain zuzen ere. Eztabaida eta ametsa esan beharko dugu, ordea. *Argia* asterokoa eguneroko kazeta bihurtzea izan zuten amets lehenbizi; Euskal Orria, Euskal Eguneroko bihurtzea gero. Eta hori iristen ez zen bitartean, *El Día* zeukaten. Orrialde bat. Eztabaida horien atzean zebilen Luzear, buru-belarri. Amets horren atzetik orpoz orpo.

Eztabaidak gogoko zituen Luzearrek, eta bero dihardu eztabaidan. Karlisten *La Constancia* eta ezkertiarren *La Voz de Guipúzcoa* egunkarietan argitaratzen ziren iritzi emaileen kontra ari zen sarri askotan. Baina baita *El Día*n bertan edo *Euzkadi* egunkari abertzaleetan agertutako iritzi batzuen kontra ere. Lauaxetarekin badu eztabaida sutsu pare bat, "Gurbindo"rekin beste bat, eta beste hainbatekin ere bai. Nor zen orduantxe sortzen ari den

Euskal Idazleen Batzan sartzeko gai? Batzuek zioten, Lauaxeta tar-teko, abertzaleak bakarrik sar zitezkeela delako elkarte horretan; Luzearrek, Lizardi dakar gogora kontrako iritziaren alde egiteko: “Aberri errota ibiltzeko, abertzale guzian kemenak bat egiñik ere ez ditugu naikoa. Abertzaletasuna, gurea dana maitasunez zaitzea izanik, euskera, aberri ezaugarririk bizi ta nabarmenena maite duan, aberria neurri txikian bederik maite du. Ta aberri maitasun apur oiekin, aritxo bat emendik, beste bat andik, errekatxoa osatu; errekatxo onen ura beste arenarekin bat egiñik, ibaitxoa; ibai bat, bi, iru ibairen indarra batu ta gure indarrari erantsita, guzien errota ibilaraztea ez ote genuke errezagoa?”. Luzearren eztabaidarik gogokoena, sutsuena, euskara jakintza bidean eragozpen ikusten zutenen aurkakoa da: “Ez da munduan jakintza bide izateko gai ez dan izkerarik. Gor-mutuai ere erakutsi bear zaiena, beren izkera (?) bereziz egin bear ko zaie, Fray Luis de Leon-en Odarik ederrenak belarri ertzera esatea alperrikakoa litzaken ezker. Danik eta izkuntzik atzeratuanagatik ere ezin esan leike, beraz, jakintza gaitan eragozpen danik. Gañontzean españeragatik ere berdin esan genezake, doixtar eta parantzetarrek beren izkeratan idatzi oi dituen idatzi sakonak, españera utsa dakitenentzat, Castelar-en itzaldirik apañena gor-mutuentzat bezin lokotx uts lirakelako. Euskera, berez, beste edozein izkuntz bezin aberatsa izanik, ez bedi beñere esan jakintza bidean eragozpen danik. Geron buruen gain bota dezagun erru guzia, esan dezagun argi ez degula euskera jakintza-izkera izatea nai, gerok maite ez degulako besterik ez”.

El Díako “Euskal Orria”n bere artikulua argitaratzea ez ezik, eta batez ere, besterenak argitaratzea zuen buruhausterik handiena, eta idazle eginak eta ez hain eginak idazten jartzea izan zuen merituetariko bat. Mutila zen zirikatzen. Zirikatzen ditu idazleak, gehiago idatz dezaten; zirikatzen ditu haurrak, zerbait idatz dezaten; egunkariko linotipistak, akatsik egin ez dezaten; beste egunkarietako iritzi emaileak zirikatzen ditu... *El Díako* zuzendaritza bera ere ez da libre geratzen. Euskarazko orrialde bakarra zeukan egunkariak, eta zazpi urteko bere ibilbidean nabarmen ikusten da

zuzendaritzarekin eduki zuen tirabira, alde batetik, "Euskal Orria" euskal orri osoa izan zedin, eta, iragarkiak edo bestelako premiak zirela-eta, ez ziezaioten orri erdia jan; eta bestetik, euskara bere orri-txokotik atera eta lehen plamara eramateko. Euskararekiko konpromiso osoa eskatzen baitzuen: "Itzez buruz gain eginda gaudе. Gizonai gizon bezela itz egitea dagokio. Ta garbi esan: euskaltzaleak al zerate ala ez? Ez!? Onela, gauzak garbi, nor norekin gabiltzan jakiteko. Ta ez umeak bagiña bezela gurekin jostaketan ibilli. Jaunak, euskaltzale ezpazerate, jakin dezagun, oraintxe one-rño bete gera ta".

Hitz batez definitu behar bagenu Luzear eta bere bizitza oso-ko lana, baina batez ere, Errepublikara garaiari aurrera atera zuena, "euskaltzalea" izango litzateke hitz hori. Lan idatzia da batez ere bere arloa, hor aritu zen beteen, baina horretaz gain, bazuen beste alderdi bat, bultzatzaile eta antolatzailearena. Esan dugu jendea idaztera jarri zuela, *Argiako* idazle-agenda ia osorik hustu zuen *El Dían*, eta emakumeak jarri zituen idazten; bere eskutik eduki zuten plaza irekia Elbira Zipitriak eta Tene Mujikak, esaterako: "Beti entzun oi degu, 'Euskal Orria'k motelak, gatzik gabeak, irakurtze-ko gogorik ematen ez dutenak izaten dirala. 'Erritako berriak, erri-tarrentzat ainbestean, baña gañontzekoai zer dijuakigu ba?' ent-zungo zaiote bein eta berriz. Gai politik ez omen darabilgu euskal idazleak. Arrazoi dutela esango al degu? Alabaña bete-beteian oker daudenik ezin esan dezakegu ordea. Ala ere, ikusi bezate euskal idazle arinok nola jaio eta indartu geran: nai bada umekeriak idat-ziaz. Zokoratu ditzazute umekeriok, zokoratu erri izperrak, zoko-ratu erdipurdi idatzita datorren idazkia, euskal idazle izan zitezken idazkigille oiek guziak ere beren lanakin batera zokoratu ta baz-tertu dituzute, ta nortzun irakurgaiak argitaratuko ditugu 'Eurkal Orri'etan? Salaberriarenak? Unamunorenak? Barojarenak? Euskal idazle jator askoak baditugula? Bai orixe. Baña... erderaz idatzita-koak 'biotzian poza eman oi digun otsa darion txintxin'a ematen ordea, ta euskerazkoak, oraingo, 'txintxin otsik gabeko poza' oxta-oxta. Onegatik, idazle txukun, alai, goxo, irakurgarriak sor-tu naiaz, emakumezkoak begiz jo ditut. Gaurkoz 'txintxin ots'

gabe errexago dantzatuko ote diran derizkiot, arreba maitiok euskera aldez gogor jardun naiean nabaitzen baiditut. Badira oen artean ere idazle egiñak, eta ez gutxi errex egingo diranak. Aiek mugatu, ta oek bultzaka bada ere ateratzea, nere gain artu nai dedala jakitea, ez deritzait beraz irakurleari ez dijuakion arazoa. Guzien gogoia ez al da ba, alik laxterren, ‘Euskal Orria’ edozein erdel orri bezin irakurgarria arkitzea?”.

Nekez aurkituko da ekintza euskaltzale bat garai hartan Luzear bertan egon gabe, edo are, haren parte-hartze zuzenik gabe. Donostian eta Gipuzkoan behintzat, ez. Orobat, Donostiako euskaltzaletasunaren bultzatzaile handiak laguntzaile ederra izan zuen, eta ezin hemen aipatu gabe utzi. Bata bestearen laguntzaile baino, elkarren laguntzaile izan zirela esan daiteke: Joseba Zubimendi eta Ander Arzelus. Bi izen horiek, neurri handi batean, elkarrekin doaz itxaropen bideko urte horietan. Zubimendik sortu zuen, 1931n, eta berak kudeatu zuen 1936a arte, *El Pueblo Vasco* Rafael Picavea “Alcibar”en egunkariko euskal orria (asterokoa) “Euskal Eresi ta Izkuntzaren Alde” izenburua zuena. Beraz Luzear *El Día*n eguneroko atalarekin eta Zubimendi *El Pueblo Vascon*, astero, euskal erreferentzia nagusi bihurtu ziren Gipuzkoan. Maiz samar argitaratu zuten, gainera, artikulurik bion izenpearekin.

Bada artikulua bat Luzearrena, 1931ko irailean *El Pueblo Vascon* argitaratutakoa, urte haietako euskaltzaletasunaren egitekoa laburtzen duena. Izenburu adierazgarriagorik nekez aurkitu: “Irudipen zoroak”. “Antzokia! (Teatro). Irudibiltegia!! (Zinea). Irratizkiña!!! (Radioa). A zer iru lagun, gure zabalkunderako! Ta irurok, gure deiaren zai-zai bezela dauzkagunak. Jakiña, gauza guzitarako bezela, diru apur bat bear. Ta diru apur ori, duanaren eskutatik ezpadator...”. Hiru zutabe horiek ikusten ditu beharrezkoen, egunkariarenaz gain, euskaltzaletasuna zabaltzeko. Antzerkian aurrera egin zuten, eta ez gutxi. Zineman huts egin zuten, zezakeenak ez baitzuen eskurik zabaldu, baina irratigintzan, behintzat, lortu zuten “irudipen zoro” hori aurrera ateratzea. Astean behingo saio bat lortu baitzuten euskara hutsez egina, 1932tik aurrera,

Donostiako *Unión Radion*. Arduradunak, Joseba Zubimendi eta Ander Arzelus "Luzear".

Luzear kazetaria goraipatzea izan zen Mitxelenaren beste setatako bat. Maiz aipatzen du bere idatzietan eta elkarrizketetan adiskidearen alderdi hori. Era askotako idazlanak ditu *El Díako* "Euskal Orria"n argitaratuak, lehen aipatu dugun kudeaketaz gain, bere izenpea agertzen baita hainbat eta hainbat artikuluren barrenean. Hiru eratakoak dira nagusi: Iritzi artikulua daude aurrena, ez oso luzeak, labur-laburrak asko ("tantoak" izendatzen ditu halakoak), euskarari buruzkoak gehienak, baina baita politikoak ere, ahaztu gabe umorezko hainbat, antzerki kritikak... Ez dakit ausartegia ez ote den esatea zutabe-idazle aurrekaria izan zela Luzear; hurrena daude erreportaje tankerako idazlanak, Lizarrako bilera politikoa dela, Ama Birjina Ezkion agertu dela, Oleriti Eguna dela, Antzerti Eguna dela, edo Txirritaren omenaldia dela, han dago Luzear bere aterkiarekin eta beti baten batek autoz eramana edo bere kasa trenez joanda, ikusi duenaren kontakizun bizia egiten; eta azkenik daude handik eta hemendik hartutako antzerkitxo laburrak, ipuintxoak eta abar berak sortutakoak edo beste hizkuntzaren batetik berak egokitutakoak. Azken horiek gehienbat.

Ez dugu ahaztu behar hori dena Donostiako Aurrezki Kutxako lanaz gain egiten zuela. Alegia, Aurrezki Kutxatik ateratzen zuela bizibidea, eta euskarari eskaintzen ziola astialdia ia osorik.

Politikagintza gerra aurrean eta gerra garaian

Ander Arzelusen aita, Andres, Sabino Aranaren aurren-aurrenetako jarraitzaileetakoa izan zen Donostian. Donostiako abertzaleei "bizkaitarrak" deitzen zieten garaian hain zuzen ere. Anderek, beraz, etxetik jaso zuen politikarako zaletasuna.

1930ean eman zuen izena EAJ alderdian. Hain zuzen ere, diktadura osoan barrena bananduta egon ziren alderdiko bi sektoreak, "Comuni6n" eta "Aberri", atzera bildu ziren urtean. 1935eko otsailean, Gipuzkoa Buru Batzarreko kide egin zuten Zumarragan,

Doroteo Ziaurritz tolosarra EBBko buru zela, eta, besteak beste, Edorta Alberdi, Elias Etxeberría, Ander Bereziartua, Pablo Egibar edo Florentzio Markiegi Gipuzkoa aldetik kide zituela. Ez zuen asko pentsatuko EBBko bilera hartan ezagutu zuen gazte bat, Juan Ajuariagerra, izango zuenik urteetan hogeita lau orduko gelakide behartua.

Hurrengo urtean etorri zen bere bizitza irauli zuen gertakaria: Gerra. Gipuzkoan ibili zen antolaketa lanetan, harik eta probintzia osoa faxisten mende erori zen arte. Bizkaira pasatu zen gero, eta hango antolakuntza politikoan sartu zen. 1936ko irailean, Donostia erortzeaz, Jose Antonio Agirre, Franzisko Basterretxea eta Juan Ajuariagerrarekin batera, hegazkina hartu eta Madrila egin zuen txango, bidez esanda, nahikoa bidaia arriskutsua, Burgos gainera, matxinatuen gainera pasatu behar zutelako. Madrilén, Largo Caballeroren gobernuarekin negoziatu zuten Euskal Estatutua (edo "Araudia", garai hartako hainbat idazlek euskaraz esaten zioten bezala). Urriaren 7an eratu zen Eusko Jaurlaritza, Gernikan. Arzelus bertan zegoen. Bilbo faxisten mende erori zen arte, 1937ko ekainean, Bilbon bertan bizi izan zen, familiarekin. 1937ko urtarrean sortu zen euskara hutsezko aurreneko egunkaria: *Eguna*. Gerra garaian bihurtu zen paper hainbeste aldiz erabilitako ametsa. Sei hilabete, ekaina arte, iraun zuen amets horrek, amesgaizto bihurtu aurretik. Kazetaren sorkuntzan parte-hartze zuzena izan bazuen ere, ez dirudi gero askorik idatzi zuenik bertan. Berak izenpetuta, artikulu bakarra aurkitu dut, nik behintzat, hasiera-hasieran argitaratua eta bakea eskatzen zuena: "Ez gorrotorik" zuen izenburu.

Faxistak Bilbon sartu aurretik, emaztea eta seme-alabak "La Habana" itsasontzian sartu, eta Frantziara bidali zituen Luzearrek. Handik harakoak ezagunak dira. Bilbo utzi, eta Santander aldera. Han, azken uneetan, eta Lehendakaria eta EBBko presidentea hegazkinez salbo utzi eta gero, zozketa egin zuten alderdiko zein kargudun geratuko zen eta zein joango zen atzerrira erabakitzeke. Luzearri harri beltza egokitu zitzaion. Santoñan preso hartu, eta Duesora eramán zuten. Italiarren esku lehenbizi, frankisten atza-

parretan gero. Epaitu eta heriotza zigorra ezarri zioten. Italiarrek beren hitza hautsi zutela eta Ajuriagerra gose greban jarri zen; Ajuriagerrak gose greba hura gelditzeko agindua sinatu zuten buruki-deetakoa izan zen Luzear. "Reunidos en el Dueso hoy nueve de septiembre, Arzelus, Markiegi, Alberdi, Unzeta, Artetxe y Solaun, acuerdan comunicar a Axuriagerra, que en evitación de un conflicto mayor que pudiera resultar más perjudicial para todos, debe desde este momento deponer su actitud y empezar de nuevo a alimentarse". Duesotik Larrinagara itsasontzi baten sotoan sartuta, 1937ko azaroan, San Andres egunean hain zuzen; eta handik berehala, 1938ko uztailean, Burgosko "Prision Central"era. Burgosen lau urte eta erdi egin zituen, horietatik bat, heriotzaren errainua buru gainean zuela. 1942an etorri ziren errebisioak, eta kondena berriak: 14 urteko kondena aurrena, indultua gero. 1943ko urtarriaren 13an, Koldo Mitxelenarekin batera kartzelatik atera, eta Donostiara.

Amalek kontatzen ditu hortik aurrerako batzuk

«Donostira itzuli zanean, bereala lan billa asi zan, baita "bere lanetan" ere. "Lan" auetako bat, Santa Maria elizako gazteak bildu eta beraien barruan abertzaletasuna piztea izan zan¹.

»Kalean zebillen batean, bere laguna zan Lealtar Nemesio –Leal Garajeko burua– arkitu zun. Onen emaztea "Obras y Construcciones Elizaran"eko jabearen sendikoa zan, eta auek lur-beso (peninsula) guztian zabaldurik zuten etxegintza, Etxe Nagusia Madriden kokaturik. "Te necesito en Madrid" esanez, zuzendaritza eskeñi zion.

»–No te parece que ya he pasado suficiente tiempo fuera de Euzkadi? –Ez zegon prest gure aita, naiz eta irabazi onak eskeñi, Aberria berriro uzteko.

¹ Atal honetan ageri dena Ander Arzelusen alaba zaharrenak, Amalek, kontatzen du liburuxka batean: *Arzelus'tar Ander "Luzear" (1898-1949)*, Euzkeratzaintza, 1998.

»Gertakizun au izan eta illabete (gutxi gora-beera) igaro ondoren, erbesteratzeko agindua jaso zun; zeatz-meatz oroitzen ez banaiz ere, berreun ta berrogeitamarren bat kilometrora urrutiratzeko agindua. Leal jaunak, gertatutakoa adierazteko ots-egin bezin laster, Madrideo lana berreskeñi zion.

»Denbora txikia eman zun ba gure artean. Madrideo bidea artu eta an asi zan lanean. Bakardadea jasan eziña zitzaion. Espetxean baño okerrago zegola esaten zun, an beintzat lagun artean zala ta...

»Leal jauna, aita orrela ikusiz, etxe billa asi zan gu ara joan gintezen aal zan azkarrena. Orrela ba, [1943ko] garagarrillaren 15ean, San Isidro egunean ain zuzen, sendi osoa Madridera joan giñan berarekin bizitzera. (...)

»An urte t’erdi inguru egin genitun, naiz ta zigorra iru edo lau illabetera kendu. Zigorrik ez, ezta Donostira itzultzeko lanik ere... Lana arkitu arte, an gelditu bear...

»Alako batean, Donosti aldean, Ernanin ain zuzen ere, lan bat eskeñi zioten “Almidones Remy” olan, idazkola lanerako. Lanbide artan etzun ez Madrident zun malla, ezta irabazirik ere, baño zalantza txikirik egin gabe, aalik eta laxterren emen giñan, 1944ko iraillan. (...)

»Lamfus jaunak –orduko Kutxako zuzendariak–, aita Donostira etorri zala jakin zunean dei egin zion eta berriro Kutxan lanean asi bear zula esan. Eziñezko amets bat zala pentsatu genun.

»Lamfus leenengotako “Camisa Vieja” zan, eta guk uste baño aalmen aundiagoa zun nunbait, aita berriro an lanean astea lortu zun beñepein.

»Bitarte onetan, aita beti bezela bere “lanetan” asia zan². Au etsaiak nolabait jakin zuten eta egun batean, Kutxan lanean ari

² Bitarte horretan, lehenago bezala Madrilen, Koldo San Sebastian historialariak dioenez, EAJren buruzagi nagusi bihurtu zen Gipuzkoan. Horiek ziren alabak esaten dizkigun aitaren “lanak”. Ikus Koldo San Sebastián, “Ander Arzelus”, *Euzkadi* 1986/09/18. “Lan” horietako bat 1945eko ekainaren 1ean egin zuen. Egundatzuk lehenago, Joseba Rezola Euskal Erresistentziaren buruzagi nagusietako bat atxilotu

zala, bi gizon sartu eta gora, zuzendariarengana, igotzen ikusi zitun. Poliziak zirala ez zun zalantzik egin, onetarako oarmen edo zentzumen berezia dute-ta auekin arremana izan dutenak. Orduan, laneko lagun bateri gertatu zana esan, eta alde egin zun aiek goian ziran artean. Poliziak zuzendariarekin bera jetxi ziranean, aita an etzegola ta, ateraño irten ziran. Une artantxe bertan aitak bira egin aal izan zun izkiñan, eta ezkutatzeta lortu, bere lankideak gerora kontatu zigun bezela. Ozta-ozta iges egin zun beraz.

»Iru edo lau egunez ezkutatuta egon ondoren, Lamfus jauna Gobernadorearengana (edo alako batengana) joan, eta ea Anderrren aurka zer zuten jakin nai izan zun. Ezer gutxirik izango zuten, bere burua aurkeztuz gero, pakean utziko zutela agindu baitzioten. Eta orrela izan zan.

»Gau batean, nere bizi osoan iñoiz aaztuko ez dedan gaua, bi polizi azaldu zitzaizkigun gure aitaren billa. Gure amak, aita etxean ez zala esan eta ikustera sartu nai zuten, baña "Fuero de los españoles" zala ta, "mandamiento judicial"ik gabe, etxe batean ezin zirala sartu eta etzirala sartuko esan zien.

»-Pero, señora, si su marido no está en casa, déjenos entrar a comprobarlo.

»Gure ama, berean gogor; ez zitula sartzen utziko, eta aserre bizian aginduaren billa joan ziran, kanpoko atean polizi bat eta kaleko sarreran beste bi utziz.

»Minutu bat galtzerik ez zegoen, aitak oso argi baitzun ezin zutela arrapatu, geiegi zekila ta oso arriskutsua gertatuko zala. Nolabait iges egin bear zun, baña, nola? Gu irugarrenean bizi

.../...

egin zuten Madrilen, eta, egun hartan, Iruna zekarten epaitzera, bi guardia zibilen artean. Madrilgo geltokian Pello Irujo inguratu zitzaion Rezolari, ihes egin behar zuela esatera. Hernanin igo zen Arzelus. Aurrez aurre eseri, eta euskaraz esan zion zerbait presoari. Donostiako geltokian ihes egin zuen Rezolak. Arzelus traban jarri zitzaien guardia zibilei. Pentsatzekoa da, gainera, Luzearek eskuratu zizkiola Donostian ezkutatzeko lekuak, harik eta Iparraldera pasatu zen arte, handik bi hila-betera (Ikus Eduardo Jauregi Beraza; *Joseba Rezola, gudari de gudarís. Historia de la Resistencia*, Fundación Sabino Arana, 1992).

giñan, eta soka baten laguntzaz bigarren bizitzako balkoi batera jexten aalegindu zan, baña alperrik, ezin beko bi poliziak ikusi gabe egin. (...)

»Gure sukaldeak barne-bide bat zun zuzenean, baña bereala biurguneak zitun bi aldetara, eskubitara joz komunera iritxi zintezken eta ezker aldera egiñez, kaleko atera. Biurgunea zan zatian sapairik ez genun, arritzekoa bada ere, eta onen ordeztellatua genun gañean, baita laugarren bizitzako bi leio ere. Bitxikeri onegatik, aal zan moduan aita laugarren bizitzako leio batera igotzen lagundu eta bizitza ortan sartuz, andik tellatura irixteko aalegindu bear zula pentsatu genun. Baña au guztia zaratarik gabe egin bear genun, bi arrazoigatik batez ere: bata, atean zegon poliziak ez zun ezer entzun bear; bestea, laugarrenean bizi ziranak lagunak izan arren, auek esnatzea arriskutsua zan, soñurik entzuten bazuten, karrasirik edo egin zezaketen ta. Nola edo ala lortu zun goiko leio batera igo eta bizitzan sartzea, bi semeen laguntzari esker, eta an, argi-zulo batetik tellatura ateratzea, Anderrek (seme zaarrenak) lagunduta. Orduan onek esan zigunez, aita tellatuan ondo utzi zun eta berri onek pixka bat lasaitu gindun; etsaien atzaparretatik iges egin zun beintzat! Bereala oean sartu zan beste guztiak bezela.

»Andik pixka batera, antxe ziran berriro ere gure "lagunak", sartzeko baimena aldean zekartela. Ezin zuten sinistu aita an ez zegonik, eta ikusketa artan etxe guztia arakatu zuten, oe azpi, arasen atzekaldeak, eta abar. Oso asarre ziran amarekin, ez zuten ulertzen ta, zergatik bialdu zituzten aginduaren billa, aita an ez bazan.

»Kezkatuta euki gindun gau osoa, aita tellatuan bakarrik... gauez... nola egongo zan ez jakiteak!

»Urrengo goizean, ondo zegoela esanez, mezu bat bialdu aal izan zigun.

»Tellatuko ibillerak geroago, berekin itzegin aal izan genuenean, jakin genitun. Etxeko ataria San Jeronimo karrikan izan arren, bizitzak Puerto karrikako izkiña ere artzen zun. Ortaz, aita tellatura irten ondoren, Puerto kale aldera joan, eta ango balkoi bate-

an sartu eta antxe egin zun gau osoa. Etxe artakoak ezagunak ziran, eta auek Puerto kaletik ateratzen utzi zuten.

»Une artako arazoa gainditu bazun ere, ez da bearrezkoa, andik aurrera ezkutuan ibilli bearke zuela esatea. Donostin eman zitun illabete batzuk, baña ortarako bizarra utzi zun. Eta orrela, iñork ezagutzen ez zuela, ibillalditxoak ere egin zitun irian zear³. Orrela ezin zula jarraitu, eta “beste aldera” joan bear izan zun, 1946an».

Donibanen azkena

“Carte d’identité d’étranger temporaire. Arcelus, Andrés. Profession: Sans. 10 decembre 1946. Delivrée 30 decembre 1946. Lieu de résidence et adresse au moment de la remise de la carte: Pau 4 rue des Anglais”. Beste aldean, Donibane Lohitzunen bizi izan zen, Villa Briseis-en, EAJk alokaturiko etxean. Bertan sortu zuten Joseba Rezolak eta biak, alderdiaren aginduz, isilpean emititzen zuen Euzkadi Irratia. Harekin batera bizi ziren irratiko beste kideak ere: besteak beste, Leonardo Salazar eta Iñaki Durañona. Luzear irratiko zuzendaria izan zen, eta euskarazko egitarauaren arduraduna. Behin baino gehiagotan eten zuten Donostiako “Radio San Sebastián” en emisioa Francoren kontrako aldarriak jotzeko. Bere kronikak “Gorrititar Imanol” izenordez izenpetzen zituen. *Alderdi*

³ Juan Ajuriagerra Donostian ezkutatuta zegoela, Valdestarren Villa Izarra etxean egoten zen. Iñaki Valdesek kontatu zizkion Pelay Orozcori Luzearren ihesaldiaren berri gehiago: “Cuando se escapó Ander Arcelus, estuvo varios días viviendo, podríamos decir, como un gato, en los tejados. Por las noches intentaba cobijarse en cualquier sitio que le ofreciera abrigo bajo techado. En una de estas ocasiones, parece que quiso entrar en algún piso que estaba abierto y desde dentro empezaron a gritar: “¡Ladrones, ladrones!”, por lo que el bueno de Arcelus tuvo que salir de allí volando. Y así estuvo varios días, sin comer. Un buen día llego aquí, porque conocía el refugio de Juan [Ajuriaguerra]. Y te vas a asustar: aquel día se comió ¡catorce pasteles seguidos!”. Pelay Orozco, Miguel; *Juan Ajuriaguerra, su vida, su obra, su muerte*, Idatz Ekintza, 1987. Amale Arzelusi esker dakigu, aita ezkutatuta zegoela ere, Aldakonea gaineko Usandizagatarren etxera joaten zela gazte talde bat prestatzen ari zen euskarazko antzerki lana zuzentzera.

aldizkariko kontseiluan egon zen, eta *Euzko Deya* aldizkarirako ere hainbat artikulu idatzi omen zuen, izenik gabe.

EBBko lehendakariorde izan zen Iparraldean. Alderdiko txosten eta gutunetan “Anselmo” izena erabiltzen da hartaz hitz egitean (EBBko lehendakaria, Doroteo Ziaurriz, “Dionisio” zen): Ander, Andrés, Luzear, Imanol, Anselmo.

1949ko urtarrilean ondoeza egin zitzaion Anderri. Ziaurriz eta Gorostidi sendagile adiskideek begiztatu zuten eta ebakuntza egin beharra zela erabaki zuten; Parisa eraman zuten hango sendagile on batengana. Apirilean egin zioten ebakuntza, baina alferrik. Amale Arzelusek kontatzen du bere liburuxkan zer zailtasun izan zituzten amak eta seme-alabek aitaren ondoan azken hilabeteetan egoteko eta hari laguntzeko: mendiz batzuetan, itsasoz besteetan, beti isilpean, beti arriskupean ibili behar. Andreak behintzat azken lau hilabeteak senarraren ondoan igaro zituen. Lurdara ere eraman zuten mirariren baten esperoan. 1949ko abuztuaren 27an hil zen, ordea. Berrogeita hamaika urte bete berri.

Baina ez ziren hil eta gero arazoak bukatu. Espainian agintea zeukatenek ez bide zuten *Egunan* 1937an Luzearrek izenpetuta argitara eman zen artikulua irakurri: “Ez gorrotorik”. Amale Arzelusek ematen digu egun haien berri:

“Ez gorrotorik”

«Muñoatarrak Donibanen bizi ziran. Sendi au Donostin oso ezaguna zan. Aberatsak ziran, baña aberastasunak ez zitun itxutu, eta guda aurretik euskeraren alde lan asko egin zuten. Muñoatar Miguel jaunak jarri zun Donostin leenengo ikastola, 1920 urtearen inguruan. Laguntza bear zuenaren ondoan ziran beti. Gure aitona-amonaren etxe aurrean bizi ziran; betiko ezagunak genitun, beraz. Aita il zanean, Donostira ekarri bear zala bururatu zitzairen. Oso gauza zalla zan eta ez genun uste iritxiko zutenik. Alde batetik, onera ekartzeko baimena ematea ia eziña zala zirudin; bestetik, ortarako bear zan dirurik ez genun. Leenengo lortu bear zana, ekartzeko baimena zan. Ontarako Madridedeko norbaitengana jo

zuten eta baimena lortu. Diru arazoa ere bere gain artu zuten, eta, orrela, Donostira ekarri aal izan genun aita.

»Aitarekin gure ama eta aizpa etorri ziran; gure bi anaiak joan bezela, mendiz, etorri bear izan zuten.

»Ekarri zuten ba Donostiko illerrira. Baña illotz ere ez ziran istilluak bukatu. Biaramunean, amar edo amar t'erdietan illobiratzeke gelditu giñan, baña bertara iritxitakoan, lurperatua zegon. Polizia goizeko zazpiretan azaldu, eta indarrean eorztea beartu zutela esan zigun bertako apaizak. Sinesteziña da illa egonda ere pakean ez uztea, bañan illobiratzea zala-ta, giza talde aundia bildu eta agerkundea (manifestazioa) eratuko zanen beldur ziran.

»Ez zan onekin bukatu "festa". Illeta-elizkizuna ere, ezin izan genun nai bezela egin. Santa Maria elizan, goizeko amaiketari genun ordua, baña bezperan, gauez, erretoreak deitu zigun goizeko zortzi t'erdietara aurreratzeke agindua jaso zula Gobernutik esateke. Zearo beldurtuta ageri zan, eta bat-batean onartu egin bear izan genun. Baña ez giñan lasai gelditu, egunkarietan 11:30etan izango zala jartzen baitzun. Orduan, Donostiko Irratira deitu eta illetaren ordua aldatu egin zala adierazteke eskatu genien. Irratiko zuzendaria Molina jauna zan. Leen aitatu det guda aurretik gure aitak euskal irratsaioak antolatzen zitula; au zala ta, Molina jaunarekin arremana izan, eta onek begi onez ikusia zun. Irratira deitu ta, ematen ari zirana bukatu bezin laster, albistea zabaldu zuten. Gerora jakin genun, Molinak milla pezetako isuna ordaindu bear izan zula, eta diru asko zan garai artako ere.

»Orrela ba, goizeko zortzi t'erdietan izan zan elizkizuna, eta, irratiari esker, jende ugari bildu zan. Baña bagenekin askok ez zutela jakingo ordua aldatu zanik, eta Amarako Karmeldarrai ea amabitan meza eman zezaketen galdetu genien, eta auek baietza eman ziguten. Orduan, Ander eta Iñaki, gure anaiak, eta Andoni, nere senarra, amaika t'erdietan Santa Maria eliz-atarian jarri, illetara zetozenei gertatutakoa adierazi, eta Amarara bialdu zituzten. Oartu zeraten bezela, jende asko bildu ez zedin, illeta-elizkizuna aurreratu arazi zigutenei, oso gaizki atera zitzaizen beraien jokoak; batean izan bearrean, bitan ospatu baitzan».

Luzearren idazlanak

1931an argitaratu zuen, *El Díaren* orrialdeetan, bere lehen antzerkia: *Gibelaundi*. Lehen orrian honela dio: “Luzear-ek euskeratutako elkarrizketa. Donosti-ko Eusko Etxea-n antzestu zan lenengo aldiz”, 1929ko abenduan, Santo Tomas egunez. Koldo Mitxelena Kulturunean gordetzen dute eskuizkribua. Bertan ageri da urtea: 1929. Aldaketa nabarmenak daude eskuizkributik *El Díako* argitalpena.

Zenbat aldiz antzestu den ikusita, *Neskamearen marmarrak* bakarriketa laburra da zalantzarik gabe Luzearren lanik ezagunena. A.M. Labayenen *Antzerti* aldizkarian argitaratu zen lehen aldiz (1934), eta Luzearren alaba Amalek antzestu zuen aurrena.

Gibelaundi eta *Neskamearen marmarrak* biak elkarrekin bildu zituen Eugenio Arocenak A. Arzelus eta A.M^a Labayen, 98 *belau-naldiko antzerkilarik* izenburupeko liburuan, eta, Azpeitiko Antzerki Topaketak zirela eta, herri horretako Udaletxeak argitaratu zituen 1998an.

Gaur hemen aurkezten dudana, Dickensen *Eguarri Abestia* (*A Christmas Carol*), 1931n, *El Dían* argitaratu zen.

Bernardo Estornes Lasak gazteleraz idatzitako *Historia Vasca* eskola-liburua euskaratu zuen, eta “Beñat Idaztiak” etxeak argitaratu zuen, 1935ean, *Euskal-Edestia* izenburupean.

Horretaz gain, nik dakidala inoiz argitaratu ez diren lanak ditu Luzearrek. Koldo Mitxelenak *Historia de la Literatura Vascan* oharatzen zuen: “autor también de interesantes ensayos dramáticos aún inéditos”. Donostiako KM Kulturunean honako eskuizkribuak daude gordeta: *Exkonberri ameslari* (*Luzear-ek euskertua*) eta *Kirten-en gauzak*. Seguru asko bi pieza labur hauek gerra aurrekoak dira.

Donostiako KMn gordeta daukate Luzearrek, 1930eko urrian, Lezon eman zuen hitzaldi baten eskuizkribua. Hitzaldiak ez du izenbururik, baina Jon Garbizu “Zubigar” Lezotar olerkariari buruzkoa da. Aski interesgarria gainera, ez bakarrik Zubigarren

lana ezagutzeko, baita olerkigintzaren gaineko Luzearren beraren usteak eta hausnarketak jakiteko ere.

Antzerki asko idatzi zuen kartzelan. Eskuizkribu gehienak familiak gordetzen ditu. Lehen aipatutako *Kirkil abestia* da bat, eresidun antzerkia (Dickensen *The Cricket on the Hearth* ipuina oinarri hartuta egokitua; musika, beste preso batek, Franzisko Bengoak, jarri zion). *Gonagorritxo* eta *Marrakatxarra* haur antzerkiak ere espetxean idatziak dira. Azken hiru hauek Sabino Arana Elkargoak argitaratu zituen *Askatasun Ipuinak* izenburuean, 1998an. Garai hits hartakoa da *Dirugosea* antzerkia ere, hiru ekitaldiko drama. Antzerki hau ez da sekula argitaratu, eta eskuizkribuaren fotokopia bat Donostiako KMn dago. Familiak gordetzen du, bestalde, kartzelan eta komuneko paperean idatzia beste antzerki bat. *Eziñ-eramana* du izenburu.

Kartzela garaian abesti batzuk ere idatzi zituen. Bada bat, *Itun* izenekoa, "Tristesse... (tristeza de amor. Sobre un tema de Chopin)" Juan Ortiz de Mendivilen partituraren gainean idatzia. Gero beste bat, *Dueso-ko espetxeratuen ereserkiak* izendatu zituzten bi pieza, Luzearren letra eta Radaren musikarekin⁴. Eta azkenik, beste lau abesti, E. Errazkinen musika, F. Martiarenaren armonizazioa, eta Luzearrek letra idatzita: *Maitetxo*, *Nere emazteari*, *Ene Aberria!*, eta *Maitasuna*.

Kartzelatik atera eta Iparraldean zegoela ez zion idazteari utzi. Familiak gordetzen du *I ta ni, iru*, Enrique Jardiel Poncelaren antzerkiaren itzulpen-egokitzea eskuizkribuan. Jardiel Poncelak 1945ean argitaratu zuen *Tu y yo somos tres*, beraz, Luzearren azken urteetako lana da egokitzapena. Hil aurreko egunetan, Emmanuel Roblès-en *Montserrat* izeneko antzerki lana euskaratzen ari zen Luzear frantsesetik. Ekintza Bolivarren garaiko Karakasen kokatuta dago, eta, Montserrat, espainiar ofizial baten abizena da. Luzearrek abizena aldatu zion, eta *Ibarrola* jarri. Erdia

⁴ Bitxikeria moduan esan dezadan, familiak gordetzen duen eskuizkribuan ageri den letrakera ez dela Luzearrena. Nik esango nuke letrakera hori Koldo Mitxelenarena dela.

edo itzultzera iritsi zen. Bukaera, Luzearren adiskide eta bere suhiaren aita Joseba Zinkunegik eman zion. Bi eskuizkribuok familiak dauzka gordeta.

Familiak gordetzen dituen eskuizkribuen artean, bada lau orrialdeko bat, aski esanguratsua, eta izenburu hau duena: "Atzoko europar baten oroipenak. Stefan Zweig-ek". Idazle austriararren *Die Welt von Gestern (Atzoko mundua)* oroitzapen-liburuaren kapitulu baten itzulpen saioa da, *Austriara itzultzea* izeneko kapituluarena, hain zuzen ere. Uste dut badela Luzearren azken urteetako irakurketen eta interesen lekuko jator.

Arteako Meñaka Jauregian, Abertzaletasunaren Agiritegian, Sabino Arana Kultur Elkargoak gorde ditu Luzearren eta Luzearekiko hainbat agiri. Besteak beste, 1941ean kartzelan hasi eta hil arteko bere gutunak. Gutun trukaketa, batez ere, Ander Bereziartua adiskide eta burukidearekin egiten du, baina badira beste batzuk ere. Euzkadi Irratiarekin zerikusia zuten paperak ere (asko Luzearrenak) agiritegi horretan daude gordeta.

Eguarri Abestia

Badu zerbait ipuin honek, bestek ez duena nonbait, euskal itzultzaileak, orain bezain ugariak ez zirenean, aurren berritan bultzarazi dituen itzulpen-saioak egitera. Luzearren saioaren berri izan ez, eta Xabier Mendiguren Bereziartuk ingelesa ikasi eta zerbait itzultzea bururatu zitzaionean, Dickens lan horrekin abiarazi baitzuen bere itzulpengintzako bide oparoa. Saio harekin pozik ez nonbait, eta tiraderaren batean gordea gelditu zen urte askoan. Urteak joan urteak etorri, 1990eko egun batean, berak bezala Luzearren saioaren berri ez zuen argitaratzaile batengana joan, eta lehen bertsio hura erabat berrituta aurkeztu zion argitaratzeko. Urte hartako abenduan eman zen argitara liburua, Erein argitaletxean, *Gabon kanta bat* izenburupean. Lerro hauek idazten ari dena zen argitaratzaile ezjakina.

2003an, Hiria Argitaletxeak beste itzulpen bat kaleratu du, *Eguberri kanta*, Nerea Mujika Arandak egina.

Hitzaurre honen hasieran aipatu dut noiz-non-nola argitaratu zuen itzulpen hau Luzearrek. Ez naiz horretan luzatuko beraz. Esan behar da, argitalpena bukatu zuenean, azken atalarekin batera, ohar bat atera zuela egunkarian, nahikoa interesgarria, "Euskal-orri irakurleak, zer deriozkiozute?":

Amaitu det nere lenengo euskal ingurtitxo saioa. Egunkariak eskatzen duan tankeran, egunean egunekoa itzuliaz, juan zaizute Dickens-en "Eguarri Abestia". Ez det neronek ere nere lana osorik irakurri, baña akasduna izan bear naitanaez; orrexegatik gañera. Zatika-zatika, ta askotan astirik ezak beartuta egiña izanik asieratik azkenera bi eskuk idatzia ematea, ala atzo emana gaur berrizturik arkitzea gerta baileike. Ez natorkizue beraz gauza aundiren bat egin dedalakoan "koipe" bila, neronen burua iñork baño obeto ezagutzen det eta. Iñoren gogoa ase nairik egindako saio baten ondoren ordea, asenai ori bete ote dan ala ez jakin naiean idazten dizkizuet lerrotxo auek. Euskal-Orri irakurle guziak erantzutea nai nuke. Bi lerro idatzi, bi xentimoko sello batekin bialdu ta kito. Ona zer jakin nai nuken: "Eguarri Abestia", irakurri al dezu? Ebaki ta jaso al dezu? Ulerkaitza izan al zaizu? Euskal-Orrian onelako ingurtitxoak atsegin al litzaizkizuke, ala gañontzeko idazkaiak naiago dituzu? Beste esanbearrik ba al dezu? Bi lerro idatzi zaizkidazu, arren, eta EL DÍA-ko "Euskal-Orria" "Apartado 130 Donostia" zuzenbidearekin bialdu gaur bertan, idazkazal irikian, bi xentimoko selloarekin. Eta eskerrik asko.

Bertan esaten zaigu nola egiña zuen itzulpena: "egunkariak eskatzen duan tankeran, egunean egunekoa itzuliaz". Ez zaigu argitzen ingelesetik edo gazteleratik itzuli ote zuen. Gorago aipatu dudan iragarkian, ordea, horrela esaten digu: "Igandean asiko gera noski, *ingeleratik* itzulitako 'nobelatxo' bizi, irakurgarri, labur bat argitaratzen". Lana irakurri eta gero, gaztelaniazko itzulpena eta ingelesezko jatorrizkoa alboan eduki eta gero, bi gauza esatera ausartzen naiz, beldurrez bada ere. Bata, seguru asko bi bertsioak eduki zituela begien aurrean; eta bestea, hori bai seguru, ez dela hitzez hitzeko itzulpena, egokitzapena baizik.

Ez da harritzekoa egokitzapena izatea, Luzearrek irakurgai egokiak eskaini nahi baitzizkien orduko euskaldunei. Hori zuen helburu nagusia. Hori egin zuen itzuli-egokitu zituen gainerako ipuintxo eta antzerki lanekin ere. Batzuetan ez du nondik egokitzen duen ere esaten. Pentsatu behar dugu garai hartan ez zegoela orain adinako aukerarik euskaraz irakurtzeko. Luzearrek irakurgai goxo egokiak eman nahi zituen.

Eta goxotasuna eta egokitasuna ezin ukatu zaio *Eguarri Abestiari*. Ez naiz harritzen Mitxelenaren oroitzapenean harri xuri batez markatuta geratu izana hura irakurri zuen eguna.

Eta egokitzapenen artean, ez da txikiena izenena. Luzearrek euskaldundu egiten ditu bertako protagonistenak, nahiz eta ekintza "London"en kokatu. Pertsonaia nagusia, Ebenezer Scrooge, Iñaki Ezkurra bihurtzen du. Ez dut uste aliritzira egokitutako izena denik. Kontuan hartu behar dugu, Scrooge abizena xuhurkeriaren sinonimo bihurtu dela ingeles tradizioan, Harpagon bezala Frantziakoan. Ezkurra, euskal abizena izateaz gain, bada jakina haritzaren edo artearen fruitua, baina baita diruaren sinonimo ere. Honela dio Kirikiñok bere ipuin batean: "Iragintza kontratakin ezkurra polito baturik...". Orotariko Euskal Hiztegian Kirikiñorenaz gainera, Apaolaza, Erkiaga eta Uztapideren adibideak datoz.

Scroogeren baltzukide Jacob Marley, *Jagoba Marlegi* da Luzearrenean. Scroogeren umetako laguna: Valentine, *Balendin* da; Orsoni ez dio izenik aldatu eta Dick Wilkins-i *Jon Larzabal* jarri dio. Fan, Scroogeren arreba, *Garbiñe* da. Fezziwig jauna, *Lertxundi*. Andregai izandako Belle, *Josune*. Scroogeren idazkaria, Bob Cratchit, *Yon Zubiri* da; honen andreari ez dio Dickensek izenik jartzen, Luzearrek *Andre Miren* bataiatzen du; bi hauen seme-alabak dira: Belinda (*Iziar*), Martha (*Marte*), Peter (*Kepa*), Tiny Tim (*Xabiartxo*) eta Cratchit txikiak (*Xubiritxoak*). Scroogeren iloba Fred, *Ibon* da; Topper, *Mikel*; Joe zaharra, *Txomin*; Mrs Dilber, *Andre Joxepa*; eta Caroline, *Karoline*.

Euskararen zain-zainetik idatzia dago *Eguarri Abestia*. Jatorrizko idazkiak dakarrena orpo orpo jarraitu gabe, euskaraz emanda, euskal ipuin zaharren kutsu halako bat erantsiz. Ez dut

esan nahi gaur egun jarraitu beharreko eredia hori denik noski. Harrezkero bidea egin du itzulpengintzak euskaraz, bide emankorra beharrik, baina ez ditzagun ilunpetan utz bide hori bide ez zenean aitzurra eta pala hartu eta aurreneko lurra mugitu zituztenak.

Joskera aldetik, Luzear, Altuberen eskolako delat esan genezake lasai asko. Ez dut uste hala ere irakurketa zaildu egiten duenik. Zailtasun bakarra, eta ez handia, hiztegia izan daiteke. Garbizaletasunaren auzian, ordea, ez da inola ere garbizalekeria erabiltzen zutenen iritzi bereko. Tradizio zaharraren putzutik ateratzen du ura Luzearrek gehienbat. Eta eskas zaionean, orduan bai, neologismora jotzen du, batzuetan garaiko hiztegiatara –Bera-Lopez Mendizabal eta Azkue buruz zekizkiela esatera ausartuko nintzateke–; bestetan, buruan bi buelta eman eta bere euskal senetik atonduta. Zailtasun horretarako aringarri, hiztegi bat aurkituko du irakurleak liburu honen azken partean.

Vernerekin bueltaka

Badakigu, iragartzera ere iritsi baitzen, lan gehiago itzultzeko asmoa izan zuela Luzearrek. Zehatz esanda, honela iragartzen du 1931ko maiatzaren azken egunean: "Laster, irudimen bizi erri aztertzalle idegabe ta idazle oparotsuenetakoa izandako Jules Verne-ren irakurgaietako bat argitaratuko degu". Eta Ekainaren seian, beste iragarki batean zehazten du zein nobela itzuli behar duen: "Julio Verne-ren irakurgairik politenetakoa ez ote da 'Larogei egunean, ludiari bira'? Orixe dezu ba egun gutxi barru eskeñi nai dizuguna". Ekaina osoan zehar iragartzen du argitarapena laster datorrela. Gero, isiltasuna. Abuztuan 9an, eta kolaboratzaile batzuen kexuak entzun ondoren, artikulu adierazgarria argitaratzen du, izenburu adierazgarriagoarekin: "Beazun tantoak. Euskal Orriaren bearra":

Izperringi landola batean egon ez danak ezin lezake, emen, barren ontan, zenbaterañoiko gibela bear degun, urruti xamarretik, amar bat kilo gorabera dirala ere nabaitu. Txorrotx xamarrek geranoi ere bi

bide erakusten dizkigute: gibelaunditu ala alde. Ez dago tarteko mallarik. Eta zerbait egin naiak bagarabizki, amaika aldiz ortzak estutu, ta bereak eta bost norbaiti esango genizkiolakoan, esanbear guziak atzeko patrikan gorde ta, "Onela bizi bagiña beti" abestu oi degu. Orregatik gure idazkide maiteak beren irakurgaitxoren bat edo beste argitaratu etzaiotelako goibel ikusteak samindu oi gaitu benetan. "Errena" k adarjotzallenen buru egiten nindun lengo batean. "Iturralde" k bere berriak nik nai banuan argitaratuko zirala zion. Eta aspaldi ontan erdipurdi dabizkitelako aitatzen ditudan oez gain, beste lagun pillá bat ere aserre xamar izango ditut noski beren lanak berandu azaldu ala argitaratu ez diralako. Ez naiz ni, ez, adarjotzallenen buru, "Errena" adiskide. Ezta ere Jainkoa, "Iturralde", emen nai dedana egiteko. Onela balitz Jules Verne-ren "nobela" polita aspaldi asia nuan. Eta zuen bion berriak aidian agertuko lirake. Baña... Aurrentzat amabostean bein edo osatu nai nuan orritxo alaiak potó egin duala ikusten ez dezute? Nun da gure andereñoen orri berezia? Nere asmo begikoak etziran ba? Zer egitea nai dezute ordea "anuntziyo" asko dan egunean orria auts egiten badidate? Zer, euskera, gure euskera gaxoa, besterik ez danean bakarrik ontzat artzen badidate? Zuek eta ni lan aberkoi, garrantziduna, egiten degulakoan ari gera. Baña ez uste besteak orrela dalakoan daudenik. Bai zera. Gure txepelkeriak iñongo argirik piztu al dezateke ba?

Hau irakurrita edonori datorkio burura kontu bat: ez dira ba asko aldatu denborak! Ez dakidana da Vernereren nobela itzultzera iritsi zen ala ez. Baliteke inon egotea itzulpen hori. Dakiguna da Joxe Migel Zumalabek, 1936ko gerratean, Eusko Ikaskuntzako bulegoetan utzi zuela nobela horren itzulpen bat. Baina desagertu egin zen tamalez. Ez dakigu Zumalabek berak itzuli zuen edo beste batek itzulia utzi zuen han. Agian, batak zein besteak itzulia izan, egunen batean agertuko da!

Gure edizioa

Gure edizio hau egiteko Donostiako Udal Liburutegiak nire esku utzi dituen mikrofilmeen fotokopiez baliatu naiz. Irakurketa ez da beti erraza izan. Batzuetan –egunkarietako ohitura noski–,

akatsen bat sumatzen zelarik, zuzentzen saiatu naiz, argi ikusten bazen behintzat zein zen akatsa. Zerbait falta zela iritzirik, hondatuta edo ezabatuta ageri zelako, adibidez, ingelesezkora jo eta parentesi zuzenen barruan sartu dut eskas zuena, eta oin-ohar bidez argitu.

Luzearrek argitaratutako bertsioa ematen ahalegindu naiz eginahalean, oso gauza gutxi aldatuta. Hona ukitu diren gauzak:

–Izen propioen ondoko apostrofoak kendu ditut ia erabat: Yon'ek > Yonek.

–/r/ gandordunak /rr/ bikoitz bihurtu ditut. Gauza bera /l/ eta /t̃/ hizkiekin.

–Galdera eta harridura markak esaldi hasieran eta bukaeran daude jatorrizkoan. Nik bukaeran bakarrik ezarri ditut, gaurko ohituraren arabera.

–Hitz elkarketetako marrak eta puntuazioa nahikoa ukitu ditut, gaurko ohiturei jarraituz, eta beti ere argitasunaren mesedetan.

–/s/-/z/ hizkien nahasketa zuzentzen ahalegindu naiz. Hona hemen zuzendu diren hitzak: arrizko > arrixko; arramaska > arramazka; aberaztu > aberastu; aztun > astun, eskutatu > ezkutatu; eskutuki > ezkutuki; azke > aske; azkatasun > askatasun; azkatu > askatu; kamutz > kamuts; karrazi, karraizi > karraxi; osta-osta > ozta-ozta; erakutzi > erakutsi; azaldu > asaldu; zakon > sakon, igeltzu > igeltsu; esker-eskubi > ezker-eskubi; mazti > masti; matz > mats; matasa > mataza; akatz > akats; irrizta > irrista; sentsuzko > zentzuzko; eguraztu > egurastu.

–/y/ grekoa bi kasutan bakarrik erabiltzen du: "iya" eta "biyar" hitzetan. "Ia" eta "biar" aurkituko ditu irakurleak.

–"Palta", "apaldu", "apari", "pirmatu", "pin" hitzak "falta", "afaldu", "afari", "firmatu" eta "fin" aurkituko ditu.

–Berezko /-a/ itsatsia erantsi diet honoko hitzei: "zalantz", "eskeintz", "bizitz", "grin", "neskatx", "lots" eta "giltz".

–Ahalegina saiatu naiz hitz formak batzen, bi eratara edo gehiagotara agertzen zirenean. Esate baterako, "ezpaitzan" eta "ez baitzan", "ezpageneki" eta "ez bageneki" eta abar agertzen baitzi-

ren, “ez baitzan” eta “ez bageneki” modukoak hartu ditut aintzat. “Bizpide” eta “bizibide” agertzen baita, “bizibide” aukeratu dut. “Ikaz” eta “ikatz” > “ikatz”; “Jaiki” eta “jeiki” > “jeiki”; “Egurrri” eta “Eguarri” > “Eguarri”; “eskar” eta “esker” > “esker”; “aserre” eta “asarre” > “asarre”. Egin dudan aukerak, ikusten denez, ez du askotan bat egiten gaurko euskara batuarekin, baina aukera hori egin badut, autoreak berak gehiagotan erabiltzen due-lako izan da.

–Badu beste kasu bat, aparte aztertu daitekeena: “oi” eta “oe” erabiltzen du, gaur egungo “ohe”rako. Hasierako kapituluetan ia erabat “oi”, “oieratu”, “oietik”, “oieko”, “oiera” eta “oiean”. Baina azkeneko kapituluetan, berriz, erabat “oe”, “oeratu” eta abar. Azken horren alde egin dut.

Nire esker ona agertu nahi diot Amale Arzelus Luzearren alabari, eman dizkidan argibideengatik, eta bere seme Jon Andoni Zinkunegiri, erakutsi dizkidan aitonaren lanak eskuzabal erakusteengatik. Iñaki Goioganari ere mila esker: batzuetan, norberari dagokion lana ongi egitea, gogoz eta eskuzabaltasunez, eskergarria izaten baita.

Inazio Mujika Iraola

2003ko ekainean

Eguarri Abestia

Charles Dickens



“Luzear“ek euskeratua



**EL DIA
1931
DONOSTIA**



Charles Dickens

LENENGO AAPALDIA

Marlegiren Mamutzarra

Marlegi illa zan. Au iñork zalantza apurrik gabe sinisteko eran idatzi nai nuke aurren-aurrena. Aren eortzi-paperak, erretoreak, sakristauak, eortzetxe-ordezkarriak eta proguko buru izandakoak izenpetuta zeuden. Ezkurak firmatuak ziran, bai, ta onen izenak indar aundia erantsi oi zion edozein paper motari.

Marlegi zarra, edozein ate-iltze bezin illa zegon beraz. Aitor dezadan argibidez, ez dedala ate-iltze bat eriotzaren irudirik egokiena danik uste. Iltzeren bat nerez aitatzekotan ilkutzakoren bat lenago aitatuko nuan. Baña ez naiz ni, ez ni, izango iñola ere, asabak on iritzian utzitako irudirik aldatuko duana. Onela erori izan baitira erridiak. Esan dezadan beraz berriro, aotsa biribilduaz, Marlegi, ate-iltzerik erdoituena bezin illa zegoala.

Ta Ezkurak bai al zekian ori? Bai noski! Jakingo etzuan ba? Ezkurra ta biak baltzukide izanak baitziran, Jainkoak daki zenbat urtean. Ezkurra izan baitzan aren atzenai-betetzalle bakararra, aren banakari bakararra, aren ordeko bakararra, aren oñordeko bakararra, aren adiskide bakararra, ta, atzenengo ibillaldi artan, aren laguntzalle bakararra. Ta irabazpideak galtzeko gizona ez izanik, etzuan Ezkurak laguna galtzeak eman oi duan samintasuna illeta egun artantxe tratu edo bat egiteko eragozpen izan.

Illetak aitatu ditudanez, biurtu nadin asitako bidera. Marlegi illa zala badakizute beraz. Au gogoan ondo artu, gañontzean edestu bear dizutedanak bere gatz guzia galduko luke ta. Hamlet-en aita illa zala ez bagenek, ez baigiñake bera, seme kaxkariña bide onetaratzeko, gabean, bere zaindoki zear pasiatzen arkitzearekin,

beste edozein jaun agurgarri onen antzeko toki aizetsuren batean –San Pabloren Ildegian, adibidez– arkituko bagenu baño geiago arrituko.

Ezkurrak etzuan Marlegi zarraren izenik beñere kendu. Salostetxe ate gañean urte ta urtetan jarraitu zuan. “Ezkurra ta Marlegi”. Ezkurra ta Marlegi baitzan baltzu-izena. Tratuan asi berriak ziranak Ezkurra esan oi zioten batzutan Ezkurrari; bestetan, ordea, Marlegi. Ark bitara erantzuten zuan. Berdin zitzaion.

Bai esku gogorrekoa Ezkurra lan kontuan! Lerdekatu, biotza aterako zion bere eskutan erortzen zanari, bere setari eutsiko zion gizon arek. Sukarria bezin gogor izan arren, etzan txinpart gogozkorik atera zezakion kanketakorik. Ispelen antzera ixil, berekoi ta bakarzalea. Gogoko otzak azpegia gogortu, sudurra zorroztu, masallak kixkurtu, ibillera makaldu, begi-ertzak gorritu ta ezpañak moretzen zizkion.

Otza ta beroa etziran Ezkurrarentzat ezer. Iparraizerik zorrotzena ez baitzan bera bezin zorrotza. Elurra bezin limurgaitza, eudia bezin setatsua, etzuten egutz-gaiak ere Ezkurra atxitzeko biderik arkitzen. Eguzkia izan ziteken zeredozertan irabazten ziona: eguzkiak beroa baitzeman, eta Ezkurra etzan ezer emateko gauza.

Etzuan iñoiz ez iñork kalean adiskidetasun deiakin gelditu. Txiroak ari eskatu? Umetarañoko guziak iges egiten zioten. Eta ez aundi ez txiki etzitzaion ezeren galdez urbiltzen. Itxu-zakurrak ere jabeak bazterreratzen zituzten, isatsa erabilliaz, “Begi ‘oiek’ izatea baño, batere ez izatea obe” balioeteke bezela.

Baña zer zijuakion onegatik Ezkurrari! Orixe nai etzuan ba? Bizi-bide zear, gañerako bidaztiak urruti xamar zituala ibiltzea baitzan bere elburua.

Bein batean, urteak duan egunik ederrenaren bezperan, Egua-rrri bezperan, Ezkurra zarra, oi bezin lanpetua bere lantegian zegoen. Egun otz, zeken, lañotsua uraxe. Bere alkitik, kaleko marmaizoak, lañoak eztarriak itxi ta egiñerazten zituan eztulak entzuten zituan; jendea, odol-birak bizitu nairik, arrantzaleak oi duten eran besoakin bizkarra juaz, edota berotu nairik soroilu-arriak oñakin gogor zapalduaz zebillela nabaitzen zuan.

Illunpean zegon erria, erlojuak irurak zirala zioten arren. Ingu-ruko dendatan sakon beltz gañean lauso gorrixtak bezela kandel piztuen argiak dirdir motela zegiten. Tarte ta zirrikitutatik lañoa sartzan zan, espaloi batetik bestera etxeak estaltzen zituan laño lodia. Odei estalki ura ikusita, izadiak gobara eguna zuala esan zitekean.

Bere idazlaria begien aurrean eukitzearren, ura eskutitz-kopiatzen ari zan saizulo estu ta zarpaillerako bide zan bere lange-lako atea irikia zeukan.

Ezkurra berotzen zuan sua txikia zan, baña idazlariarentzat piztuta zegoanaren ondoan sutzarra zirudin. Onek ezin zezaken iñola ere sua indartu, ikatz-tokia nagusiaren langelan baitzegon, eta etzuan ikatz-koskor bat artzea besterik bear bere irabazpidea galtzeko arrixko bizian jartzeko!

Sua ezin indartu zezakenez, bere lepo-beroki zuria jantzi, ta kandela bereganatu zuan onen beroa ere artzeko. Baña etzuan ezer asko irabazi.

–Eguarri zorientsuak, osaba! Jainkoak gabon! –zion abots alai bat entzun zan.

Ezkurraren illoba baten aotsa zan. Bat-batean sartu zalarik, bere agurra iñork ura ikusi baño lenago entzun zan.

–Ba! –marmar egin zuan Ezkurrak–. Umekeriak!

Laño ta izotz menderatu naiaz, lasterka bizian etorria zan Ezkurraren illoba ori, ta gorrituta iritxi zan. Arpegiak dirdir zegion, begiak txinparta zerioten eta bere arnasa ur biurtzen zitzaion itz egiterakoan.

–Eguarri umekeri bat, osaba!? Etzera biotzez ari!

–Bai jauna, uste diaten bezela ari nauk –erantzun zion Ezkurrak–. Eguarri zorientsuak! Xagua baño txiroago izanik, zer esku-bidekin edo zergatik alaitzen aiz?

–Orra! –bota zion alaiki illobak–. Ta zu Kreso bat baño aberatsagoa izanik, zer eskubidekin goibeltzen zera? Zergatik musindu?

Etzuan Ezkurrak berealako erantzunik arkitu, ta, biderik erre-xenera joaz berriro, “Ba! Umekeriak!” besterik etzuan esan.

–Etzaitetz asarretu, osaba –esan zion illobak.

–Nola ez, ergel artean bizi banauk! “Eguarri zoriontsuak!”, “Eguarri zoriontsuak!”. Zer zekartek iretzat Eguarriak? Dirurik ez eta guzia ordaintzeko aroa; urte bete geiago, baña ez xentimo bat geiago; kontuak atera ta zorretan agola ikusteko garaia. Benetan esaten diat, al banikek, “Eguarri zoriontsuak” ezpañetan dituztela dabiltzan guziak beren xaltxan egosi ta gorosti artean serbituko nizkikek. Bai orixe!

–Osaba!... –asi zan illoba.

–Illoba! –erantzun zion gogorki osabak–. Ospa itzak Eguarriak derizkioken eran eta utzi akidak neri nere tankeran ospatzen.

–Baña iñola jaituko ez baidituzu –jardetsi zuan illobak.

–Utzi nazak pakean –esan zion Ezkurrak–, on dagikela. Oraindañokoakin baliatu aizen itxurak dituk eta!

–Izan ditut bai zuk diozun eran baliatzeko bideak. Eguarri oietxekin ere bai. Baña askoz lasaiago bizi naiz garai ontan. Eguarriak, bere izen eta jatorriagatik zor zaioten begirapenez gañera, maitasun, ontarte ta goinai aro izan zaizkitelako. Auxe baita, urte luzearen buruan, giza-emakumeak biotza zabal-zabal egin eta mendekoak ere bizilagun bezela ta ez beste enda batekotzat artzen dituen aroa. Aberastu ez banaute ere, on egiñ didate beraz Eguarriak, eta “Onetsia bedi Eguarri eguna” esatez ez naiz aspertuko.

Idazlari gizajoa bere saizulotik txaloka asi zan itzaldi ark berotuta, baña, bereala oarturik, sua zirikatuz nolabait estali nai izan zuan egindakoa, sukondartxo zearo itzaliaz.

–Zuzmurrik txikiena nabaritzen badiat, beste ogibideren baten billa ospatuko dituk Eguarriak! –esan zion Ezkurrak.

Ta bere illobari:

–Motell, izlari bikaña aiz! Etzekiat nola Latetxera eraman ez auten.

–Tira, osaba, etzaitetz asarretu ta etorri biar gurekin bazkal-tzera.

Bai al dakizute ain gogo onez egindako eskeñia nola artu zuan Ezkurrak? Bere illoba... esan dezadan, inpernuko zuloan ikusi nai lukela bete-beteaz.

–Baña zergatik? –galdetu zion gizajoak–. Zergatik?

–Zergatik ezkondu itzan? –galdetuaz erantzun zion Ezkurrak.

–Nere emaztea dana maite nualako.

–Maite zualako!?! –esan zuan Ezkurrak, Eguarriak ospatzea bezin ergelkeri aundia balitz bezela–. Agur!

–Baña, osaba, zer dala-ta orain nere ezkontza eragozpen bezela jarri, ezkongai nitzala ere beñere nere etxera etorri ez baziñan?

–Agur! –esan zuan berriro Ezkurrak.

–Asko samintzen nau zu onen itxututa ikusteak, osaba. Gure artean naigaberik izan bada, ez da noski ni bide naizela izan. Adis-kide antzean, egunari zegokion bezela, eskeintza au egin nai izan dizut. Eta ez nuke nai nere asmo onik galdu, gerta ala gerta. Eguarri zoriontsuak, beraz, osaba!

–Agur!

–Eta urte berri on!

–Agur! –esan zuan Ezkurrak bosgarren aldiz.

Eta illobak alde egin zuan sartu bezin gogo onez. Idazlariaren aldamenetik igarotzerakoan ura zoriondu zuanean, biotzezko oiartzunak erantzun zion.

–Beste zoroa! –zion Ezkurrak bien elkarrizketa entzunik–. Astean bost duro irabazten ez ditu, emaztea ta seme-alabak etxean, eta “Eguarri zoriontsuak” dio. Ergel alena! Zoro-etxeren batean zurragorik arki diteke!

Idazlariak Ezkurraren illobari atea iriki zionean, beste bi lagun sartu zitzaizkion. Itxura oneko jaun bi ziran, besapean idazti ta paperakin, txapela aterata Ezkurra agurtu zutenak.

–Ezkurra ta Marlegi, noski, oker ez bagaude? –esan zion batek zerrenda bat irakurriaz–. Ezkurra ala Marlegi jaunarekin ari gera, jauna?

–Marlegi zazpi urtez aurretik illa da –erantzun zuan Ezkurrak–. Gaur zazpi urte, ain juxtu.

–Baña bere lagunak ez du noski jaun aren eskuzabala samiñez oroitu eraziko –esan zuan lengo jaunak bere agiriak erakutsiaz.

“Eskuzabala” entzun, eta, beste gabe, Ezkurraren bekozkoa illundu zan. Agiriak biurtu zituan atzera.

–Guzia alaitasuna dan urte aro ontan –jarraitu zuan jaunak–, txiro ta beartsuenganuzko begiratutxo bat txit bidezkoa izaten da, beren alde zer bait egiteko. Negu gogorra daramagu, millakak bear-bearrenekoa falta dute, eundaka milla oxta-oxta bizi dira.

–Kartzelik ez al dago? –galdetu zuan Ezkurrak.

–Geiegi bezela –erantzun zion jaunak idazkortza utziaz.

–Eta txiro-etxeak ez dute beren eginbearra betetzen? –galdetu zuan berriro Ezkurrak.

–Bai, alaxe da. Ain bearrak ez balira obe!

–Ta beartsuai dagozkien legeak galdu al ziran?

–Ez, oraindik zutik daude.

–Alare, zuri entzunaz besterik uste nuan. Gaitz erdi. Poztutzen naiz.

–Baña aitatu ditugun etxe oiek, jendea ez gogoz ez gorputzez asetzen ez duela uste degulako, lagun-talde batek txiroai jaki ta edari ta berogarriak eskeintzeko dirua biltzea gure gain artu degu. Ta onetarako, mai batzutan guzia gañezka ibilli oi dan aro au aukeratu degu, egun abetan txirotasuna ere astunago egiten dala-koan. Zenbat jarriko degu zure izen ondoren?

–Ezer ez! –erantzun zion Ezkurrak.

–Izena ezkutuan gorde nai al zenuke?

–Pakean uztea nai nuke. Ona garbi esan zer nai nuken, jakin nai badezute. Nik ez det Eguarririk alaiki ospatzen, eta ez nago besteak orrela egin dezaten ezer emateko eran. Len aitatu ditudan etxe oientzat dagokidana ematen det, ta oparo gañera, bai, ta zer-baiten bear diranak dijoazela aietara.

–Asko dira ordea ori ezin egin dezatekenak, eta beste askok goseak il naiago luteke.

–Zergatik ez dira ba iltzen? Munduan jende geiegi ez dago? Orixe litzake gañezka daudenak garbitzeko biderik egokiena. Gañera, barkatu, baña nik ez dakit ori guzia ala dan.

–Jakin zenezake, ordea –oarrarazi zion jaunak.

–Ez det ba nai. Neronen arazoakin naiko buruauste sortzen zait, iñorenetan sartu gabe. Agur ba, jaunak!

Itzik egin bearrik etzegola ezagaturik, bi jaunak etorri bezela juan ziran. Ezkurak utzitako lanari eldu zion berriz, bera añako gizonik etzalakoan, oi baño olde obearekin.

Bitartean, laño ta illuntasuna gizendu ta beztu baitziran, esku zuzidunak kale zear ikusten ziran, zaldi aurretik oei bidea erakutsiaz ibiltzeko laguntza eskeintzen.

Ezki zarra godar tankerako leio batean Ezkurrari begira bezela zeukan bertako elizako ezkildorre koldarra ere ezkutatu zan, eta odei artetik, an goien ortzak kaskas balegioteke bezela, dardarti bialtzen zituan ordu ta laurdenak.

Otza gogortu zan.

Kalean, odi konponketan ari ziran langille batzuek piztutako su inguruan, gizon eta aur arlote talde bat arkitu ziteken, ustegabeko bero ura irunsi naiaz bezela.

Kalertzetan, uraga-iturrietatik gañez egiten zuan ura jeltzen zan.

Denda-erakustokiak, gorosti ta garao txortaz apainduta, dir-dir zeuden, kale zear zijuazenen arpegi zuriak gorrixkatuaz. Ollo ta jaki-saltokiak, zoragarriak, urdail miñez zebiltzanentzat begi asegarri, jaki motarik ao-urgileenakin beterik azaltzen ziran.

Uriko alkateak, Eguarriak bere mallako agintari bateri zegokion bezela ospatzeko, bere berrogeitamar sukaldari ta goxogilleai agindu bear zitzaiena agindu zien. Eta aurreko astelenean bere mozkorkerian bazterrak asaldatu zitualako bi duroko multa ordaindu berria zuan zapata-konpontzalle gizajoa ere an ari zan, bere ganbara-zuloan, oiturak agintzen duan budiña egiten, bere emazte igarra ta semetxo xaxpikia urtean beingoa zuten aragi zati billa ziran bitartean.

Laño ta otzak etzuten itxuraz jai. Gogor saiatzen ziran beintzat. Otz garratza, mea, izugarria. Dustan Deunak, deabrua bere izkillu bidez zigortu bearrean, egun artako otzarekin sudurrean muturreko bat eman izan balio, a zer karraxiak eraziko zizkionak¹.

Zakur goseak ezurrari bezin gogoz, sudurtxoari lotuta zebilkin otz gaizto arekin dardar, ume zirtzil batek giltzazulotik Eguarri abestitxo bat eskeñi zion Ezkurrari. Baña au,

“Ate txokuan ollar bi,
batek bestea dirudi”

entzun bezin laster, makil bat artuta ateruntz abiatu zanean, abeslari koxkorrak iges egin zuan, laño ta otzari giltzazuloko bidea aske utzirik.

Lantegia ixteko ordua ere iritxi zan ba noizbait. Ezkurra marmarka jeiki zan eta bere otseñari ere aldegitoko eskubidea eman bear izan zion itzik esan gabe bederik. Au ordua jo zai zegon, eta etzuan unerik galdu argia itzali ta txapela jazten.

–Biar egun guzian jai naiko dek? –galdetu zion Ezkurrak.

–Bear aundirik ez dala beintzat.

–Bear aundirik! Ta nik astekotik duro bat kenduko banikek, bear aundirik izango al ukek?

Bildur irripartxo batek kixkurtu zion arpegia idazlariari.

–Ez dek beraz uste “nik” opor-egun batekoa ordainduta kalterik diatenik.

Urtean beingoa zala esaten ausartu zan idazlaria.

–Ori dek! Abenduaren ogeitabosta dala, ta lapurreta bizia egin orduan –esan zuan Ezkurrak txamarra leporaño lotuaz–. Artzak, artzak egun osoa; baña etzi, galdutakoa osatzen saiatu.

Ala agindu zion idazlariak, eta Ezkurra irten zan marmarizo bizian.

Laster egin zituan ark bat-biak, eta landola itxi ta lepoko berokia muturrak gerriraño zintzilik zituala jantzi ondoren, egun aundi aren bezpera ospatzeko, Ixkindegiko txirristan gazte errenkada luze bateri malla bat erantsiaz ogei aldiz jetxi, ta etxeruntz jo zuan lasterka, lenbaitlen iritxi ta sendi arteko jolasetan alaitzeko asmoz.

¹ Dunstan santua bere arotz lanean ari zela, deabruak tentatu omen zuen. Tradizioaren arabera, tentaldiari amaiera eman bide zion etsaiaren sudurra tenaza handi batzuekin estututa (Edizio prestatzailearen oharra).

Ezkurrak afaldu zuan, murrintsu, eguneroko taberna zulo beltzean, eta gabeko izperringi guziak irakurri ta egunen buruan artutakoen berri zeraman kuadernotxo ondo aztertu ondoren, lotarako asmoan etxeratu zan.

Baltzukide izandakoaren bizilekua zuan bere etxea.

Bizitza illun-illun bat zan. Etxe luze-luze bateko bizitza illun-illuna.

Etxea bera, aurtzaroan kiriketan zebillela galdu ta nora jo etzekiela gelditua ote zan esan ziteken, ain itxura traketsa zegin enparantza koxkor artan. Gure edesti garaian, zar eta itun arkitzen zan. Ezkurra bakar-bakarrik bizi baitzan etxe guzian. Gañerako bizitzetan idazkol-lantegi besterik etzegon.

Ezkurrak enparantza-koxka guziak ongi ezagutzen zituan arren, eskuakin ikutuaz billatu bear izan zuan bere bidea, ain zegon beltz.

Negu-Urtzik etxetzarraren eskaratza bere jauregitzat autu ote zuan pentsa zitekean, otz eta laño guziak an bilduta bezela arkitzen baitziran.

Esan dezadan orain beste ezer baño len, irakurleok jakin dezazuten, ate kisketak aundi samarra izatea beste gauza nabarmenik etzuala. Ezkurrak etxe artan bizi zan ezkerro, gau ta egun amaika aldiz ikusia zuan. Bidez esan dezadan Ezkurra Londongo bururik kamutsena baño irudimen gutxiagokoa genula, kamutsenen artean alkate ta ziñegotziak sartu arren.

Eta aurrez jakin bear ditugunak garbi jartzen ari naizelarik, jakin, arratsaldean bere idazkolan izan zituan bi jaun aiekin itz egin zuan ezkerro, etzala Ezkurra Marlegi iñoiz izan zanik ere gogoratu. Ta au guzia jakin ondoren, esan zaidazute ia zergatik ikusi zuan Ezkurrak, giltza ate-zuloan sartzerakoan, an gañeko kisketan, au iñork ikutu gabe, ez eguneroko kisketa, baizik Marlegiren arpegia.

Marlegiren arpegia. Etzan inguru guziko illunpe beltza bezela, ez; otarra ustel batek jakitegi illun batean botako luken bezelako argitxo laruz inguratuta azaltzen zitzaion. Etzan onen begiratua ez asarre ez ankerra, baña kopet izugarrian zaldizka betau-

rreko ikaragarriak zituala, Marlegik oi zuan eran begiratzen zion Ezkurrari.

Aize epel batek erabillita bezela mugitzen zitzaizkion illeak, eta begiak zabalik baña geldi-geldi zeuzkan. Begi geldi aiek eta arpegiaren zurtasunak ikara bizia ematen zuten; baña etzan arpegia berez ikaragarria, ikara beste zerbaitek sortzen zuala esan ziteken, ez arpegiak.

Ezkurrak bere almen osoz begiratu zionean, kisketa kisket biurtu zan atzera.

Ez litzake egia zirkin egin etzionik esatea. Aurtzaro ezkeru oi etzuan biotz ikara izugarria nabaitu zuan. Baña alare, ausarki, giltza artu ta zuloan bira eman, atea iriki, ta kandela piztuaz sartu zan etxean.

Zalantzunea izan zuan atea ixterakoan. Bizkar gañetik, ate atzera begiratu kezkatu bat egiñerazi zion, Marlegiren ille-mototsa ikusi ta lengo biotzikara berritzeko bildurrak. Baña kisketa atzetik, au ateari lotzeko garranga ta biurrikoak besterik ikusi etzituean, “Ba! Ba!” nardaberaki esanaz, bultzada batez indarrean itxi zuan.

Ate danbada, turmoi biurtu zan etxe uts artan. Gañeko gela bakoitzak eta beeko upel bakoitzak oiartzun bereziz erantzun zioten ateari. Etzan ordea Ezkurra oiartzunak bildurtu zezateken gizona. Atean krixketa bota, eskaratza pasa, ta eskalletan gora geldi abiaturik, bidean kandela antxiturik.

Eskallera aietan il-burdi bat bere luma galdurdun zaldi ta guzi igo ziteken, baita trabeska ere. Ain ziran zabalak. Onegatik iruditu zitzaion apika Ezkurrari, an aurretik, illunpetan erdi galduta, aolku bat zeramala.

Kaleko laspel-argimutil oietako sei etziran noski geiegi izango atarbe ura argitzeko, zuek ikusi, beraz, Ezkurraren kandel mutur arek an zer adar jo zezakean. Baña Ezkurra gora zijuan alare. Illuntasuna ez baita ezer kostatzen: Ezkurrak illunzalea izan bear naitanaez.

Ala guztiz, bizitzako atetzarra itxi baño len, gela guziak aztertu zituan guzia ondo zegon ikusteko. Kisketako arpegia begi aurre-

an bezela zeukan oraindik, eta etzuan arrixko berririk nai. Txaki, logela, trastezar-txokoa, guzia utzi bezela zegon. Mai azpian iñor ez, iñor ez alkipeon; sukaldean, su pixka bat; katillu ta zali, mai gañean; eta eltzetxo batean, morokilla, Ezkurraren sudurjarioarentzat sendagai ederra.

Iñor ez, oe azpian. Ezta orman iltzetik zintzilik ala-olako tankeran zegon txirikinpean ere. Trastezarren gelan betiko kaldera zar bat, oñetako zulatuak, arrai otartxoak, iru ankeko garbontzia ta burniziri bat.

Lasaixiago itxi zuan atea, oi ez bezela giltzari bi bira egiñerazirik. Itsumustuan ezer gertatzeko bideak onela itxi ondoren, lepoko kixkurra kendu, txirikiña, oskixillak eta oe-txanoa jantzi ta sukalde-urbil exeri zan morokil-aurrean.

Gau gogorraren kideko izateko asko falta zuan su kaxkar arek. Pittin bat epeldu nairik, su gañean makurtuta jarri bear izan zuan, ikatz-kondar arek eman zezaken beroa artzeko.

Antxiñakoa zan sukaldea, olandar azokariren baten lana noski. Itun-Zar eta Berriko irudiak izan nai zuten, bira guzian zeuzkan buztiñarritan azaltzen ziranak. An omen zeuden Kain eta Abel, Faraonen alabak, Sabako Erregiña; an zeukan aingeru talde bat ere, oe-burukoak ziruditen odei gañean egalari; Abraham, Belshazar, Bialduak intxaur azal antzeko ontzitan... eunka irudi, bere mena alaitzeko. Baña zazpi urtez aurretik ildako Marlegiren arpegia azaltzen zitzaion, eta, Igarlearen zigor antzera, onek guzia estaltzen zuan. Buztiñarri aiek irudigabeak eta Ezkurraren gogai ixpillu izateko doaidunak izan balira, bakoitzean Marlegi zarraren buru bat azaldu izango zan noski.

–Txotxolokeriak! –zion Ezkurrak, gela zear zebillela.

Juan-etorri biziak. Berriro exeri zan. Besalkian etzaterakoan, txintxarri bat begi aurrean gelditu zitzaion. Gela-txoko batean zegon txilin ura etzan aspaldian ezertarako erabiltzen. Noizbait alabearragatik goi-goiko bizitzatik deitzeko eran jarria zan, ta gero alaxe gelditua. Arrituta, bildur ikara aundiz ikusi zuan ba txintxarria bazebillela... poliki-poliki aurrena, otsik atera gabe... bizixiango gero... ta indarrean azkenik, etxeko guziakin batera.

Txiliñotsa minutu erdi batean entzun zan, minutu batean geienaz. Baña Ezkurrari ordu bete iruditu zitzaion. Txintzarriak asi bezela, guziak batean ixildu ziran.

Aien ots meari, karraxiagoko batek jarraitu zion. Au beetik zettorrela esan zitekean. Be-beko upel gañean arrastaka erabillitako burni-kate batek egingo lukenaren antzekoa zan.

Ezkurra, sorgiñen mendeko etxetan azaltzen diran mamutzarrak kateak zintzilik dituztela azaldu oi dirala oroitu, ta ikaratu zan.

Upeldegiko atea burrundara aundian iriki eta ixten nabaitu zuan. Gero kate otsa eskalletan gora, beko bizitzetan... eta, azkenik, zuzenean bere ateruntz zettorrela ezaguturik,

–Gezurra, irudipenak! –zion–. Ez det sinistu nai!

Baña etzizaion arpegian odol tantorik gelditu, deitu gabe, atarik ez balitz añean, gelan sartu ta otsgillea bere begien aurrean ikusi zuanean. Sukaldeko gartxoa ere luzatu zan, “Ezagutzen det. Marlegiren Mamutzarra da” esanaz bezela, ta berriro kuxkurtuta len bezin apal gelditu zan.

Arpegi uraxe! Berbera! Marlegi, bere ille-ordekoakin, oi zituan txamarra, galtzerdi ta oñetako luzeakin, oen borlatxoak, txamargañekoaren atze-mutur eta ille-ordeko mototsa bezela zut zituala. Gerritik arrastaka zeraman katea. Luzea zan eta isats antzera azaltzen zitzaion, eta diru-kutxa, giltza, saloste-idazti, latidazki ta altzairu-sarekizko gorgoillakin egindakoa zan. Gorputz argal gardena zuan, eta Ezkurrak, aurrez zeukalarik, upulurdaren atzeko bi botoiak ikusten zizkion gorputz zear.

Marlegi barrengabea zala askotan entzuna zuan Ezkurrak, baña etzan orduraño ontan jausi. Ta... etzuan orduantxe ere sinistu nai! Mamutzarra bere aurrean zeukan arren, bere begien otza biotzeraño sartzen zitzaion arren, burutik kokotzera zeraman musuzapia ari ala sedazkoa zan ederki ezagutu zezaken arren, siniskaitz egiten zitzaion guzia, ta bere zentzuai gezurra ziotela esan nairik burruka bizia zerabilkin.

–Zer da! Zer nai dezu? –galdetu zuan Ezkurrak oi bezin lotsagabe ta ozki.

–Gauza asko... –erantzun zion Marlegiren abots jatorrak.

–Nor zera?

–Galde zaidazu nor nitzan.

–Tira ba, nor ziñan? –esan zuan Ezkurak abotsa jasoaz–. Erraño batentzat arrokeri aunditxoak dira zureak.

–Munduan, zure baltzukide Marlegi izan nitzan.

–Ta... ta exeri al zindeke? –galdetu zion Ezkurak kezkatu.

–Exeri nindeke, bai.

–Exeri zaite ba.

Ain gorputz argalaren jabe zan Mamutzar ura exeri eziñak izpidea jarriko zuan kezkaz galdetu zion exeri zeiken Ezkurak, baña sukaldez beste aldera letxua baño lasaiago exeri zitzaion Marlegi zana.

–Ez dezu nigan sinisten –oarrarazi zion exeritakoan.

–Ez –aitortu zion Ezkurak.

–Zerorren zentzuak diotena naikoa ez badezu, zer geiago bear dezu ba?

–Ez dakit.

–Zergatik ez degu ba zerorren zentzuak dasaizutena sinisten?

–Edozein umekerik igiarazten dizkidalako –erantzun zion Ezkurak–. Egospen zail batek gezurzulo biurtzen dizkit: zerorri ere aragi zati egosgaitz edo urdunputx pittinen batek edota lusagar erdi gordiñak sorterazia izatea baleike. Nornai zerala, sukaldetik sortu zatzaidala egingo nuke, ta ez illobitik.

Etzan ba Ezkurra alako sestokaria ere, ta une artan ezin ziteken berez artakoa etzanik olde onez egon. Ezurretaraño zijuakion bildurra nolabait uxatu naiak esan erazten zizkan guziak. Odola izoztu baitzion Mamutzarraren abotsak.

Ixilik gelditu ezkeru, laxter, begi zuri aien mende, bere burua- ren jabe izango etzala nabaitzen zuan. Egoera izugarria! Izugarria- goa oraindik, Mamutzarra egutz bereziduna zalako. Etzuan Ezku- rrak bere gain ezer nabaitzen, baña Marlegi ain geldik egon arren, ille, borlatxo ta txamargaiñekoaren isatsak labe bero batetik irten- dako aize epel batek erabilliko lituken gisa igitzen ikusita, ala sinis- tu bear.

–Agintziri au ikusten? –galdetu zion Ezkurrak aitortutako kariagatik, ta Mamuaren begiratu unetxo batean bederik aldendu naiaz.

–Bai, ikusten det –erantzun zion Mamuak.

–Baña begiratu gabe! –esan zuan Ezkurrak.

–Alare ikusten det.

–Ongi da. Auxe irentsitzea aski nuke ba, ene bizi guzian sor-gin eta malo artetik ez irteteko. Berriketak, berriketa besterik ez!

Au entzun eta, kateari eragiñaz burrunbots izugarria egiñik, Mamutzarrak karraxi ikaragarri bat bota zuan. Ezkurrak besalkiari indar guziz eldu bear izan zion, ez zoratuta bertan erortzeko. Ta izu-laborriz itotzeko zorian gelditu zan, Mamuak, bero balitz bezela, buruko zapia kendu, ta beko matrallezurra bularren gain erori zitzaionean.

Belaunikatu zan Mamuaren aurrean, bi eskuak otoi antzean jarririk, eta,

–Erruki zaite! –deadar egin zuan–. Zergatik minkaizten nazu, iduri zatar izugarri orrek?

–Gizakume lurkoia! –erantzun zion Mamutzarrak–. Nigan sinisten al dezu ala ez?

–Bai, sinisten det! Nola ez? Baña zer dala-ta jetxitzen dira mundura gogoutsak, eta zergatik nere gain ixuri beren beazun guzia?

–Gizakumearen gogo bere kidekoakin anaitasunean bizitzeko sortua da. Eginbear au bizi dala betetze ez duanak eriotz ondoren zigorpean or ibilli bear du jo batera ta jo bestera, emen gertatzen diran gauzak ikusi ta ezer egin eziñik, bizi zala zenbat on egin zeza-kean ezagutzeak biotza erdibitzen diolarik. Ai ene!

Ta berriro, malo-esku zuri meak biurrituaz, Mamutzarrak karraxi bizi sarkor bat bota ta kateots izugarria zabaldu zuan.

–Katepean zaude –esan zion Ezkurrak dardar–. Zergatik?

–Neronek emen bizi nitzala egindako katea da. Estunez estun, kana bete gaur, biar beste kana bete, neronek egin nuan. Nere gogoz gerriko biurtu, eta nere gogo utsez artu nuan nere gain. Kate gaiak arritzen al zaituzte “zu”?

Zuaitz ostotxoaren antzera dardar zegon Ezkurra.

–Zerorrek daramazun katearen azta ta luzera jakin nai al zenituke? –jarraitu zuan Mamuak–. Zazpi Eguarriz aurretik au bezin astun eta gogorra zenun. Ordu ezkerro luzatzen saiatu zera. Ez da ez kate makala zurea.

Ezkurrak bira guzian begiratu zuan, berrogeitamar edo irurogei bat altzairu-ari metro ikusteko bildurrak, baña etzuan ezer arkitu.

–Jagoba! –otoi egin zion–. Marlegi zarra, esaidak guzia! Itz gozoren bat ez al dek neretzat?

–Ezta bat ere –erantzun zuan Mamuak–. Beste ezpain batzuen eginbearra da ori, ta Iñaki, zu baño biotz bigunagoak diranentzat oparo izan oi dira. Nai nuken guzia esaterik ez daukat. Beste itzen batzuek ozta-ozta. Ezin nindeke iñon gelditu, ez daukat iñon astirik galdu ez atsedean artzerik. Nere gogoa idazkol orma artetik irten etzan. Arretaz entzun! Etzan nere gogoa bizi nitzala gure den-da zokotik irten, eta orain jo ta tira egun neketsu luzeenak nere zai dauzkat.

Oi ez bezelako kardaba astunpean arkitzean, Ezkurrak eskuak galtza-patriketan sartzen zituan. Ta Mamutzarraren azkeneko itzak entzun zituanean, orixe egin zuan, begiak beruntz zituala ta lurretik jeiki gabe.

–Patxara aundian artu bearke zenun ba ain arrozgo luzea, Jagoba –esan zuan lasai itxuran, baña zionari alako apaltasun aidea erantsiaz.

–Patxaran!?! –oju egin zuan Mamutzarrak.

–Bai ba, zazpi urte illotzik eta gelditu gabe orron ibiltzeko...

–Gelditu gabe! –birresan zuan Mamuak–. Atsedean gabe, txo-larte txikienik gabe. Beti, beti, barrengo ar zimikopean.

–Ta lasterka ibiltzen al zera? –galdegin zion Ezkurrak.

–Aizeak narabilte.

–Zazpi urtean amaika ibillitxo egingo zenun orduan –oartu zuan Ezkurrak.

Irugarren aldiz Mamutzarraren ojumin biotz-urratzallea entzun zan, eta gau ixiltasuna burrunbots ikaragarri biurtu zuan kate-soñuak.

–O, uztarpeko errukarria! Esku ta oin estun eta katepean euki ta ikusten ez! –zion Mamuak–. Ludi ontan egin lezateken on guzia egiteko, bertako irazaki illezkorrak eunki ta eunkitako lan bizia bear dutela jakin ez! Kristau gogo bateri lurrean dan arte leiaz saiatuta ere, dagokion mallan dezaken on guzia egiteko, bizitza laburregi izango zaiola ez jakitea! Adion bat galtzea, beñere osatu ezina dala ez ezagutzea! Olaxe gertatu zitzaidan neri! A! Olaxe gertatu zitzaidan neri!

–Baña, Jagoba, tratalari bikaña izan etziñan ba? –esan zuan totel-motelka Ezkurrak, Marlegik ziona berari ere ongi ote zijua-kionen zalantzan.

–Tratalaria! –karraxi egin zuan Mamutzarrak, eskuak biurrituaz–. Gizadia beste traturik bai al dago ba ludi ontan! Gizarteko pakea, goi maitasuna, lagun urkoaganako onginaia, errukia, kupida, ona nere tratu bear zuan guzia. Salosketa etzan nere egizko tratu-itxaso zabalean ur tanto bat besterik.

Ta bere oñaze osakaitza kateak balemaio bezela, beregandik al zuan añean urrutiratu, ta astunki lurrera jausten utzi zion.

–Urtearo ontan eroan bear izaten det geiena –jarraitu zuan–. Zergatik ibilli ote nitzan emen, ozte artean begiak beruntz nituala, Iru Erregeak Txiroen Bakalduna jaio zan estalperuntz eraman zituan Izar zerutarra ikusteko beñere goruntz jaso gabe? Ez ote zegon ba ludian argi orrek erakutsi dezakidan beartsu-etxerik?

Mamutzarra negar-marraska artean ikusita, Ezkurra gero ta okerrago arkitzen zan, urduri, dardar.

–Entzun zaidazu! –uju egin zion Mamuak–. Zurekin egoteko eman didaten epea ia amaitu da.

–Belarri uts natzaizu –erantzun zion Ezkurrak–, baña etzaitez nerekin latzegia izan, eta, arren, Jagoba, olerki gaiak alde batera utzi itzazu.

–Ezin dezaikezut zuri gorputzez azaltzen zergatik utzi didaten esan. Len ere, bein baño geiagotan ementxe urbil ibillia nazu.

Ezkurrak kopeteko izerdi otza legortu bear izan zuan, ez bait-zan entzundakoa berririk lasaigarriena.

–Nere nekabide zati bat auxe da –jarraitu zuan Mamutzarrak–: nere adur izugarri oneri iges egiteko egokiera bat oraindik ere zure esku daukazula adieraztera etorria natzaizu gaur.

–Beti adiskide ona zu –esan zuan Ezkurrak–. Eskerrik asko.

–Iru gogouts agertuko zaizkizu –iragarri zion Mamutzarrak.

Ezkurra ao zabalik gelditu zan. Mamutzarrak ainbat zabaldu zuala esan ziteken.

–Aitatu dezun egokiera... ori al da? –galdetu zion abots durduriz.

–Orixe.

–Ba, ba... ez baliatu naiago det.

–Gogouts oiek etortzen ez badira, ez dezu iñola ere nere bide ontatik aldegiten somatuko... Ordu batean etorriko zaizu beraz lenengoa, zaitu zazu.

–Ta ezin al litezke irurak batean etorri, Jagoba? Artara, guzia batean amaituko bailitzake! –erdi-eskatu zion Ezkurrak.

–Biar eta ordu berean azalduko zaizu bigarrena. Ta azkenekoa, irugarren gabeko amabiak jo bezin laxter zurekin izango da. Ez nazu ni geiago ikusiko, ta zerorren ona nai badezu, gure arteko elkarrizketa onetzaz gogoratu beti.

Au esanik, Mamutzarrak musuzapia mai gañetik artu, ta kokotz azpitik burura, len zeukan bezelaxe lotu zuan. Ezkurrak ikusi gabe nabaitu zuan bestea zer ari zan, matalezurrak elkartzekoan ortzak egin zuten kurrizkaz. Eta begiak jaso zituanean, katea besotik zintzilik artuta, zutik arkitu zuan beste mundutik etorritako adiskide ura.

Agerketa atzeraka-atzeraka urrundun zan.

Oinkada bakoitzak leioa neurri berean irikitzen zualarik, au zabal-zabalik arkitu zan ura leioratu zanean.

Ezkurrari, keñuz, urbiltzeko eskatu zion. Eta onek orrela egin zuan. Urbil xamartu zitzaionean, Marlegiren Mamutzarrak, gelditzeko esango balio bezela, eskua jaso zuan, Ezkurrak agindua bete-

rik [, gelditu egin zan²]: bildurrak eta zalantzak esaneko biurtu baitzuten.

Mamuairen keñuak aizea murmur itzalez, atsekabe marmario itun itsasgaitzez, murrin eta samintasun intziri eleszaillez bete zutela zirudin. Mamutzarrak Ezkurrarekin batera entzun zituan pixka batean, eta gero gaua betetzen zutenakin bat egin zuan bere abotsa, illunpe beltz artan ezkutatuaz.

Jakinaiak bultzata, Ezkurra bere latzikara menderatu ta leioratu zan, kanpora begiratzeko.

Lañoak, aruntz-onuntz intziri bizian, gelditu gabe zebiltzan mamuz egiña zirudin. Marlegiren Mamutzarra bezela, katepean arkitzen ziran guziak, pillaka elkarri lotuta batzuek, banaka bestekak, baña guzi-guziak kateakin lotuta.

Ezkurrak mamu-sail artan ezagun asko arkitu zitun. Bere adiskiderik miñenetako bat Mamutzar egiñik ikusi zuan: txonkatillari lotuta diru-kutxa izugarri bat zeraman, eta an, Ezkurraren leio aurreko ate opoan, aur bat besoetan zuala exerita zegon andre errukarri bateri lagundu eziñak negar egiñerazten zion. Gogouts minkaiztu aien zigorra orixe baitzan: gizarteko zorigaitzak gozatu nai, ta iñola ezin gozatu.

Bat batean, lañoak estali edota berak laño biurturik (Ezkurrak ezin zezakean ez au ta ez ura esan), mamu ta abots itzali ziran... eta gaua, Ezkurra etxeratu zanean bezelaxe gelditu zan.

Leioa itxi ta Mamutzarra sartu zan atea aztertu zuan. Berak utzi bezelaxe arkitzen zan, ta maratilla iñork ikutu gabe zegon.

Berriro, “Ergelkeriak!” esaten asi zan; baña asi bakarrik orde... “Er...” esanda mututu zan beintzat. Eta biotzikarak bear-tuta, edota egun osoko nekepean, edo Beste Mundualdeko ibillaldi-diagatik, edo Mamutzarrarekiko berriketaldia zala ta (nik oso berandu zalako esango nuke), batere erantzi gabe oeratu ta zerraldo gelditu zan.

² Parentesi zuzenaren barrukoa edizio prestatzaileak erantsi du. Hala behar duela ematen du.

BIGARREN AAPALDIA

Ona beintzat lenbizikoa...

Ezkurak begiak iriki zituanean, logela-ormak bukatu eta leioa nun asten zan etzuan jeiki gabe esaterik, ain illun zegon guzia.

Kata-begiak zabal-zabalik, illunpe ura argitu nairik saio bizian ari zala, odei artetik dardarka zetorkion erlojuaren abotsak ordu aurretiko deia entzunarazi zion.

Arriturik entzun zituan sei, zazpi, zortzi... amabi tantako. Amabiak! Ordu bitan oeratu, ta amabiak? Erlojua zoratuta zebillen! Otzak kurpil arteko koipea jelatu ta zer ordutan bizi zan etzekiala utzia zuan noski. Amabiak!?

Bere oe-buruko erlojutxoaren ordukia ikutu zuan, ezkildorrekoari zer ordu zan esateko ustean. Baña au ere, bixi-bixi, amabi tintineko jo arteraño etzizaion ixildu.

–Ezin liteke! –esan zuan Ezkurak–. Egun osoan lo egon ote naiz ba? Ala eguzkiak atzerapenen bat izan ote du? Eguardiko amabiak ote dira?

Au gerta ote zeikenen zalantzak asaldatuta, oetik jeiki, ta leioratu zan aztamuka. Leiarretako lausoa besoakin garbitu bear izan zuan zerbait ikusteko. Ta ala ere, etzuan gauza aundirik ikusi: lañoa len bezin lodi, otza len baño ere gogorrago kalean, eta bere kezka egia izan balitz, gauak egun-argiarekin egunero oi duan burrukan goizetik lenengo aldiz menderatu izan balu, jende artean nabaituko zan izu-larririk ez. Onetxek etzuan gutxi lasaitu: izar artean onelakorik gerta izan balitz, “Zortzi egun barru Ezkurratar Iñakiri onenbeste laurleko ordainduko dizkiot” zioten ainbat eta ainbat agirik zer indar egin zezateken ba?

Ezkurra berriro oeratu zan. Eta, alegiñak alegin, etzion gertaera ari argibiderik arkitu. Zenbat eta geiago oldoztu, are ta geiago nastutzen zuan, eta ezkutuki ura bere adimenetik uxatu nairik saiatzen bazan, are ta buruauste geiago ematen zion.

Marlegiren Mamutzarrak betetzen zion irudimena. Guzia ametsa izan zala sinistra jartzen zan bezin laster, irudimenak lengo gertaeretara itzul egiten zion, eta berriro-berriro bidekurutzean arkitzen zan. Amets ala egi?

Tankera ortantxe arrapatu zuan urrengo ordu aurretiko iru laurdenekoak. Iru laurden aietxek oroitarazi zioten Mamutzarrak iragarritakoa: ordu batean etortzekoa zuan lenengo ikerlea, alegia.

Azti-ordu ura esna zaitzea erabaki zuan. Eta etzitzaion zail izan: ez baitzeukan atadiko aizeak baño logale geiago.

Baña bai luzea ordu laurden ura! Ustegabe lo kuluxken bat egin, eta ordu bata jo ote zuan ere oldoztu erazi zion. Alakorik batean ordea, ezkil otsa iritxi zitzaion.

–Ding! Dong!

–Amabi ta laurdenak –esan zuan Ezkurrak.

–Ding! Dong!

–Amabi t’erdiak –jarraitu zuan.

–Ding! Dong!

–Ordu bata laurden gutxiago.

–Ding! Dong!

–Ordu bata –egin zuan garaile–. Ona emen ordu bata! –Ta ezkildorreak etzuan oraindik ordurik jo. Baña alaxe zan, ordu bata.

–Dannnnnn!

Eta etziran oraindik odei artetik bialdutako dardarots sakon mudurriak ixildu, eta gela guzia argitu (baña nola!), ta oeko errezelak zabaldu ziran.

Bai, ben-benetan ari natzaizute. Esku batek zabaldu zizkion errezelak. Ta ez oiñaldekoak, ezta ere burukoak, baizik ezker-esku-bikoak, albotakoak. Oetxek zabaldu zitzaizkion, eta Ezkurra izututa erdi eseri zan... eta ni, ementxe, urbil naukazun bezelaxe, ira-

kurle maite, ementxe zure aldamenean bainago ni, onelaxe, aurrez aurre arkitu zuan goitiko gogoki arrigarri bat.

Arrigarria zan, izan ere, aren irudia: aur bat zirudin, edo obeto begiratuta, aur biurtutako agure zarra ote zan esan zitekean. Bizkar gañera zetorkion illea elurra bezin zuria zan, baña arpegia zimur ipitxik gabea gazteen gazteenak baño labaiñagoa zuan. Beso luze ta zaintsuak zituan, eta beso ta esku oi ez bezin indartsuak ziruditen. Zanko ta oin utsik zegon. Soinpeko zuri bat zeraman, gerriko dirdizari labain batekin gorputzari lotuta. Gorosti makil bat negu-ikur bezela eskuan zualarik, soinpekoa udara-lorez apainduta zekarren. Baña aundiena, burutik sortzen zitzaion argi-izpi bizi uraxe zan: nola argitzen zituan zoko guziak! Argi ura bear etzuanerako izango zan noski besapean zeraman kandel-itzal-ki antzeko txano ura.

Etzitzaion, alare, begiuts egiñik zegon Ezkurrari doairik arri-garriena ori iruditu, nai ala agertu edo ezkutatzeko zuana baizik. Irudia beso edo zanko batekin agertzen zitzaion batzuetan, ogei zankokin bestetan; bizkar gañean bururik gabe edo buru uts gorputzik gabe ere ikusi al izan zuan... eta gero, osoro ezkututzen zitzaion, berriro len bezin garbi ta oso azaltzeko.

–Iragarritako Gogoutsa al zera? –galdetu zion azkenik Ezkurrak.

–Alaxe naiz.

Abots legun eta atsegiña, baña ixil ta mea, urrutitik, oso urrutitik letorkenen baten antzekoa.

–Nor zaitut ba? –jarraitu zuan Ezkurrak.

–Igarotako-Eguarri-Mamua natzaizu.

–Guzien Eguarri irudian al zatoz?

–Ez, zuri dagozkizunen Mamua naiz.

Zergatik etzekiala, Gogouts ura txanoa jantzita ikusteko gogo bizia sortu zitzaion Ezkurrari. Ta ala, arren oztu etzedin, bere etxean balego bezelaxe, txapela jazteko eskatu zion.

–Nola! –erantzun zion Mamuak–. Ene argi izpi ori onen aguro itzali nai ote zenuke zure esku loi oiekin? Ez al det aski, amai-

gabeko urtetan sudurğañaño sartuta erabilli bear dedan txano au, zure grña zitalakin eundua izatea?

Gaizki esanak barkatzeko ta bere gogoaz bazan burutsik egon zitekela apalki esan ondoren, Ezkurra zertara etorri ote zan galdetzen ausartu zan.

–Zerorren onak nakar! –erantzun zion Gogoutsak.

Eskerrak eman zizkion Ezkurrak. Baña, berekiko, gau osoan pake-pakean lotan utzita, on aundiagoa baizik ez ote zukean zion.

Gogoutsak bere oldozpenak “entzun” balizkio bezela,

–Zu gaizkatu naiak nakar! Kontu beraz! –esan zion.

Eta izketan ari zala, eskua luzatu ta Ezkurra gerritik artuaz,

–Jeiki ta jarrai akidazu! –esan zion.

Etziran ez eguraldia ez garaia etxetik irteteko egokienak, are ta gutxiago oe goxo epela utzi ta beroneuria utsaren azpitik zebilen kale zear oskixil eta txirikin utsez sudurjario arekin ibiltzeko. Gogoutsari au guzia adierazi naia alperrikakoa izaki ordea, ezbaitezegon onen aginduari uzkur egiterik: Gogoutsaren esku indarra biguña baña menderagaitza izaki.

Jeiki zan beraz. Baña laguntzallea leioruntz zijuakiola nabaiturik, onen jazkiai eldu ta arren egin zion:

–Ilkorra naizela! Erori nindekela!

–Au baño eginkizun zailtxiagorik bete zenezake, nik nere eskua ementxe jarriarekin –erantzun zion Gogoutsak, eskua Ezkurraren biotz gañean jarririk.

Eta beste itzik esan gabe, orma zear igazi ziran, ezker-eskubi soroak zituztela, bidezabal luze batean arkiturik. Uririk etzan ageri. Illuntasun eta lañorik ere ez. Neguko egun argi ta otza zan. Lurra elurpean bero billa gordea zuten.

–Jaun aundia! –esan zuan Ezkurrak eskuak baturik–. Emen azia naiz ni! Aurtzaroan ementxe bizitua!

Gogoutsak gozaro begiratu zion. Onen ikutuak, milla urrin gozo zekaizkion Ezkurrari, aspaldidanik aztutako gogai, itxaropen, amets, poz eta atsekabe urriñak.

–Ezpañak dar-dar dagizute –esan zion Mamuak–. Ta... masaillean zer dezu?

Abots durduriz, pikor bat zuala erantzun, eta berak zerizkion tokira eramateko eskatu zion.

–Bide au ezagutzen? –galdetu zion Gogoutsak.

–Bai orixe! Begiak itxututa ere zuzen asko juango nitzake.

–Ta alare onenbeste urtean etzera beronetzaz oroitu. Jarrai zagun.

Eta bidean arkitzen zituan esi, ate, zuaitz, guzia ezaguturik jarraitu zuten. Urruti batean erritxo koxkor bat agertu zitzaieten: ibai batek karabilka mun egiten zion zubitxoia ta eliza ederki ikusten zituzten.

Gazte talde bat onuntz zetorkien: zalditxo koxkor gañean ziran batzuek, besteak gurditan, eta zarata ederra zekarten. Guztiak olde ona ageri zuten, eta beren alaitasunak inguruko zelaiak ere betetzen zituan.

–Len izandako gauzen irudiak dituzu –esan zion Gogoutsak–, ez gaituzte ikusten.

Gero ta urbillago gazte alai aiek. Ezkurak banaka-banaka guziak ezagutu zituan. Ikusi utsak barrena ikutzen etzion ba! Zerk bizitu zizkion biotz taupadak? Zerk begiak diz-diz alaiz piztu? Bata besteai, nork bere bidea artzerakoan opa oi zizkien “Eguarri zoriontsuak” atsegin arrigarri bat banatzen etzioten ba! Zer ziran ba beretzat “Eguarri zoriontsuak”? Ezertarako izan al zituan beñere?

–Ez da ikastetxea utsik gelditu –esan zion Mamuak–, lagun guziak aldegin diote ta mutiko bat antxe dago bakar-bakarrik.

Negar-intziriz, Ezkurak bazekiala erantzun zion.

Bidezabala utzirik, bidetxigor bat artu, ta buztiñerre gorritz egindako etxe batera eldu ziran. Kosko gañean aizeorratz bat eta ezkillak ikusten zitzaizkion. Etxe aundia zan, baña oso baldarra; ta gela zikin, orma busti lizun, leio txirtxillatu, ta, an-emenka esko-bara ustelak adierazten zuten, iñor gutxik begiratua. Kortan olloak kakaraka zegiten, eta zaltegi ta aterpeak belarrez josiak zeuden.

Etzeukan barrenak ere inoizko aunditasun itxura txikienik: eskaratz beltz artatik, atea zabalik zeuzkaten gela zarretara begi-

ratuta, aundi bezin otz eta txiro arkitu zituzten beintzat. Lur busti usai bat nabaitzen zuan sudurmintzak: guzia larrugorrian bezela zegon, eta edonori “goizean-goiz jeiki ta otordu exkaxa” bururatzen zitzaizkion ura ikusirik.

Sargela zear, Gogoutsa ta Ezkurra atze aldeko ate batera eldu ziran: atea iriki zitzaiotenean, txaki luze, murrin, uts bat ikusi zuten; ikastetxe-mai ta alki illarak uts ez ezik otz, ta, alki aietako batean, mutiko bat bakarrik, su urri baten inguruan, irakurriaz zegon.

Ezkurra alki batean jausi zan, bere aurtzaroko bakartasunak zapalduta.

Etxeko otsik txikienak, erdi urtutako odijela tantoak, aizeak zebizkin lertxun osto mur-murak, zirrikitutako ate baten kanke-takoak biotz samurgarri izan zitzaizkion Ezkurrari, ta onek, aspaldian ez bezela, negar egin zuan mara-mara.

Gogoutsak besoa ikutu ta buru-belarri irakurketan zekusten mutikoa erakutsi zion.

Bat-batean arrotz itxurako gizon bar agertu zan: bai ederki ordea! Leioan, kanpo aldetik zegon, aizkora gerrian ta egurrez zamatutako asto bat lepagoroikitik zuala.

–Oi!, ara Ali-Baba! –zion zoraturik Ezkurrak–. Ali-Baba maitea da ta! Bai, bai! Oroituko ez naiz ba.

Bai, noizbaiteko Eguarri egun batean, mutiko orixe bakar-bakarrik gelditu zan egun batean, orain bezelaxe, “etorri zitzaion” lenengo aldiz. Mutiko gizajoa!

–Eta ara Balendin eta Orson bere anaia –jarraitu zuan Ezkurrak–, ara, ara nun dijuazen! Eta Alako!... Damasko atetan zerraldo utzi zuten ura, ez al dezu ikusten? Eta Sultanaren otseña. Erraldoiak aboz-bera jarrita... orra or! Ederki egin dio gañera. Ederki. Bakaldun-alabarekin ezkonduko zan ba?

Ezkurra, oi zituan arazo latzen antzik ere etzuten umekeri aiek, ben-ben, algara ala malko artean adierazi niaz ikusi balute, a zer parrak uriko lagun-artean!

–Ara, ara Txorizlaria! –uju egin zuan–. Orlegi ta ori, letxu antzeko zerbait galdor bezela duala! “Robinson gizajoa!” ala omen

zion ugarteari bira emanda etxera etorri zanean, “Robinson giza-joa! Nun izan aiz?”. Gizona, ametsetan ari zalakoan; baña ez, Txorizlaria izaki... Ta ara orain, ara Domeka³, lats aldera eroa bezela lasterka. Eup! Adi zak!

Eta bat-batean, bere izakerari etzegokion eran abotsa jetxi, ta bere irudi zuanari begira,

–Mutiko gizajoa! –esan eta negarrari eraso zion.

Malkoak legoturik, “Ai al baneza!” zion; andik laster, “baña berandu da!”.

–Zer dezu? –galdetu zion Gogoutsak.

–Ezer ez, ezer ez –erantzun zuan Ezkurrak–. Bart Eguarri abes-
titxo bat entzunarazi zidan mutiltxo ari zeredozer emango nioke-
la, orixe zan guztia.

Parriritzi keñu bat nabaitu zitzaion Gogoutsari, ta, eskua igi-
tuaz, esan zuan:

–Beste Eguarri bat ikus zagun.

Ezkurraren irudia azi, ta ikastetxea illundu ta narrastu zan. Ormak zirritu, leiarrak pitzatu, sapaiari igeltsua bazijuakion abe-
ak agerian utziaz. Ezkurrak etzezaken ura guzia nola gertatu zan
esan; baña bai “orduan” ere orrelaxe gertatu zala. Ta berriro lagun
guziak oporrean ziralako, bera bakar-bakarrik zegola.

Etzan ordea lengo artan bezela irakurtzen ari; batera ta beste-
ra katamotz itxuran zebillen.

Ezkurrak Gogoutsari begiratu, ta gero, buruari eragiñaz, estu-
-estu ateruntz zuzendu zituan begiak. Iriki zan atea, ta bera baño
gazteagoko nexka bat sartu zan, ta musu ta laztan artean, “anai
maite” esaten zion.

–Etxera eramateko zure billa etorri naiz, anai maite –zion txa-
loka ta parrez–. Guazen etxera! Etxera! Etxera!

–Etxera, Garbiñe? –galdetu zuan mutillak.

–Bai, Iñaki! –esan zion arrebak pozaeren pozez–. Etxera, baña
betiko. Aitak len baño askoz geiago maite gaitu, ta gure etxeak

³ Jakina den bezala, Defoeren pertsonaia “Ostiral” zen, ez “Domeka” (Edizio pres-
tatzailearen oharra).

zerua dirudi. Lengo gau batean oera nijuala, ain maitakiro itz egin zidan, zuri etxera etortzen utziko ote zizun galdetu nion; eta baietz, etortzeko, erantzun zidan. Eta ona zalburdi batekin zure billa etorri. Gaurtik aurrera, gizon bat izango zera, ta etzera geiago onera etorriko. Baña lenago, a zer Eguarriak bota bear ditugun!

–Anderetxo egiñik zaude, Garbiñe –esan zion mutillak.

Parrez, nexkak kopeta ikutu nai izan zion, baña etzuan nai zuanik iritxi, txikiegia izaki. Alare oin muturretan jarri, ta musu eman zion, eta gero, aurra izaki, eskutik artu ta ateruntz eraman zuan. Mutillak atzera egiteko asmorik etzuan azaldu.

Abots izugarri bat entzun zan orduan eskaratzean: “Ezkurra- ren jazki-kutxa jetxi” zion. Eta bereala sartu zan irakaslea bera. Maitasun ankerra zerioten begi aiek, eta eskua eman zionean, Ezkurra gaztea oso larritu zuan. Gero, leotz itxurako gelatxo batera eraman zituan anai-arrebak: ura gela ondatur, bai otza uraxe, lurtamu ta ludibirlak ere bero eske zeuden. Ondo bataiatutako botilla ardoa ta noizbait egunekoa izandako okore bat atera, ta eskeñi zizkien. Burdizaiari ere neskata mear batek eraman zion “zera” artatik baso bat, baña onek, lengo upeletik ateratakoa bazan, barau bizian egon naiago lukela esan omen zion.

Ezkurra gaztearen kutxa burdian jarri zutenean, irakasleari agur egin eta igo ziran anai-arrebak, jelak kurpilpean zegizkin karrakada artean etxeruntz abiatuaz.

–Neskatil samurra bai, Garbiñe. Aizetxo batek etengo zukean lilitxo antzekoa –esan zuan Gogoutsak–, baña ura biotza!

–Alaxe zan. Zan bezela!

–Oker ez banago, ezkondu ta gero il zan. Eta ondorengorik utzi al zuan?

–Bat –erantzun zion Ezkurrak.

–Egia. Zure illoba.

Oroipen onek goibeldu zuan Ezkurra, ta legorki,

–Bai –esan zuan.

Ez bat eta ez bi, esate baterako ikastetxetik irten gabe, uri aundi bateko kalerik ederrenetakoan arkitu ziran. Oñezko ta zaldizko, burdi ta gurdi bazebillen antxe iñon ibiltzekotan. Jaki-saletxeai

begiratutxo bat aski zan, Eguarri bezpera zala ezagutzeko. Gau betea, ta kaleak argiz ornituak.

Alako salerostetxe baten ate aurrean gelditu zitzaion Gogoutsa, ia ezagutzen zuan galdetuaz.

–Bai orixe! –erantzun zion Ezkurrak–. Emen ikasi nuan nik nere bizibide bear zuana!

Sartu ziran. Galestarren tankerako illorde bat, sapairañño irixteko oso gutxi falta zuan mai gañean makurtuta lanean ikusi zuanerako:

–Baña Lertxundi jauna da ta! Jainko maitea! Lertxundi berbera!

Lertxundi zarrak idazkortza utzi, ta erlojuari begiratu atsegin batekin zazpiak zirala ikusirik, txamarra ondo lotu ta par antzean dei alai au egin zuan:

–Ep! Ia onera! Jon! Iñaki!

Ezkurra gizon egiñik azaldu zan, bere lagunarekin.

–Jon Larzabaldarra! –esan zion Ezkurrak Gogoutsari–. Jainkoaren izen deuna! Berbera da ta! Jon gizajoa! Zenbat maite nindun. Jauna!, Jauna!

–Tira, mutillak –zion Lertxundik–, gaurko naikoa dezute. Eguarri bezpera degu gaur, Jon. Eguarri, Iñaki. Ia ba atek aidean ixten dituzuten. Tira. –Ta bizkarreko bana eman zien.

Aguro? Bai azkar bezela ere atek itxi. Ate-zatiak bizkarrean artu, ta irten ziran. Bat!, bi!, iru!, orra beren tokian!; lau!, bost!, sei!, burniagak jarrita!; zazpi!, zortzi!, bederatzi!, eta, amabirañño esan baño len, an zituan biak aurrean, lasterka-moxal antzera arnaska.

–Bapo –esan zien Lertxundi zarrak bere alkitik lurrera bizkor jetxiaz–. Baztertu ditzagun orain traste zar guziak denda osoa garbi gelditu dedin. Ia mutillak. Ekin, Jon! Jo, Iñaki!

Traste zarrak baztertu! Denda osoa ere laster mugituko zuten bi mutil sendo aiek, Lertxundi zarraren begirapean! Minutu batean guzia egiña.

Bildu ziteken guzia geiago bear ez balitz bezela baztertu ondoren, lurra busti ta garbitu zuten, muturra moztu zien argi-biurtuai,

ikatzez bete zuten sukalde-zuloa, eta denda gelditu zan bero, atsegin, negu-gau baterako dantza-aretorik egokiena bezela.

Xirribikari bat bere eresingi ta guzti sartu zan, eta, Lertxundi zarraren lan-maiean igota, asi zan bere ereskiña neurrian jartzen. Berrogei katuren marraska zirudin aretxek.

Lertxundiren emaztea etorri zan gero ezker-eskubi irriparrak banatuaz. Lertxundi andereñoak (Eleneren alabak bezela, iru), irri-par uts eta maitagarriak benetan, amarekin batera eldu ziran. Aspaldidanik, iru neskatil aien mende, biotza apurtuta bizi ziran sei mutil gazte, zegokien bezela oien ondoren azaldu ziran. Eta gero, burrundaran, Lertxundi zarraren otsein guziak, neska ta mutil, iskanbilla bizian... eta etxeko neskamea bere lengusuarekin, bai, an ixkiñako ogigiñarekin, ta sukaldaria esnezalearekin, bere arrebaren lagun aundia baitzan. Aurreko mandataria ere (gizajoak otordutan gorriak ikusi bear izaten ote zituan zioten) an azaldu zan, belarriak gorri-gorri zekarzkin, etxebarrunbeko mirabe ziztrin baten atzean gorde eziñik.

Sartu ziran ba, bata bestearen atzetik, larri-larri oek, lotsagabe aiek, oso gutxi itzontzi, bildurri geienak. Eta dantzaldi bat antolatu nairik, nor norekin elkartzen ziran. Baña buru jarritako bikoak dantza-neurria galtzen zuan, eta dantzan asteko besteak bukatu zai bezela nabaitzen zuten, nasketarik aundiena sortuaz, guziak buru biurtu ziran arte.

Lertxundi zarrak gelditu zituan guziak orduan, eta xirribikariari egoki iruditu zitzaion garagardo pitxar bat ustutzeko.

Etzan ordea xirribikaria geldik egoteko jaioa itxuraz, eta ekin zion berriro, ez nekatuta dagonaren antzera, orduantxe sartu berria litzaken ereslari “prexko” bat bezela baizik. Bere eginbearra bete ala bertan il nai zuala esan ziteken.

Dantzan jarraitu zuten, eta txolartetan, okore ta edaribizi, idi errea, piper-opil eta garagardo ugari. Baña unerik ederrena, Lertxundi ta bere emaztea, garaiari zegokion eresi otsean, dantzarien buru jarri ziran uraxe izan zan. Dantzari guziak beren ospea ez galtzeagatik, zezazkiten era zail eta biurrienak atera zituzten, baña alperrik, Lertxundi ta bere emaztearentzat etzan dantzakera zallik.

Ez det gero nik gezurrik esaten. Eta dantzirudi guziak egindakoan, amaitzeko, kate bikoitza osatu zutenean, ango alaitasun eta zarata etziran nolanaikoak izan.

Amaiketan amaitu zan dantza. Lertxundi ta bere emaztea atean ezker-eskubi jarri ziran, eta guziai banaka-banaka eskua eman eta bakoitzari Eguarri zoriontsu opariz, dantzariak agurtu zituzten.

Kanpokoak aldegin zutenean, bi mutillai “Zorionak” esan eta beren dendatze-erakusmaipeko oatzetara bialdu zituzten.

Au guzia ikusten zegola, Ezkurra ero baten gisa aritu zan. Guzia gogoratzen zuan, guziarekin orduantxe gertatzen ari balitz bezela poz artzen zuan, eta ezin geldik egona nabaitzen zitzaion... Jonekin bakarrik gelditu zan arte, etzan konturatu Gogoutsa, bere burutik sortzen zan izpi biziaren argira, berari begira zeukala. Arek ekarri zuan bere onera.

–Ez da ba ezer asko –esan zion Gogoutsak– gazte oiek guziak oinbeste eskertzeko.

–Ez da ezer asko! –birresan zuan Ezkurrak.

Gogoutsak bi mutillen arteko elkarrizketa entzuteko esan zion. Biak, Lertxundi noraño jaso etzekitela ari ziran gizajoak. Eta bereala Gogoutsak jarraitu zuan:

–Ez al derizkiozu? Guzia amabost bat duro kostako zitzaion, ez? Zer da ori orrek duan añarentzat? Zer, onenbeste eskertzeko?

–Ez da ordea ori –erantzun zion Ezkurrak, bere noizbaiteko irudia izketan ari balitz bezalaxe–. Ez da ori. Bere esku baitzeukan gure poz ala atsekabea; bere esku, gure lana alaigarri ala neketsu egitea, eginbearra astun ala arin biurtzea. Etzaio diruari begiratu bear. Itz batek, eskeintza batek, esan ere ezin leiken uskeri batek zorion osoa ekarri oi digu askotan. Zer dijuakigu ordean diru asko ala gutxi kosta zaion jakitea? Zorion apurrik txikienak dirutza aundiak aña balio baitu.

Gogoutsaren begiratuak ixildu erazi zuan.

–Zer dezu? –galdetu zion onek.

–Ezer ez, ezer ez.

–Ez?

–Ez ba; nere idazlariari itz bi esango nizkiokela alegia, al banu. Besterik ez.

Ezkurra izandakoak dendatzeko argiak itzali zituan, eta gurekin dabilena Gogoutsa lagun zuala kalean arkitu zan berriro.

–Astia badijuakit –esan zuan Gogoutsak–. Gabiltzan azkar.

Etzion ba au ñori esan, baña Ezkurak, bereala, urte batzuek geroago bere irudi zana aurrean arkitu zuan. Sasoiko gizona orduko Ezkurra: etzitzaizkan oraindik geroagoko gogortasun eta zailtasuna arpegi-azaleratzen, baña kardaba ta zikoizkeriaren lenengo aztarrenak nabaitu zitzaizkioken. Bere begiratu larriak biotza menderatu bear zion griña asegaitzaren kezka agertzen zuan.

Etzegon bakarrik. Beltzez jantzitako neska gazte ille-gorrixka zeukan aldamenean. Gogoutsaren argi izpiak dirdir zegin gajoari arpegia bustitzen zioten malkoetan.

–Ez dizu ajolik –zion maitakiro–. Zuri ez dizu ajolik. Beste Maitagarri batek bota nau zure biotzetik. Atsekabe unetan, nik egin izango nuan bezela, alaitu, ta aurrerako indarra eman al badezaizuke... zer egingo zaio ba?

–Baña zer Maitagarri ta zer berriketa dira oek? –galdetzen zuan Ezkurak.

–Urrezko Irudi ori, ori da nere ordezkoa.

–Ori da buruz jokatzea! Txirotasuna baño gauza gogorragorik ez, eta aberastu naiak egiñerazten duana ain gogorki arpegira bota bear.

–Besteak zer esango dutenari begira bizi zera. Orretzek bakarrik ikutzen zaitu. Zure biotzaren ametsik zindoenak banaka-banaka ezkututzen ikusi ditut, aberastu naiak bakarrik iraun du: etzera beste ezertarako bizi. Aberastu, aberastu, dirua pillatu... aberastu... besterik ez.

–Ta onelaxe balitz ere, zer? Ez al da gizon begiratuari dago-kiona? Ez al naiz zuretzat lengoa?

Neskatxak burua ibilli zuan.

–Ez al naiz lengoa?

–Gure ezkondu naia aspaldikoa da. Elkarri itza eman genionean, biak txiroak giñan, eta ez genun zoriona diru irudian ikusten.

Biak lan eginda ederki bizi gindezkela uste genuen. Gaur “zu” besterik zera, ez “ordukoa”.

–Orduan mukizu bat bainitzan.

–Zerorren biozkadak lengoa etzerala diote, ongi dakizu zerorrek ere. Ni lengoa berbera naiz. Gure biotzak bat egiñik zebiltzanean zorion iturri zitzaidana, gaur, nor bere aldetik dijuazkigunean, atsekabe bide garratz biurtu zait. Zenbat eta zenbat bira eman dizkiot buruan oneri! Ezin esan ala! Ondo pentsatu ondoren, gure artean ezer izan ez balitz añezan utzi nai zaitudala esateak naikoa adieraziko dizu noski.

–Baña nik orrelakorik eskatu al dizut ba?

–Itzez, beñere ez.

–Nola ba?

–Zure izakera, oiturak, gogoa trukatuaz. Nere maitasunak egiñerazten zizkizun gauza guziak, gaur beste itxaropen bakar batek egiñerazten dizkizunakin trukatuaz. Gure artean lengo lokarririk ez balitz –jarraitu zuan neskak, bulartsu–, gaur nere maitasunik eskatuko ote zidazuke? Neregatik ezer egingo ote zenuke? Nik ezetz uste det.

Emaztegaiaren oar zuzenak egi utsa zerioten arren, zeuzkan indar apurrak batu, ta,

–Onela jarduteko arrazoirik ba al dezu? –galdetu zion.

–Naiago nuke ba bestera itz egin! –erantzun zion neskatxak–. Jaungoikoak bakarrik daki zein gogorra izan zaidan egia jakitea. Baña, ia, erantzun zaidazu: gaur andregaiak aukeratu bear bazenu, diru apurririk ere ez duan neskatxa bat autuko ote zenuke? Guzia urre biurtzen ez dezu ba! Ta zure urre maitasun bakar ori zapal-duta, ala egingo bazenu ere, ez ote ziñake biar ez bada etzi damutuko?... Bai noski! Onexegatik zure itzaren jabe utzi nai zaitut. Zu ziñan “ura” asko maite bainuan.

Ezkurrak zerbait esan nai arren, neskatxak jarraitu zuan:

–Nere erabakiak atsekabetu egingo zaitu agian gaur. Onela sinistu nai det, atzo elkarri genion maitasun oroiz. Baña, laster, nere arrastorik ez dezu biotzean gordeko: norik daki garaiz uxatu-

tako amets bat bezela ez ote naizen izango? Zoriona opa dizut alare, zerorrek aututako bizibide ortan!

–Aski det, Gogouts! Ez det ezer geiago ikusi nai! –zion Ezkurrak–. Etxera, eraman nazazu etxera. Zergatik onela minkaiztu?

–Beste ikusgai bat. Bat bakarra –esan zuan Gogoutsak.

–Ez! –oiu egin zuan Ezkurrak–. Ez! Etzadazu arren ezer geiagorako erakutsi!

Baña Gogouts gozagaitzak, bi besotatik eldu, ta beste atal au ikusi erazi zion.

Etzeuden lengo tokian. Gela txukun bat zan aurrean zeukate-na, ez zabal eta apaiñegia, baña lasai, atsegiña beintzat. Sutondotan, neska gazte eder bat zegon: lengo uraxe zirudin, eta Ezkurrak berbera zala esango zuan, lengoa, aren aurrean, etxekoandre egitiñik ikusi ez balu. Etzan, ez, neska gazte ura, Ezkurraren andregai izana, aren alaba baizik.

Ura iskanbilla etxe artakoa! Ezkurrak konta ala aur bai baitzegon. Eta bakoitzak berrogeiren zarata sortzen zuan.

Ardalla bizi arek zoratu bear gorrian jarri zuan Ezkurra; baña etxe artan etzuan iñork aintzakotzat artzen: ama-alabak parra lasai egiten zuten beintzat zoro aien artean. Azkenik alaba ere asi zan jostaketan, eta gaizto pilla ura bere gañera etorri zitzaion.

Nor izan ziteken aur aietako bat! Ez nuan nik noski berak egin ziotena egingo, bai zera: aren ille kixkurra nastu?, aren oñetakotxo politak atera?, ez!, nere bizia bilijuakit ere! Baña bere begi eder aiek bertatik bertara ikusi, ille-zizur aietako bat kontuz ikutu, bere itz eztsua entzun: aur baten askatasuna gizon baten ezaguerarekin, nork zezaken!

Atea jo zuten, eta guziak, neska erdian zutela, atean ziran aitarren billa. Onek gizon bat zekarren, Eguarri-jostallu ta sariakin.

Langille gizajoa, ia zapaldu zuten! Alki gañetara igota, patrikarañoko guziak miatu zizkioten: gañean zituana atera, ta onek besarkatu, arek bizkarreko bat eman, eta pozaren pozez zankezurretan ostiko bat edo beste ere artua izan bear zuan. Bezua bakoitza karraxika artzen zuten! Ura izua jaki-dendatik ekarritako indio-

llarra⁴ plater ta guzi jan, eta txikia paderari kaskegin naiean ari zala oarturik! Baña ura lasaitasuna indiollarra ta platera azaldu ta paderak puskarik falta etzuala ikusirik! Ura poza! Aur aien esker ona! Ori zorakeria! Ezin esan ala! Aur eta biotz, malladian gora igo ziran: aiek, logelara, ta au, poz-odeietara... Baña aiek eroturik igo ziran arren, laster menderatu zituan “Martin itxuak”.

Nagusia, bere alaba besotik artuta, sutondoan emaztearen aldamenean exeri zanean, Ezkurra adi-adi gelditu zitzaion. Eta ain neskaxa ederrak, bere negua udaberri biurturik, “aita” deitu izan zezakiola oldozteak malkoak gogo-leioetaratu zizkion, ikusmena lausotuaz, lanbrutuaz.

–Josune! –esan zion emazteari irriparez senarrak–. Ire lagun zar bat ikusi diñat gaur arratsaldean.

–Bai...?

–Ez denala nor zan asmatzen?

–Baietz! –erantzun zion parrez–. Ezkurra... Iñaki...

–Ber-bera. Bere lantegi aurretik pasa naun, eta ederki ikusi diñat, zursareak jasoak baitzeuzkanan. Bere baltzukidea gaxo zeukan, entzun diñatenez. Iltzen baden, bakar-bakarrik gelditu bear din gizajoak.

–Gogouts! Arren, eraman nazazu emendik –esan zion Ezkurrak abots larriz.

Eta Gogoutsari begiratzera koan, len ikusitako arpegi guzien marrak aren musuan arkiturik, burruka bizian ekin zion,

–Utzi! Utzi nazazu! Arren! Ez det geiago nai! –esanaz.

Burrukan zebillela (ura burruka bazan beintzat, Gogoutsak ez baitzion ume koxkor bateri baño arreta geiago jartzen), burrukan zebillela, diot, Gogoutsaren argiak iñoiz baño indar aundiagoa zeukala nabaitu zuan Ezkurrak, eta, erru guzia ari erantsirik, itzalki antzeko txanoa besoazpitik atera ta buruan sartu zion bat-batean.

⁴ Dickens nobelan, delako oilar hau jostailuzko txiki bat da. Hori jakinda hobeto ulertzen da pasarte (Edizio prestatzailearen oharra).

Gogoutsa oso txikitu zan, ta txanopean ezkutaturik gelditu zitzaion; baña indarrean saiatu zan arren, etzuan Ezkurrak txano azpitik beruntz irteten zan argi turrusta itzaltzerik lortu. Makaldu-ta, losun menderakaitz batek aulduta zegon. Nola etzekiala, bere logelan arkitu zuan bere burua, ta, itzalkia beste bein zapaldurik, zambuluka oeraño iritxi ta bertan zerraldo erori zan.

IRUGARREN AAPALDIA

Bai bigarrena ere...

Zurrunga burrunbatsu batek esnatu zuan, eta, amets ala egi, buruan naste bizian zebizkion gogaiak aztertu nairik eseri zanerako, Ezkurak, iñork itzik esan gabe, ordu bata zintzilik nabaitu zuan. Marlegik bialdutako bigarren mandatariarekin itz egiteko garai-garaian esnatu ez ote zan zesaion barrenak. Eta aurrez, mamu berri au zein aldetatik azalduko ote zitzaion oldoztu utsarekin otzikara bizia nabaituaz, jeiki, errezelak bere eskuz iriki, ta berriro etzan zan, ustegabeen iñork somatu gabe ernai egoteko asmoan.

Gertu dagonak bi balio baditu, Ezkurak bi mila ere balio zituan orduantxe. Bigarren agerkera, zarrasta apurrik gabe agurtu nairik, naiz pixoialetako aurra naiz zezen asarrea, zetorrena zetorrela gizon bateri zegokion eran artzea erabaki zuan.

Baña ain gertu egoteak ere bere kalteak baditu. Gertu bearra-
ren bearrez, ez baitzan ezer gertatzen ez bazitzaionerako gertutu. Ta ordu bata jo, ta gogoutsik azaltzen etzitzaiola ikusirik, kirio dardar bizi batek eman zion. Bost, amar, amabost minutu juan ziran eta... ezer ez. Oean etzanda, ordu bata jo zuanakin batera, bere gañean dirdirka asi zitzaion argi gorrixta baten izpi artean zegon. Ez mamu, ez gogoutsik iñon... argi gorrixta uraxe bakarririk... eta onetxek mamu-talde batek baño bildurtiago zeukan gizajoa. Ez baitzuan arek zer esan nai zuan ez zer zekarken ulertzen. Ezer jakin gabe, berez sutan ote zegon ere oldoztu erazi zion argitasun aretxek.

Azkenik, bere larruan etzegin edozeñek oldoztu zezakeana berbera bururatu zitzaion, beti gerta oi baita larritasun irtenbideak larri ez dagoanak arkitzea. Beste edozeñek oldoztu zezakeana bururaturik, argi gorrixka ura aldameneko gelatik zetorrela zirudindin ezker, aldameneratzea erabaki zuan. Eta oetik jeiki, oskixillak jantzi, ta ateruntz abiatu zan, ezkutukia idoro nairik.

Etzuan atea irikitzeke astirik izan, eta ezagutzen etzuan aots batek bere izenez deitu, ta sartzeko esan zion. Ezkurrak, agindua egin zuan.

Bere etxea zuan ba ura, baña nork ezagutu? Bai, berea, bere-berea izan bear zuan. Orma ta sapai, ostaillez estalita, masti antza zemaie gelari. Gorosti, migura ta untz-ostoak, ixpillutxo gisan biurtzen zioten argia, ta sukaldean Ezkurra edo Marlegiren garaian oi etzan bezelako su ederra zirt eta zart ari zan.

Mota guzitako jakiak, indiollo, ate, eize mota asko, urdanka, aragi-okore, ispel kaja, gaztain, larraran, udare ta sagarrez egindako bakaulki antzeko bat zegon, ke gozoa zeriote katillu usaitu artean. Eta aundikiro eserita, gazte itxurako Erraldoi musugorri bat. Bakalzigor antzera Ugaritasun Adar itxurako zuzi bat zeukan, eta onen argiak bete-betean jo zuan Ezkurra atea irikiarekin bat.

–Aurrera! –esan zion Mamuak–. Sartu ta ezagutu nazazu!

Ezkurra, esandakoa bildur-bildurrak egiñik, buru makurka gerturatu zitzaion Gogoutsari. Etzan lengo Ezkurra arro lerdena, bere buru jabetza galdu ta Erraldoiaren begiratu bildurrak zebillen, au laztan eta maitekor agertu arren.

–Gaurko Eguarri Irudia naiz! –esan zion–. Begira zaidazu!

Begiratu zion, lotsa aundiz begiratu ere Ezkurrak.

Larru zuriz iskindutako soinpeko soil bat zan bere jantzia. Bularra gorriarik zeraman, estalki bearrik ez balu bezela.

Jantzipetik oñak utsik agertzen zitzaizkion. Eta jela-zintzilika-ri apaindutako gorosti-estun bat zeraman buruan.

Bere ille kixkur luzea bizkar gañera zetorkion, ta guzia, aots, itxura, egoera, guzia, begi-asegarri ta atsegiña zan. Erdoiak janda-ko ezpata-zorro uts bat zeraman gerrian.

–Nere antzeko ezer ikusi ez dezula egingo nizuke! –esan zuan Gogoutsak.

–Beñere ez.

–Ez al zera beñere nere senide gazteenakin ezertan aritu? Nere anai aziagoakin esan nai nuke, azkeneko urte oetan jaiotako anaiekin alegia, neroni gaztegia bainaiz?

–Dakitela ez beintzat –erantzun zion Ezkurrak–. Anai asko al zerate?

–Milla ta bederatzireundik gora.

–Aita gizajoa! –iges egin zion Ezkurrari.

Gaurko Eguarri Irudia zutik jarri zan.

–Gogouts! –esan zion Ezkurrak apalki–. Noranai eraman nazazu. Nere gogoz aurka bederik, atzo ikusitakoak zerbait erakutsi dit: ona emen ikaskizun oien ondorena. Gaur ere zerbait erakutsi bear badidazu, ikasi nai nuke.

–Nere soñekoa ikutu zazu ba.

Eldu zion Ezkurrak egiñalean. Gorosti, migura, garao, untz, ollo, ate, urdanka ta okore ezkutatu ziran; ezkutatu zan etxea bere tximini ta guzi; itzali zan argi gorrixta, ta argitu zan gaua. Egunargiz arkitu ziran: Eguarri goiz batean, erriko kale zear. Eguraldia, gogorra: erritar guziak etxe-atadi ta tellatutako elurrak ezin garbiturik zebizkin eguraldi zakurra. Aiek algarak mutikoenak, etxe gañetatik kalera erortzen ziran elur-zaplastakin.

Elurraren zuritiesun aldamenean, etxe-ormak illunak ziruditen. Espaloi-artean, burdi ta orgak lurraska sakonez betea zeukaten estalki zuria; ta ezker eta eskubiruntz, amaika aldiz elkartu ta banatzen ziran lurraska sakon oietan bera, izoztutako ur arixka zijuan.

Zerua, odeitsu. Ta kalerik estuenetan, lañoa oraindik ere nagusi. Kearrez betetako lañoa, tximini guzitako ilintxak antxe bildu izan balira bezelaxe.

Ez giroa, ez uria bera, etziran iñoren atsegingai, baña alare eguzkirik ederrenak eman zezakean alaitasuna nabaitu ziteken kale aietan.

Elur-garbitetan ari ziranak, beren neke aspergarriaren orde, elkarri ziriak sartu, txantxeta bizian elur-pelotak bata besteari bota, ta, norbaiteri ematean, parra lasai egiten zuten.

Egazti-saletxeak zirrikiturik zeuden; eta igalitegiak, zoragariak. Oen atetan, tripazairik aseenen sabel borobil antzeko gaztain gurbillak, beren sorreri narotasuna agertzen zien kaletarrai. Erakustokiak apaintzen zituan untz-osto orlegi gañean gorri, españar tipulen biribiltasun ezea arki ziteken. Sagar eta udare-menditxo zalegarri eta kakotatik zintzilik zeuden mats-mordo galantai amaika begi josi zitzaizkien egun artan. Ur eta intxaurrak, arraiontzi aundi bateri egal egiñik zeuden larraran eta limoi artean illun ageri ziran. Eta arraitxoak ere oi ez bezelako zerbaiten zai nabaitu zitezken.

Ta jakitegiak! O, jakitegiak! Ateak erdi-itxita zeuzkaten arren, barrengo edertasun arrigarria ezin ezkutatu. Etzan, ez, aztakin-azpiltxoak aitzurdin gañean jotzen zuten eresi alaiagatik, ezta ere listai-matazak erositako jakiak besarkatzeko bizi-bizi askatzerakotan zegiten ots bereziagatik, ez umao-latak eskuz esku beatzkari-jostabide antzera zebiltzala ikusteak, ez usaimenari ain atsegin zitzaizkion te ta akeita lurriñak; etziran boli antzeko ur-zuriak, ez lekatxo ta goxotutako igaliak, eta ezta ere nornai litxarzaletuko luteken azukrez jositako goxo aiek...

Ez... Esandako guzia, ain ona ta atsegiña izanik, etzan berez erosleak bata besteen gainka, bultzaka, ukalondokoka, saskiak elkar joaz, erositakoa salmai gañean aztuaz, barrendik sortzen zitzaien alaitasun arekin zebizkiana. Etziran argatik nagusi ta mutillak, guziak ondo serbitu, ta bakoitzak nai bezela ta eun deiri batera erantzun nairik, zoratu bear bizian alai-alai saiatzan. Jai egunik aundiena, Eguarri eguna izateak zegin, guziak anaitasun eta maitasunez beterik, biotza eskutan eta irriparra ezpañetan zituztela egotea.

Laster entzun zan joalle otsa, ta kale ta txadi guzietatik parrastaka elizaratu ziran sinisdunak, jazkirik apañenak eta pitxirik maitteenakin.

Une ortantxe, norbaitek berealako batean egiteko agindu balie bezela, erriko etxekoandre ta serbitzari guziak, eguneko egaztia erretzeko oiturak agintzen zuan bezela, ogigiñenera bidean arkituko zenituzten.

Gogoutsak arretaz begiratzen zien guziaz, ta, Ezkurrarekin batera, urbilleneko ogitegi ateratu ta eseri zan. Egaztiak estaliz zekarzkiten zapiak altxa, ta bere zuzitik botatzen zizkien tanto arrigarri batzuek. Ain arrigarriak ezik! Guziak presaka nola baitzebiltzan, aurrena izan naiak asarre-itzen batzuek sortzen zituane-rako, intz arrigarri aren tanto bik asarrea uxatu, ta atzera olde onean jartzen zituan guziak, Eguarri egunez asarretzea lotsagarria ere balitzakela esanaz. Eta egia zioten, Jauna, egia!

Ixildu ziran kanpaiak, eta ogigiñak ateak itxi zituzten. Eta erretzen zeuzkaten egaztiak, jaia aitortu nairik bezela, ketan zeuden labetatik zerioten usai gozoa besterik etzan kalean gelditu.

–Botatzen dezun ur orrek lurrin bereziren bat al du? –galdetu zion Ezkurrak.

–Bai orixe. Neronena.

–Ta gaur edozein sukalgairi al dagokio?

–Edozeiñi, baña batez ere txiroenai.

–Zergatik?

–Bear gorriagoan baitaude oek.

–Ta aizu, Gogouts –esan zion Ezkurrak puxka batean oldozkor egon ondoren–, nola izan zindezke zu, gaxo oei atsegin bidea ixten diena?

–E? –galdetu zion Gogoutsak

–Bai, zu; zazpian bein egun on bat igarotzeko gaiak ez baitizkiezu eskuratzen uzten, eta orixe bakarra izaki jan oi dutela esan dezateken eguna. Ez al da ala?

–Baña ez al dakizu zuen mundutsak ⁵?

⁵ Linotipistaren akatsa ematen du, ez baita ulertzen. Ingeleseko jatorrizkoaren arabera, honelako zerbait behar zuen jarri: “–Nik? –karraxi egin zuan Gogoutsak” (Edizio prestatzailearen oharra).

–Bai, zu. Zazpigarren egunean guzia ixteko esaten ez dezu ba? Ez al da ori nik diodana?

–Baña nik inoiz orrelakorik esan al det? –galdetu zion arrituta Gogoutsak.

–Barkatu oker banago, baña zure izenean edota zure sendikoen izenean egiñerazi oi da ori.

–Baña ez al dakizu ⁶ zuen mundu ontan, gu ezagutzen gaituela ta gure izena nolana erabilliaz beren griña guzien mende, arrokeri, aizunkeri ta berekoitasun egipen likitxenetan dabizkizutela asko ta asko? Ez baititugu gure izenean agertu oi diran guziak ezagutzen! Au gogoan artu, ta aiek dagitena ez inola ere guri erantsi: berak bitez beren egipen jabe.

Onela agindu zion Ezkurrak, eta erriperuntz jetxi ziran. Gogoutsaren doaietako bat bere neurria nai bezela luzatu ala laburtzea zala oartu zuan Ezkurrak: sapaiaik goien zituen aretoetan, izugarri; gelarik tatarrenetan, txiki azaltzen zan.

Doai onek, edota apika, bere barren zindo ta laztankorrek bultzata, Ezkurra bere idazkariaren etxera eraman zuan Erraldoiak.

Juan ziran ba, ta, atadian irriparez gelditurik, Gogoutsak bere zuzi-tanta batzuek botiaz etxea onetsi zuan. Entzun dezuten bezela! Zubiriren etxea, astean bost duro irabazten etzituan idazlari gizajoaren etxea, Gaurko Eguarri Gogoutsak onetsi!

Zubiriren emaztea, ertzez izan ezik, azpikoz gora ta barrengoz kanpora tajutu ziteken era guzitara ibillitako gona batekin, jantzitzen ez badute ere ainbestean apaintzen duten xinta ta txibista begi alaiarritz josita, maia jartzen ari zan. Bigarren alaba, Iziar, zuan laguntzalle, ama bezin apain au ere. Ta bitartean Kepa, larortz bat eskuan zuala, lusagar eltze bat arretaz zaitzen arkituko zenuten, aitak utzitako lepoko gogorrek begi bat aterako ez bazion

⁶ “Dakigu”, *El Díako* jatorrizkoan. Seguru asko lerro honekin sortuko zen nahasketan linotopian (Edizio prestatzailearen oharra).

muturra ortzartzean arturik euki bear izan arren, arro ta burgoi, ark emandako eskubideagatik.

Bi Zubiritxo koxkor zoratu bearrean sartu ziran, ogigiñarenetik zear zetoze eta etxeko indiolloa usaiean ezagutu zutela karraxika esanaz: egazti eder aren barren eta inguruan zer etorriko etzan noski! Mai biran dantzari zebiltzan oldoztu utsarekin. Kepari oso “elegante” zegola esaten zioten pozaren pozez. Eta onek atsegintsu baña arropuztu gabe entzun, eta suari aize egiten zion, lusagarrrak eltze-txapelari kankateko biziak emanaz, ondo egosita zeudela adierazi zuten arte.

–Nun sartu ote da zuen aita bedeinkatu ori? –zion andre Mirenek–. Eta zuen anaia? Ta Marte?

–Ona emen Marte, ama –erantzun zion neskatxa gazte batek etxean sartuaz.

–Ona emen Marte, ama –esan zuten bi Xubiri koxkorrak ere–. Eztakizu, Marte! Ura indiolloa!

–Alare! Ongi etorri, alaba. Berandu ator? –esan zion andre Mirenek amabi bat musu eman eta soingañeko ta illelarrua kentzen lagundurik.

–Bart lan asko egin baikenun ba, ama, ta gaur guzia banatu bear.

–Dana dala, etorri aiz beintzat eta kito. Eseri adi sutondoan, otzak ago ta, maite.

–Ez, ez! Aita dator –zioten bi Xubiritxoak–. Gorde zaite, Marte, gorde!

Marte gorde zan. Eta bereala an zuten Yon, aita, berokia iru arra bidean zintzilik zuala, egunari zegokion bezela jantziak dirdir jarri arteraño igurkiturik, eta Xabiartxo bizkarrean artuta. Xabiartxo gixajoa! Galtzar-makillakin ibilli oi baitzan. Eta xankotxotan burnizko galtzerdiak zeramazkin.

–Ta Marte nun da? –galdetu zuan Yonek sartu orduko alde guzitara begiratuaz.

–Ez omen dator –erantzun zion emazteak.

–Ez datorrela? –esan zuan Yonek atsekabe bizian. Xabiartxo zaldizka zuala tximista baño azkarrago etxeratu ta orain onekin arkitu zan ba–. Gabon gabean etxeratu ez?

Martek ezin ikusi izan zuan aitaren samintasuna, txantxetan ari ziran arren, eta bear baño len irten eta aita besarkatu zuan. Bi gazteak Xabiartxo artu, ta budiña nola egiten ari zan erakusteko sukaldera eraman zuten.

Yonen sinisterreztasuna zala-ta parra lasai egin ondoren,

–Ona izan al da Xabiartxo? –galdetu zion amak.

–Bai ona bezela ere. Batzuetan, bakarrik ainbeste denboran egoteak eraziko dio apika, gauzik arrigarrienak oldoztu ta esaten ditu. Ba al dakizute zer esan didan etxera gatozela? Txit atsegin zitzaiola jendeak bera elizan ikustea. Zergatik uste dezute? Elbarri bat Eguarri egunetan ikusita, guziak naitaez, errenak sendatu ta itxuai ikusmena biurtu zien Aretzaz oroituko omen dira-ta noski.

Dardar zegion aotsak Yoni au edesten ari zala. Ta dardarra bizitu zitzaion, Xabiartxok oso ondo zegola ta guziak alai ikusi nai litukela ziola esan zuanean.

Onen galtzar-makil ots bixia entzun zan: bere bi anaiakin sutondora urbiltzen nabaitu zuten.

Yonek, eskumuturrekoak geiago zarpaildu bazitezken bezela gora jaso, limoi ta jinebra nastuaz edari bizi bat egin, eta surtan jarri zuan, Kepa ta alde guzitan zeuden bi anai aiek indiolloaren billa juan eta etorri bitartean.

Laster ziran atzera etxean, indiolloa sekulako aunditasun eta ospez ekarririk. An sortu zan iskanbillak indiollo bat ludiko egaztirik arrigarriena zala sinistu eraziko ziguten. Ezta antzara beltzik ere alakorik! Etxe artarako alaxe izaki.

Andre Mirenek aurrez gertutako saltsa berotu zuan. Kepak sasoiitsu ta bizkor egin zioten lusagar-zukua. Iziarrek sagar-orea gozatu zuan. Martek mai-ontziaz azken ikutua eman zien. Yonek, Xabiartxo bere aldameneko mai ertzean eseri zuan. Bi koxkorak guzientzako alkiak jarri zituzten, eta, nor berearen ondoan, maiean eseri zai zeuzkazuten, “INDIOLLOA!” bear baño lenago ez eskatzeko, aoan kutxare bana sartuta.

Jakiak maieratu zituzten noizbait. Eta otoitxo bat egindakoan, etzuan iñork txindik atera. Arnasa ozta-ozta artu zuten, amak indiolloa ebaki bitartean. Baña ebaki ta irrikitzen zeuzkan betegarrri ura azaldu zanarekin bat, juan ziran ango ixiltasunak. Guzien poza! Xabiartxok ere bere laban-kirtenarekin maia jo ta “Gora!” zion.

“Konpañeo”, ura indiolloa! Yon berberak, ain egazti aundia erretzeko laberik izan zitekenik ere siniskaitza zala zion, oso arri-tuta. Bai xamurra! Txestallu, neurri, ta batez ere txit merke eresia izateak izpidea ugari eman zien.

Lusagar-zuku ta sagar-orearekin batera, indiollo ura naikoa izan zuten guziak. Andre Mirenek zionez beintzat, ezur batek zeukan aragi puxketa ezin izan zuan iñola ere bukatu. Ta guziok ase-ta zeudelarik! Bi koxkorrak batez ere: bekaiñetarañoko guzitik betegarria zerioten arrano aiek.

Azpil garbiak jarri zituan Iziarrek. Eta ama sukalderatu zan, budiña bere ontzitik atera ta ekartzeko. Etzuan iñork laguntzerik izan nai.

Ura zalantza ta eziñegona!... Bear ainbat mamitu ez balitz!... Ateratzerakoan pitzatuko balitz!... Ez al zuan beintzat norbaitek leiotik sartu ta ostuko!... Bi koxkor aien kezkek, atzeneko oldozpen onetxeekin!... Bost minutu aiek bai luzeak!

Baña ez! Lurrin aokada batek adierazi zien estalkia kendu zit-zaiola; gobara usai batek, ondoren, bilkai jarritako oiala atera zit-zaiola... ta okoretegi, jatetxe ta lisatzalle usai nasketa batek azke-nik, ontzitik aterea zala.

Minutu bat... eta andre Miren ozkorrituta, baña parresamurra ezpañetan zekarrela, bere budiñarekin sartu zan. Suaga-berunpilla bezin zut eta dirdizari, koñak gar artean, eta gorostiz apainduta zetorren budiña.

Budin bikaña! Ezkondu ezkerro andre Mirenek egindako lanik bikañenetakoa, onena ez bazan gero!, uraxe zala zion Yonek. Guzia ondo irten zala ikusirik, andre Mirenek irin geitxo jarri ote zuanen kezkek bildurrak euki zuala aitortu zioten. Guziak zerbait

esan bearra izan zuten: iñork ez ordea txikiegia zanik, gezur biri-billa izango baitzan.

Afaria bukatu ta maizapiak jasotakoan, lurra garbitu, sua bizitu ta Yonek gertatutako edaria maiera ekarri zuten. “Epaikariak” bete-betekoa zala erabaki ondoren, larraran eta sagarrez maia bete, ta, gar eta sutauts artean, gaztañak erretzen jarri zituzten. Zubiri sendia sutondoan eseri zan, aizeki itxuran, eta atera zituzten etxean ziran kristalezko ontzi guziak: bi edontzi ta kerten gabeko zukuontzi bat.

Urrezkoak ańean bete zuten alare bere eginbearra. Ta gaztain tunpada artean banatu zuan Yonek berak antolatutako edari bizia, eskeintza antzera,

–Eguarri zoriontsuak itzazute, ene maiteak! Jaunak onetsi gaitzala! –esanaz.

Guziak erantzun zioten, eta,

–Banaka-banaka onetsi gaitzala Jaunak guziok! –amaitu zuan Xabiartxok.

Aitaren aldameneko alkitxoan eserita zegon. Yonek, maiteena zuan uraxe norbait edo zerbaitek eraman nai ote lioken beldur balitz bezela, aren eskutxo aula bere esku artean zeukan.

–Gogouts! –esan zuan Ezkurrak ordu arteraño baño arreta geiagorekin–. Esaidazu, Xabiartxo biziko al da?

–Sutondoan alkitxo uts bat agertzen zait –erantzun zion Gogoutsak–. Eta jabea galdu duan galtzar-makiltxo bat oroigarri kutunena bezela jasota dakust. Etorkizunak errańu oiek aldatzen ez baditu, aurra laster ilko da.

–Ez! Ez! –oju egin zuan Ezkurrak–. Arren, ez! Gogouts on orrek, esaidazu luzaro biziko dala!

–Etorkizunak errańu oiek aldatzen ez baditu, ez nik eta ez bere ondorengoak ez degu bere tokian arkituko... Ta zer? Il dedilla, ala bear bada. Orixe litzake gańezka daudenak garbitzeko biderik egokiena.

Ezkurrak berak esandako itzak Gogoutsari entzunaz, burua makurtu zuan, barrengo zimiko ta ońazepean.

–Gizon! –esan zion Gogoutsak–. Gizona bazera beintzat eta ez arria! Ez dagokizu zuri onelako jaiotzak zer dakarten eta zergatik izan oi diran aztertzea. Nor zera zu iñoren bizi ala eriotza erabakitzeko? Goikoaren aurrean, zoritxarreko aurtxo orren bizia zerorena baño garrantzi aundiagokoa ez ote da gero? Jaungoikoa! Landare-galtzalle besterik ez dan xomorroa, bere kidekoen osasun geiegiagatik alaka ikusi bear!

Gogoutsaren asarre-itzak, apalki, dardar eta begiak lurretik jaso gabe entzun zituan Ezkurrak. Baña bat-batean bere izena entzun, eta altxa zuan burua.

–Ezkurra jauna! –zion Yonek–. Jai au berari zor diogun ezke-ro, zoriona opa dezaiogun Ezkurra jaunari!

–Ezkurra jauna? –esan zuan oso suminduta emazteak–. Ai, ementxe aurrean baneuka! Bereak eta bost entzun bearko lizkidak! Zorion ederra emango nioke nik!

–Miren –erantzun zion Yonek–. Seme-alabak ditugula! Eguarri dala!...

–Eguarri bear, Ezkurra zeken dollor ori bezin gizaseme gorrotagarri bateri zorionak opa izateko. Ta ongi dakizu zerorrek ere, Yon, zuzen ari naizela, iñork baño obeto jakin dezakezu ta!

–Ene maite! –esan zion goxoki Yonek–. Gaur bederik!...

–Dan eguna dalako... ta batez ere zuk nai dezulako, bere ize-nean edango det –esan zuan andre Mirenek–; baño ez beragatik! Osasun betean luzaro bizi dedilla! Eguarri zoriontsuak eta Urteberri on bitza! Ain zurkaitza danez, jai alaiak igaroko ditu noski ta...

Seme-alabak ere amaren eskeintza bera egin zuten, baño gau artan biotzak berez agintzen etzien gauzik egin bazuten, uraxe bat beintzat. Xabiartxok edan zuan azkena, ta aopeko errosarioa esanez edan ere. Ezkurra baitzan etxe artarako “Amalau-zaku” bildurgarriena. Bere izena aitatu utsak bost bat minutuan ezin uxatu izan zuten ondoeza nabaierazi zien.

Laster berpiztu zan ordea alaitasuna, len baño ere biziagoa apika, Ezkurrarekikoak egin eta munduan bazanik ere oldoztu bearrik etzutelako nunbait.

Keparentzat irabazpideren bat laster izango ote zuten bezela esan zuan Yonek. Gauzak ondo irteten baziran, eguneko SEI ERRIAL!! geiago izango zituzten beraz.

Kepa orrela aberastu zitekela oldozte utsak algara bizian jarri zituan bi anai tximista aiek. Eta Kepa bera, lepoko mutur artetik suari begira, onelako dirutzak berekin dakarzkina buruauste ta kardabapean gelditu zan, irabazi aiekin guziakin zer paper erosi bear-ko ote zituan ezin erabakirik bezela.

Martek, gajoa jostun-etxe batean ikasten ari baitzan, zer lan egin bear izaten zuan, zenbat orduan aritzen zan azaldu, ta urren-go egunean lanera jua bearrik etzuanetz, etzanda egon nai zukela zion.

Egun batzuek aurretik “kondesa” ta “konde” bat nola ezagutu zituan ere esan zien. Eta “kondea”, Keparen antz-antzekoa noski. Au entzun zuanean lepokoaren muturrak iges egin, eta Kepa gizajoa lepokoan galdu zan.

Bitartean gaztain eta zukuontziak berea egin zuten. Eta azkenik Xabiartxok txit egoki ta aots eztsitsuz, elurretan galdutako mutikoaren abesti polita abestu zuan.

Guzia, guzi-guzia, apalki, aunditasun ipitxik gabe egiña izan zan. Etziran dezatekenak, jazki txiroak zebizkiten, oñetakoak ura artzeko egiñak ziruditen, Kepak baitetxera bidea begi-itxuan ere asmatu baietz egin ziteken: baña zoriontsuak ziran, esker onekoak, zegokiena ondo artzen baitzuten.

Ikusgai ura ezkutatu baño len, Gogoutsak zuzi tanta batzuekin guziak are ta alaiago ta zoriontsuago jarri zituala nabaitu zuan Ezkurak.

Kaleratu ziranean, illun zegon eta elurra mara-mara ari zuan. Etxe ta dendatako argiak dirdir arrigarriak zegizkiten. Kale zear zijuazela: emen, sugañean afari goxo gertuketak, eta etxeakoak otza ta elurren aurka errezelak zabaltzeko asmotan arkitzen zituzten; an, lenbiziko agurra berena izan zedin, etxeke seme-alabak, eskaratzean, anai-arreba, osaba, lengusu ta abarren zai agertzen zitzaizkien; onuntzaxiago, leiar artetik, giza-emakume talde bat afari

asieran; aruntzago, beti nork bere txanda balu bezela, guziak batera berriketan, inguruko etxeren batera zijuan gazte taldea.

Besteren etxerako asmoan agertzen ziran taldeak ikusita, irixterakoan iñor arkitu bear zutenik ezin sinistu; baña, bestalde, nunnai, norbaitzuen zai zeudenen gertuketak nabaitzen ziran: sukaldetan, ikatza ta zer jana ugari ikusten zan beintzat.

Gogoutsaren atsegiña! Aren biotz ona, ta alaitasuna banatzeko esku zabala! Laspelargi-piztallea ere, Gabon lagunartean ospatzeko asmoan, beñere baño pizkorrago zijuala, algaraz pasa zitzaioten illunpea ixarrez tantoturik, Gaurko Eguarri Gogo aldameanean pasa zanik ezagutu ere gabe!

Ez bat eta ez bi, Gogoutsak itzik esan gabe, lekaro arritsu batean arkitu ziran. Alde guzitan erraldoi-obiak ziruditen arri pillak. Jelak katiatuta ez baleuka, laster litzake ura lur artan jaun ta jabe. Eguzki kondarra, irudi arriabartsu ura azken-izpi gorrixta batekin argitu, ta gau mende illunera jausi zan.

–Nun gabilta? –galdetu zion Ezkurrak.

–Lur azpian, lan ta lan bizi diran meatzari artean. Ezagutzen naute. Begira!

Txabol bateko leioetan argia ageri zan, eta aruntz jo zuten. Arri ta lokatzez egindako orma zear igazi, ta sutondoan billerarik alaiena arkitu zuten: aiton zar-zar bat, bere emaztea, bion seme-alabak, eta seme-alaben ondorengoak, jantzirik apañenakin zeuden. Aize durrunda menderatzeko, aultxo sortzen zitzaion aotsakin, bere gaztearorako oso zartzat zeukaten Eguarri abesti bat abesten ari zan aitona, ta onek bakarka amaitzen zuanean, guziak laguntzen zioten.

Etzan Gogoutsan luzaro gelditu, ta soinpekoari ondo eltzeko esanaz, lur sakon aien gañetik... noruntz jo zuala uste dezute? Itsasoruntz? Itsasoruntz! Ikaraturik ikusi zuan Ezkurrak lurra atzean utzi, ta ertzari azpia jan nairik, arkaitzak asarre arroz jasotako uin zaratatsuakin zatituaz, belarriak gortzen zizkion itsaso orrulariaren gañean zirala.

Itxasertzetik lau bat kilometrora, ugarri arkaitsu illun batean, aize ta urak astintzen zuten itsasargi bakar bat zegon. Itsas belar

eta landarez josia zeukan oña, ta bere argiak erakarritako antxeta-sallak jira ta bira zebizkin inguruan.

Bi gizonen zaipean zegon. Eta arresi zirritotik ur gañeratuko litzaken argitasun izpia bezela, sutzar baten dirdira ikusten zan. Lanean gogortutako esku babatsuak elkarri eman eta bata besteari Eguarri zorientsuak opa zizkien, bien arteko anaitasuna zurrut banakin bustiaz. Bitan batek, zarrenak, itsasoan igarotako ekaitzaldi guziak arpegian zeramazkila zirudin arek, abesti sendo bat asi zuan gero: aotsak berak ere ekaitz itxura obea zuan.

Berriro abiatu ziran Gogoutsa ta Ezkurra itsas asarrearen gañean, lurrunontzi batekin topo egin zuten arte. Lemazaiaren aldamenean jarri ziran, oartzalle, txanda agintari, ta mariñelai begira. Nor bere tokian, Eguarri abestiren bat ezpañetan zuala, edota etxean egindako Eguarri egunen bateko gertaerak lagunartean edestuaz arkitu zituzten guziak. Eta egun artan, lotan ala esna, gaizto ala on, guziak itz eztiren bat nun edo nundik sortzen zuten bere kidekoentzat.

Illunpean, Eriotza bera bezin sakon eta zingokaitzak ziran amiltegi igikor aietan ibiltzearen aunditasun gogaiak buruan zituela oldozkor zegon Ezkurra, arrituta, txundituta, baña oso ergelduta utzi zuan algara burrunbatsu batek. Bere illobaren algara ezagutu etzuan ba! Gogoutsa, bere illobari atsegiñez begira, aldamenean zuala, etxegela argi, atsegin, bero batean zegon.

–Ja!, ja!, ja! –ari zan Ezkurraren illoba–. Ja!, ja!, ja!

Ezkurraren illoba baño par-errezagokorik ezagutuko bazenu, zailtxo izango zaizu noski baña, aurkeztu zaidazu arren. Nere lagunik onena izango litzake ta.

Ordainpide-legeak agintzen dutenez, goibeltasun eta gaitzak kutsukorrak diran ezkerro, parra ta umore ona ere alaxe bear, eta algara batzuek bai kutsukorrak, ezer kutsukorrik bada. Ezkurra- ren illoba, sabelari eldu ta gomazko kopin bat bezela burua mugitu ta kiñuka asten zanean, Ezkurraren ezkon-illobak ere parrari erasotzen zion, eta aiekin ziran lagunak algaraz lertu bearrean jartzen zituzten bien artean.

–Ja, ja, ja! Ja, ja, ja!

–Eguarri ergelkeri bat dala esan etzidan ba! –zion illobak–. Ta benetan ari omen zan!

–Are ta okerrago! –esan zuan emazteak suminduta.

Txit polita zan, oso-oso polita: xulotxoz betetako arpegi alaia, irriparruts aoa, ta begi bizi txinpartutsak zituan. Oso begiratua izan arren, grina-piztutzallea zala aitortu ziteken: ez ordea gaizpide iritzian.

–Ori azala! –zion illobak–. Ikusgarria da arranoa! Ta bear luken baño askoz trikuagoa. Baña berak bestek ez du orrekin kalterik. Dagola ba, utzi dezaiozun pakean.

–Oso aberatsa izan bear du ba, Ibon –esan zuan andreak–. Zuk ala diozu beintzat.

–Eta zer? –erantzun zion Ibonek–. Zertarako du dirua? Ez du gauz onik egiten. Beretzat bederik zerbaiten atsegin eta lasaipiderik billatuko ezta ba? Ezer ez pentsatzeagatik, ja, ja, ja!, ezta bere txibota guziak guri utzi bearko dizkigunik ere pentsatzen.

–Nik ezin ikusi det –oarrarazi zuan emazteak, bere aizpa ta emakumezko guzien oniritzi artean.

–Nik bai ba! –esan zioten illobak–. Ondo begiratuta kupigarrria da. Ni ez nitzake naita ere arekin asarretuko. Nori kalte egiten dio bere setakin? Bere buruari. Ara, oraintxe, guri gorrotoa digula ta ez duala gurekin afaltzera etorri nai. Ondorenak? Ez duala ezer asko galdu.

–Bai jauna, afari eder bat galdu du –bota zion emazteak, afaldar guzien zorion-agur artean. Oek zerbait jakingo zuten noski, maietik altxa berriak ziran ta.

–Zorion-agur oek poztutzen naute! –esan zuan Ibonek–. Etxekoandre gaztegiak baexpakoak ote ziranen kezka bainerabilkin emen, barrenen. Zer derizkiok ik, Mikel?

Mikelek, Ibonen emaztearen aizpa bat begiz jota zeukan, eta ezkongai batek onelako arazotan sartzeko eskubiderik etzuala aitortu zuan. Itz oek Ibonen ezkon-arreba lotsarazi zuten. Txibistadun lodixka ura, ez arroxakin apaindurik zegona.

–Buka zazu, Ibon! –esan zion emazteak–. Beñere ez dezu asten dezuna bukatzen!

Bai kutsukorra Ibonen algara!

–Gu ezin ikusiak eta gure alaitasuna ikusi nai ezak on aundia egingo lioken txolarte au galerazten diola esan nai nuan, alegia. Bere lantoki edo etxean, bere gogamen illunenakin baño lagunarte obean ez ote legoke ba gaur gurean? Nik urtero-urtero nere eskeñia berrituko diot, danik eta purrustik aundienak egiten badizkit ere, errukia baitiot. Eguarri, gorrotagarria bazaio ere, urtero zorionak ezañean ditudala ikusten banau, noizbait biotz barrenen bederik begi obez ikustera iritxiko da. Azkenaian bere idazkari gizajoari milla bat peseta uzteko añean, besterik ez bada. Bai, bai, atzo limurtu nuan.

Ezkurra limurtu? Ori sinistu zitekenik gogoratze utsak algaraz ler-egiñerazi zien guziaz. Artara bildu baitziran gau artan, par egitera. Eta etzan Ibon atzean gelditu.

Tea artu ondoren, eresgaraia eldu zan. Guziak oso zaleak baitziran. Mikelek abesperen aots ederra zuan, eta batere indartu gabe, kopeteko zañak lertzeko zorian azaldu gabe, odola arpegiratu gabe, atsegintsu jardun zan. Ezkurraren ezkon-illoba maniura-jotzalle aparta zan, eta beste ereszati batzuekin batera, Ezkurraren billa ikastetxera juan zan neskatillari atsegiñena zitzaion bat jo zuan. Ura entzunda, Igarotako Eguarri Gogoutsak erakutsitako irudiak bururatu zitzaizkion Ezkurrari. Urte batzuek lenago gauza oei arreta geiagogz begiratu izan balie, biziak dituan benetako atsegiñak Marlegiren Mamutzar bearrik gabe, nun arkitu asmatuko zuan noski, berekiko zionez.

Eres-txolarte ondoren “ikusimakusitan” jostatu ziran, oso atsegin baita aldian bein aur biurtzea, batez ere Eguarritz, Jainkoa bera aur egin zan egunean. Baña au burua nerea! Aztutzen ez nitzan ba! Lenago “itxumustuka” ibilli ziran. Noski! Ta Mikelek beatz muturretan ere begiak zituala aitortu bear, nun ta sudur azpiraño sartzen zioten txapela zuloduna etzan.

Nere ustez, Ibonekin bat-eginda zebillen Mikel, eta Gaurko Eguarri Gogoutsaren laguntza ere berekin zuala esango nuke. Gañontzean, nola beti aizpa lodixka arekin topo egin? Siniskaitza ezta? Suburniakin estropozoka, alki ta maiakin kankarrekoak

artuaz, pianoakin kokotza autsirik, errezel-artean korapillatuta... beti aretxen atzetik arkituko zenuten, beste iñor aurrean jartzen bazitzaion ere ikutu gabe. Ori etzala bidezkoa esaten zuan neskak, eta egia zion. Eta azkenik, berea egin zuanean, txoko batean iñora iges egin eziñik arrapatu zuanean egin zizkionak ez dira iñori egitekoak: ille guziak nor zan ikusi nairik bezela nastu, ta, arek zionez, beatz batean bear zuan erraztuna arkitzeko aitzekian, eskua ainbeste denboran artuta euki etzion ba. Izugarria izan zan! Jostaketa ondoren, areto txoko bateratu ziranean, azterketa aregatik bereak aituko zituan noski.

Ezkurraren ezkon-illoba etzan “itxumustuka” ibilli. Alki batean eserita besteai begira egon zan. Baña “ikusimakusitan” eta “nola?, noiz?, nun?” izena duan jokoan aritu zan, bere erantzuera bizi ta zorrotzakin aizpak oso atzetik utziaz. Ibonen arrokeria!

Guziak iskanbilla bizian ari ziran, eta Ezkurra, an zeudenak ez bera ikusi, ez ziona entzun ezin zezatekenik gogoratu gabe, batzuetan oker eta bestetan egoki erantzuten ausartu zan.

Ezkurraren ustegabeko umekeri aiek Gogoutsa zorutzen zeukaten, eta arek poz au nabaiturik, mutil koxkor batek egingo luken bezelaxe, jostaketa guziak amaitu arte antxe egoten uzteko arren eskatu zion. Baña ezin zitekela erantzun zuan Gogoutsak.

–Ara, beste jolas bat astera dijuaz! –otsegin zion Ezkurrak–. Gogouts!, arren, beste ordu erditxo bat!

“Bai ta ez” izena zuan joko bat zan. Ezkurraren illobak oldoztutakoa zer zan asmatu bear zuten besteak, ari galderak egiñaz. Galdera oei, Ibonek bai ala ez erantzuten zioten, beren irudimena zuzen ala galduta zebillen jakin zezaten. Ezker-eskubi bota zizkio-tenai erantzundakotik, aberen bat izan bear zuan Ibonek oldozme-
nean zebilkiana. Abere bat, bizia bera, muker samarra, basatia, gurrinka ta orroka aritzen zana, Londonen bizi eta kalean zaitzallerik gabe aske zebillena: eta ez zaldia, ez astoa, ez beia, ez zezena, ez katamotza, ez zakurra, ez katua, ez artza... zer izan ziteken?

Galdera berri bakoitzak algaraz lertu bearrean jartzen zuten Ezkurraren illoba, azkenerako parraren parrez lurrean etzanda biraka asteraño. Bat-batean ezkon-arreba lodixkak oju egin zion:

–Badakit! Badakit zer dan, Ibon! Asmatu det!

–Zer da ba? –galdetu zion Ibonek.

–Zure osaba!

Ta alaxe izaki. Guziak arrituta utzi zituan. Baña geienak zioten, “Artza ote da?” galderari, “Bai” erantzuna zegokiola. “Ez” esanda, Ezkurraren irudia menetik kendu omen zien ta.

–Dana dala, txolarte ederra pasaerazi digu beintzat, eta bere izenean kopatxo bana ez ustutzea gaizki legoke –esan zuan Ibonek–. Tira ba... Bete... Orrela... Osaba Iñakiren izenean!

–Bere izenean! –erantzun zuten guziak.

–Nun-nai dagola, Eguarri zoriontsuak eta Urteberri on bitza! Etzuan nere zorion-agurrik eskertu eskeñi nionean, baña ez gera beti iritzi batekoak, eta onenean orain guzien eskeñiak ondo artuko ditu.

Ezkurraren alaitasuna! Gogoutsak utzi izan balio, illobaren eskeintzari pozik erantzun izango zion. Baña Ibonen azkeneko itzakin batera, irudi alai aiek ezkutatu, ta egan arkitu ziran berriro.

Asko ikusi zuten eta erridi bakanenetan izan ziran. Mota guzitako etxetara eraman zuan Gogoutsak, aberats eta txiro, osasuntu ta gaxo artera, baña nun-nai olde ona, eramanpena, pakea, itxaropena ta indarra arkitu zuten, ikerpena ondo amaiturik. Txiroetxe, Gaxotegi ta Espetxetan, zoritxar-kerizpe guzitan, gizakumearen indar aulak sarrera eragotzi ezin lezaioken Gogoutsak onespén bat utzirik, Ezkurrari bere aginduak erakutsi zizkion.

Guzia gau batean egiña zitekenik ere, sinistu ezin. Ezkurra kezka artean zegon, gertaera guziak elkarrekin zeramaten asti apurrean ikusiak izan arren, Gogoutsak begien aurrean zartzen baizijua-kion. Berarekin abiatu orduko nabaitu zuan au, baña etzion itzik esan aur billera bat utzi ta Gogoutsak buruzuri arkitu zuan arte.

–Baña ain laburra al dezu bizia? –galdetu zion.

⁷ Ezabatuta dago parentesi zuzenaren barrukoa *El Díako* jatorrizkoan. Hala ere, ematen du hori jarri behar duela (Edizio prestatzailearen oharra).

–Ludi ontako bizia oso motza da neretzat –erantzun [zion Gogoutsak ⁷]. Gaur gabeen amaitzen da.

–Gaur gabeen!

–Amabitan! Entzun! Nere azken ordua badator!

Amabiak laurdena gutxiago entzun ziran orduantxe.

–Barkatu nere galdera egokia ez dala baderizkiozu –esan zion Ezkurrak soinpekoari arretaz begiraturik–, baña zurea ez dan zer-bait ikusten dedala iruditzen zait. Soñeko ertzetik ageri dezuna zer da, oin bat ala atzapar bat?

–Atzaparra dala derizkiozu beraz? –erantzun zion Gogoutsak–. Begira!

Bere soinpeko toles artetik bi aur kupigarri, lander, izugarri, nardagarri irten ziran. Oñetan, bere soñekoari elduta, belaunikatu zitzaizkion.

–Gizon! Begira onera!

Nexka ta mutilla ziran, zurbil, zarpatsu, goseti, kopetillunak biak, baña apalki belaunikaturik zeuden. Gaztetasun bizia bear lukena, gazte-itxura negargarri bat besterik etzan. Aien azpegian agertzen etzan akats eta gaiztakeri mallarik ez liteke iñon arkitu.

Izuak atzera egiñerazi zion Ezkurrari. Aurren bat ikusi orduko nornairi ezpañeritzen zaizkion itz maitekorak esan nai zituan, baña etzion mingañak lagundu, gezurretan ari baño ixilik egon naiago zuan nunbait.

–Zureak al dira, Gogouts? –galdetu zuan noizbait.

–Gizonen semeak dituzu! –esan zion Gogoutsak, aiei begiraturik–. Ta neregana datozkit, beren sortzalleakandik igesi. Mutilla, Gogitxukeria da. Nexka, Zekenkeria. Kontu biakin, baña batez ere aurrenekoarekin, galbide guziak berekin ditu ta. Kopetean iñork kentzen ez dion bitartean, “Ondamena” idatzita darama.

–Kerizpe edo laguntzarik ez al dute? –galdetu zion Ezkurrak.

–Ez al dago kartzelik? –erantzun zion Gogoutsak len berak egindako galdera bikin–: Txiroetxeak ez al dute beren eginbearra betetzen?

Amabiak jo zuten.

Ezkurra Gogoutsaren billa asi zan, eta etzuan iñon arkitu. Azkeneko tantai otsarekin batera, Marlegiren iragarpena gogoratu zitzaion, eta, begiak jaso zituanean, itsas gañean lañoa bezela, lurraren gañean soñeko zabal eta burutxano batekin zetorkion mamu bat nabaitu zuan.

LAUGARREN AAPALDIA

Ta azkeneko Gogoutsa urreratu zitzaion...

Geldiro, ixilik, aundikiro urbildu ere. Ezkurra, aurrean belau-nikatu zitzaion, Gogoutsak inguru guzian zerion goibeltasun eta ezkutuki aideak menderatuta.

Illoial beltz antzeko batekin estalirik zetorren. Gorputz osoa ta buru-arpegiak gordeta zekarzkin. Esku bat bakar-bakarrik ageri zuan. Onexegatik izan ez balitz, illunpeakin bat egiñik, etzan Gogoutsa iñola nabaitzerik izango. Ezkurrari luze ta aundia iruditu zitzaion, eta ikusgai arek bildur adierazgaitz bat sartu zion barru-barruraño. Gogoutsak ez itzik egin ez ezer mugitzen zuan.

–Etorkizuneko Eguarri Gogoarekin ote nago? –galdetu zion Ezkurrak.

Itzik esan gabe, Gogoutsak eskua jasota zerbait erakutsi zion.

–Oraindik izan ez dan arren, biar gertatu bear duanaren berri ematera al zatozkit?

Une batean, illoialaren goiko muturra makurtu zan, Gogoutsak buruarekin baietz esan balu bezela. Auxe izan zan aren erantzupen bakarra.

Gogoutsakin oitzeko garaia bazuan ba, baña Ezkurra dardar bizian zegon. Mamua, dardar ura nabaiturik, geldi-geldi egon zan. Ezkurraren barrena pittin bat lasaitu zedin.

Baña batekoz bestera gertatu zitzaion: bera alegiñean saiatu arren, esku bat eta gauza beltz aundi ura besterik ikusten uzten etzion illunpe zear, oial beltz aren atzetik, bi mamutzar-begi begira-begira zeuzkala oldozte utsak izua ezurretaraño sartu zion.

–Etorkizun Gogouts! –marraskegin zuan–. Oraindañokotan, zu bildurgarriena! Baña nere kaltean etzatozela badakit. Eta aspal-dian utzitako bidera jo nairik, zure erakusbideak, eskertsu, ontzat artu ta jarraitzeko asmotan naiz. Ez al didazu itzik egin bear?

Etzion erantzun. Eskuak aurrera bidea erakusten zion.

–Esaidazu nundik jo! –zion Ezkurak–. Gaua laburra da, ta minutu guziak zein baño zein ederragoak neretzat! Arren, erakus zaidazu bidea! Erakutsi bidea, Gogouts!

Mamua etorri bezelaxe aldendu zitzaion. Baña aren soñeko errañuak berekin balerama bezela, Ezkurra Mamuaren atzetik abiatu zan.

Oek errira juan bearrean, erria bereganuntz zetorkiela zirudin. Eta bat-batean erri erdian arkitu ziran: Boltsan, salostari artean... Patriketan ontzakoen ota, taldeka jardunean, alde guzitan erlojua nagusi... Beren erraztunak igurtziaz antxe zebiltzan Ezkurak ainbeste aldiz ikusitako aiek, berak ainbat bider ikusi bezelaxe.

Gogouts tratalari-talde baten aldamenean gelditu, ta beatza-kin talde ura erakusten ziola ikusirik, urbildu zan Ezkurra ere aiekanuntz.

–Ez –zion gizaseme lodi, kokotz-luze batek–. Eztakit il dala besterik.

–Noiz il zan? –galdetu zion beste batek.

–Bart arratsean, entzun dedanez.

–Baña zerekin il da? –esan zuan irugarren batek, surrauts beazkada galanta artuaz–. Nik ez nuan ura beñere ilko zanik uste.

–Jainkoak daki! –erantzun zion lenengoak aoa zabalduaz.

–Zer egin ote du diruarekin? –galdetu zuan, sudurren puntan indiollo-muki antzeko zintzilikario bat zeraman jaun gorrixta batek.

–Eztakit ezer –erantzun zion kokotz luzeak–. Neri eztit beintzat utzi, ori ziur nago.

Algaraz artu zuten guziok irteera.

–Eortzi merkea izango da –jarraitu zuan berak–. Laguntzalleren bat izaten naiko lan. Juango ote gera geroni?

–Amaiketakoren bat izatekotan, ez legoke ain gaizki –esan zuan sudur-zintzilikaridunak–. Nerekiñ zerbait nai duanak, sabela bete dezaidala.

Len añako algarak.

–Nik ikusten dedana, guzietan fiñena neroni naizela –amaitu zuan lenengoak–. Ez det amaiketakorik ere eskatzen, eta beste norbaitek nai badu, ni juango naiz. Ondo pentsatzera, neroni ez ote nitzan ba aren lagunik kutunena? Elkarrekin topo egiten genun guzitan, zerbait itz egin bearra sortu oi zuan beintzat. Gero arte!

Taldea sakabanatu zan. Ezkurak guziak ezagutzen zituan, eta Gogoutsari zerbaiten azalpen eske bezela begiratu zion. Gogoutsak, kale kaskar batean barrena eramanez, elkarrekin topo egin zuten lagun bi erakutsi zizkion. Jakin nai zuanaren berri ikasi ote zezaken edo, aiek ziotena entzutera urbildu zan.

Biak oso ezagunak zituan. Tratalariak, salerosketan izen aundien jabe ta aberatsak biak. Aiekin ondo eukitzen alegindua zan beti.

–Nola gera? –zion batek.

–Ondo! Ta zu? –besteak

–Ainbestean! Zarrak ordaindu dituala beraz guziak?

–Ala diote. Otz dago, ez?

–Eguarritan gera ta ezta arritzekoa. Irristan ibilli bear ez?

–Ez. Aurreragoko egitekorik badabilkit. Agur!

–Agur, ba!

Ezta itzik ere geiago. Orrelaxe arkitu, itz oietxek esan eta elkar onelaxe agurtu zuten.

Ezkurra arrituta zeukan Gogoutsak. Uxkeri aiei arreta jarri eraziko zion ba? Bestalde entzundako itz aiek zerbait esan naiko zutela iruditzen zitzaion, eta auxe igarri nairik burua ondo nekatu zuan.

Ezin ziteken, Jagoba, baltzukide izandakoaren eriotz otsak izan: au aspaldi gertatua baitzan, eta Gogoutsari etorkizuna beste-

rik ez baitzegokion. Ura izan ezik, etzuan berriz iñoren aztarrenik arkitzen. Baña nornaigatik esanak zirala, atera zezaken ondore on guzia bereganatu nairik, ez itz ez kiñu bat galdu gabe guzia aztertu, ta, batez ere, bere buruaren irudia azaltzen zitzaionean arretaz begiratzea erabaki zuan. Ezkutuki aren argibidea beragan arkitzeko ustean nunbait.

Inguru guziak aztertu zituan. Bera antxe agertu oi zan ordua izan arren, bere tokian beste gizon bat ikusi zuan. Ez, etzegon bera iñon. Etzan arritu ala ere. Aspaldian bizikera berritzekotan baitzan, eta bere asmo aiei josi zien egun, une, eta leku artan bere bururik ez arkitzea.

Ililik, gotillun, Gogoutsa bere aldamenean eskua luzatuta zeukan. Bere oneratu zanean, Ezkurrak aren esku ta tankerari begiratuaz, Begi Ezkutu aiek begira-begira zeuzkala nabaiturik, izu otzikara bat goitik bera sentitu ta jela-aizeak izoztuta bezela gelditu zan.

Toki ura utzi ta Ezkurrak oso izen txarrekoztat euki oi zuan zoko batera juan ziran. Kaleak, estu ta ustel-usaia zeriottenak ziran; etxe ta dendak, kaskarrak; giza-emakumeak, ordi, itxura txarrekoak, erdi larrugorrian zebiltzan. Zornartate ta bidetxotatik, mallarik makurreneko jende zikiña, pillaka, amildegiratzen dan ibaiaren burrunbaz, kalerik aundienera sartzen zan.

Zekenkeri-leize aren erdi-erdian, salokitxo zapal bat ageri zan: zarpazar, botilla, ezur eta ondakin dendatxo bat. Lurrean giltza, iltze, kate ta burni zar mota guziak pillaka. Koipe ustel ta zatar zikin artean, iñork gogoz azterkatuko etzukean ezkutuko pizti bizikera bat nabari ziteken. Kirastasun aren jabea, irurogeitamar bat urteko alproja illezuria, sutontzi baten ondoan exerita, ondo irabazitako atsedean aldi gozartsuan pipa erreaz zegon, aizeak jo etzezan, listai batetik milla margoko zatar puskakin egindako errezel itxura bat zintzilik zuala.

Ezkurra ta Mamua, lotura aundi batekin zetorren emakume bat sartu zan une berean eldu ziran gizon aren aurrera. Emakume onen ondoren, beste bat etorri zan; zorroto batekin au ere. Eta bien

atzetik, beltzez jantzitako gizon bat. Bata bestea ikusteak, arrituta utzi zituan irurak.

Une batean guziak (pipa ortzetan zuan agurea ere arrituta zeukaten ba), guziak, diot, izuarekin ixilik egon ondoren, irurak parrari eraso zioten.

–Aurreratu bedi lenbizi esnezalea bakarrik –uju egin zuan aurrena sartutakoak–; betor gero gobarazalea. Eortzetxeko mutila, azkena. Zer derizkiok, Txomin? Ustegabeen irurak emen!

–Eta nun obeto? –esan zien Txomin zarrak pipa ortzartetik aterata–. Atozte “salara”. Guziok ezagutzen dezute. Baña zaudete... aurrena itxi dezadan denda. Au atearen kurrizka! Ez dago denda osoan ate-orpo oek baño burni zarragorik, ez nereak baño ezur igarragorik. A, a! Oiek nolako, ni alako! Guazen orain “salara”!

“Sala”, errezel atzeko zati ura zan. Sutontziko ikatzak igitu, ta bere pipa muturrarekin kandela antxitu zuan zarrak, berriro ortzartean sartu baño len.

Ortan ari zan bitartean, aurrena sartutako emakumeak bere lotura lurrean utzi, ta alkitxo batean exeri zan, ukalondoak belaun gañean zituala lotsagabe-lotsagabe beste biai begira jarririk,

–Zer da? E? Zer dezute? E, andre Joxepa? –esan zuan–. Nork bere buruari begiratu bear ez badio! “Ark” ere orrelaxe egin oi zuan beti.

–Egia da –erantzun zion gobarazaleak.

–Zer dala ta izu-arpegi ori orduan? Zeren bildur zera, emakumea? Nork jakin bear du ezer? Nun ta geroni asten ez geran gere kontuak zabaltzen.

–Ez noski! –erantzun zuten andre Joxepa ta gizonak batera–. Orrelakorik pentsatzea ere!

–Tira ba! Gauzatxo abek galdu dirala, ta nori zer dijuakio? Ildakoari ez beintzat.

–Ez, orixe ez –esan zuan parrez andre Joxepak.

–Eriotz ondoren ere gorde nai bazituan, zergatik etzan bizi zala eskuzabalagoa izan? Orrela egin izan balu, etzuan eriotzak, bakar-bakarrik, zakurra bezela arrapatuko.

–Egi aundiagorik...! –esan zuan andre Joxepak–. Orain guzia pagatu du.

–Ta geiago kostako zitzaion, oek baño geixiago balio duten gauzak artu al izan banizkio. Iriki zak lotura, Txomin, eta ia zenbat ematen didaken. Garbi itz egin. Etzaidak ni aurrena izatea ajolik, eta ez ekarri diatena besteak ikustea ere. Emen alkar arkitu baño len, zer ari giñan jakingo genun noski. Ez det uste pekatu egin degunik. Iriki zak lotura, Txomin.

Baña adeiz, gizalegez, ezin zezaken beltzez jantzitako gizonak orrelakorik egiten utzi, ta aurreratuaz bere lapurreta agertu zuan. Etzan gauza aundirik. Sellu bi, lapitz bat, alkandora biritx batzuek, balio gutxiko kakote bat. Agureak arretaz aztertu, zenbat eman ikusi, ta orman idazten zuan bakoitzarengatik zezakena, ta, guzia bukatutakoan, kopuruak batu zituan.

–Ona zure kontua –esan zion– ta [ez⁸] nizkizuke bost kuarto geiago emango, nere bizi truk eman bear banizkizu ere. Zein da orain?

Andre Joxepa. Maindire ta musuzapi, barrengo jazkiren batzuek, zillarrezko zalitxo pare bat, azukrea artzeko tresnatxo bat, oñetakoak. Ordaña orman idatzita gelditu zan, beltzez jantzitako gizonarenaren aldamenean.

–Emakumeakin dirua galtzen det –zion zarrak–. Goitik jotzen baitet guzia. Onek galdu bear nau. Ara zure kontua. Txakur txiki bat geiago eskatzen badidazu, bi errial gutxiago emango dizkizut.

–Ta orain, iriki zak nere lotura –esan zion emakumeak.

Txomin, lasaiago aritzeagatik, belaunikatu zan, eta, korapilloakin burrukan ainbeste denboran aritu ondoren, oial illun aundi astun bat atera zuan.

–Zer den au? –galdetu zion–. Trozela?

–Bai jauna! –erantzun zion emakumeak, ukalondoak belaun gañetik altxa gabe–. Trozela!

–Baña oraindik “bera” oean zegola, estun ta guzti jetxi al den?

⁸ Parentesi barrukoa edizio prestatzaileak erantsi du. Hala behar duela ematen du.

–Noski! Zergatik ez ba?

–Ik aberatsa bear unen⁹ –oarrarazi zion Txominek–, ta iritxi-ko aiz noski!

–Neregan baziok, ez nauk ni eskua luzatzeko bildurrak egongo beintzat, batez ere “aren” antzekoak ditukenen gauzakin. Kontu! Etzaidak koiperik bota burusi gañera!

–“Aren” burusiak?

–Norenak izatea nai dek ba? Eztizkik bear ta.

–Ez unen noski gaitz kutsukorren batekin ilko? –galdetu zuan agureak, kontuak alde batera utzita.

–Ez adi bildurtu. Orrela izan baukan ez nizkiken nik “gauxa” abek artzeko bear aña minutu ere bere inguruan egingo. Begira akiok, bai! Eztiok alkandora orri zulorik arkituko! Ori baitziken onena. Garaiz irixten ez banauk alperrikaltzen zidatek.

–Alperrikaldu?

–Lurrazpiratzeko ori jartzeko asmoak baizizkiteken –erantzun zuan parrez emakumeak–. Eskerrak atera zioatela. Bastoxiagoko batekin naikoa ez al dik ba?

Ezkurra ikaratuta zeukan elkarrizketa izugarri arek. Lau likitx aiei, nazkatuta, atsekabez begiratzen zien.

–Orra! –zion ontan emakumeak, Txomiñek emandako txanponak jasoaz–. Orra nola amaitzen dan guzia! Bizi zala aide ta lagun uxatu zituan, eta orain bere eriotzarekin gu bakarrik irabazle! Orra!

–Gogouts! –esan zuan Ezkurrak, buruko ille muturretatik oñetako azkazal muturretarañoko guzia dardar zuala–. Orain ulertzen det! Doakabe ori neroni izan nindekean! Nere biziaren amaia orrelakoxea izan zitekean! Jaungoiko aundia!... Baña zer da au?

Ikarak atzera bota zuan. Iruditokia aldatu, ta trozel gabeko oe baten aurrez aurre arkitu baitzuan bere burua! Xaretutako maindire zar baten azpian “zerbait” zegon, eta estalita geldi-geldik egoite arek garbi adierazten zuan “zer” izan ziteken.

⁹ Jatorrizkoan “uken” dator (Edizio prestatzailearen oharra).

Ezkurrak, lenengo unean, ezin izan zuan alegiñaren alegiñaz ezer ikusi, ain zegon illuna gela. Kanpotik sartutako argi-izpi motel batek zuzen-zuzen oe gañera jotzen zuan, eta antxe, iñoren laguntza gabe iñori maitasun malko bat ixuri erazi etzion gizon baten gorputz illotza zegon.

Ezkurrak Gogoutsari begiratu zion. Onek oe-burua ikusarazi nai zion itxuraz.

Illoiala zabarkeri aundiz jarria zegon, eta ikutu txiki bat nai-koa zan ildakoaren arpegia agerian uzteko.

Ezkurrak aditzen zuan au, txit errex egin zitekela nabaitzen zuan, “nai zukean”, baña bere aldamenetik Gogoutsa bialtzea bezin zail zitzaion.

Oera begira, gizon ura atzera piztuko balitz, bere lenengo gogaiak nolakoak izango ote liraken oldoztu zuan Ezkurrak. Dollorkeria? Biotz-gogortasuna? Buruausteak? Oietxek ziran noski bukaera beltz ura ekarri ziotenak!

Gela otz bakar artan, bere itz, oitura, maitasun egipen edo biotz onaren oroipen txikienik jaso ta gordetzeko etzuan iñor. Katu baten arramazkotsa atean, eta surik gabeko sukaldean xaguen karruska. Zeren bila zebiltzan? Zerk ote zeuzkan ain urduri? Ezkurrak etzuan jakin nai ere...

–Gogouts –esan zuan–. Au geiegi da. Toki izugarri ontatik alde egin, arren, onek erakutsi didana beti gogoan eukiko det, bai orixe. Guazen!

Baña Gogoutsak, bere eskua luzatuta, ildakoaren burua erakusten zion.

–Ulertzen dizut –esan zion Ezkurrak–, eta al banu egingo nuke. Baña ezin det, Gogouts, ezin. Erri guzian gizon onen eriotzak biotza ikutu dionen bat baldin balitz, arren, ikusi nai nuke.

Gogoutsak bere estalki beltza ego antzera zabaldu zuan, eta berriro biltzerakoan, egun argiz zegon gela batean ama bat seme-alabakin arkitu zituan Ezkurrak.

Amaren larritasunak, norbaiten zai zeudela adierazten zuan. Urduri zebillen batera ta bestera, edozein otsek bildurtzen zuan, noiznai leioratzen zan, erlojuari ainbeste aldiz begiratzen zion,

orratz lanean ezin asmatu-rik, aurren berriketa errugabeak ere min ematen ziola zirud- in.

Azkenean, ain larri zaitutako deia entzun zuan. Otsarekin batera atean zan. Bere senarra zetorkion: kardaba arpegitik zearo juan etzitzai- on arren, alako alaitasun batekin nastuan zekarren, eta alaitasun au, lotsatuta, estali nai zuala esan ziteken.

Maiean jarri zan, bazkari lege aurrean. Eta, luzaro ixilik egon ondoren, emazteak zer berri zekarzkin galdetu zionean, zer erant- zun ezin asmatu-rik bezela gelditu zan.

–Onak ala txarrak?

–Txarrak –esan zuan azkenean.

–Zearo ondatuta?

–Ez, oraindik itxarobide bat badegu, Karoline.

–“Bera” limurtzen badegu? –esan zion arrituta emazteak–. Alatz orrek...

–Ezingo da limurtu –erantzun zion senarrak–. Illa baita!

Arpegia gogo-ispillua baldin bada, andre gazte ura leial eta onutsa zan, baña berri ura entzun eta zerura eskuak baturik egin zuan begiratuak, berak nai baño geiago adierazi zuan. Bereala damutu zitzaion egiña, baña barrenak agindutakoa besterik etzuan agertu.

–Aste beteko epea eskatzera juan nitzai- onean, atea iriki zidan sorgin erdi mozkor arek ez sartzen uzteagatik esan zidala uste nua- na egia gertatu da. Oso gaizki zegola zion, eta, ikusten danez, azke- netan egon bear zuan.

–Eta gure zorra nork jasoko du orain?

–Ezta- kit; baña ordurako dirua izango degu noski, ta, ez bage- nu ere, ez al da urrengoa lengoa bezin biotz-gogorra izango! Gaur lasai egon gaitezen beintzat, Karoline.

Ulertzen etzuten aurtxo txiki aien arpegiak ere, gurasoen alai- tasuna zerioten. Etxe ontan gizon aren eriotza zorion ekartzalle izan zuten beraz! Orixe izan zan Gogoutsak Ezkurrari erakutsi al izan zion biozkada bakarra: alaitasuna!

–Baña ez al du maitasun apurrik ere sortu iñon bere eriotzak? –galdetu zuan Ezkurrak–. Eriotz-gela ori ametsik bildurgarriena

bezela, beti irudimenean erabiltzea nai ez badezu, arren, Gogouts, erakus zaidazu onelakorik balitz.

Gogoutsak txit ezagunak zituan kale batzutan barrena zera-mala, Ezkurra bere irudiaren billa saiatu zan, baña iñon arkitu gabe.

Lenago, beste bein izandako Yonen etxera eraman zuan berri-ro. Ama, seme-alabakin sutondoan zegon.

Ixilik! Oso ixilik! Bi Zubiritxo txinpart aiek arrirudiak bezin geldi, Keparen aurrean exerita zeuden, eta onek idazti bat zeukan eskuan. Ama-alabak josi ta josi ari ziran, baña... bai ixilik guziak!...

“...Eta aurtxo bat arturik, beren artean exeri zuan...”.

Nun entzun zituan itz aiek Ezkurrak? Etzuan ametsik egin ba. Ez, atal-buruan zirala, mutillak irakurriko zituan noski. Zergatik ez ba jarraitu?

Amak lana utzi ta arpegia esku artean ezkutatu zuan.

–Margo onek begian min egiten du –zion.

Margoak!... Xabierto gizajoa!...

–Juan da! Ezta ezer. Argi onek begiak nekatzen dizkit, baña ez nuke iñola ere, zuen aitak etortzen danean ezagutzerik nai. Onez-kero laxter da...

–Bai, berandutxo izan bear du! –esan zuan Kepak idaztia itxiaz–. Len baño geldiago etortzen dala egingo nuke aspaldi ontan.

Berriz ere ixildu ziran guziak. Eta andik puxka batera:

–Bai, Xabierto bizkarrean zuala bizkor asko etortzen ikusi izan det bein baño geiagotan –esan zuan amak, abots geldiz dardar une bat menderaturik.

–Bai nik ere –erantsi zion Kepak.

–Eta nik... –beste batek.

–Izan ere... aiñ zan ariña gixajoa –jarraitu zuan amak bere lanetik begirik jaso gabe–, ta ainbeste maite zuan aitak, ainbeste... Nola aren kiloak bizkar gañean nabaitu?... Ara, or da aita!

Yongana irten zan. Ondo bear zuan gizajoak! Bere tea gertu zegon, eta nork ekarri erabakitzeko burukatu ziran. Bi Zubiritxo

biziak beren arpegiak aitarenarekin bat egin zituzten, “Aita, ez atsekabetu! Ez samindu, aita!” esan nai baliote bezela.

Yonek alaitasuna zeriola azaldu nai zuan, eta guziakin jardun zan. Mai gañeko lanak aztertuaz, ama-alaben trebetasun eta beatz bizitasuna aitortu zituan.

–Iganderako guzia gertu egongo da –esan zien.

–Iganderako? An izan al zera, Yon? –galdetu zion, emazteak.

–Bai maite. Nerekin etorri baziña...! Guzia ain orlegi... Ikusi bazenu! Baña orain maiz ikusiko degu. Igandean berriz juango naitzela agindu diot. Ene semea...! Ene seme maitea!

Ta malkoak berak baño indar geiago izanik, mara-mara irten zitzaizkion.

Gelatik irten eta goiko bizitzara igo zan: Eguarri antzera, lore txorta ta zintzilakariz apaindua zeukaten.

Aurtxoaren aldamenean alki bat zegon, eta lentxiago norbait egondako aztarrenak agertzen ziran gela artan. Yon gizajoa exeri zan, eta, pixka batean oldozkor egon ondoren, arpegitxoan muñ eman zion aurrari.

Barrena lasaitu, ta, etsi-etsi eginda, alabear nonbait, jetxi zan berriro.

Sutondora urbildu ziran guziak, eta ama-alabak josi ta josi, ta besteak berriketan, antxe aritu ziran. Ezkurraren illoba bai atsegiña noski, Yonek zionez. Bein bakarrik ikusia izan arren, kalean gelditu ta ain itun egoteko zer ote zuan galdetu etzion ba.

–Ta ain biotz ona agertu duan ezkerro, egia esan diot –jarraitu zuan Yonek–. “Samintzen nau berri orrek, Zubiri”, esan zidan, “zugatik eta zure emazte onagatik”. Eta, aizu, nola jakin du au?

–Zer gero?

–Emazte ona zerala.

–Ori mundu guziak daki! –jardetsi zuan Kepak.

–Ederki esana, seme! –jarraitu zuan aita–. Nik ere alaxe uste diat. “Nere atsekabe-agurra artu” zion. “Zerbaitean lagundu al banezaizuteke, ona emen nere zuzenbidea” esan zidan bere ingorritxoa eskeñirik, “eta zuen etxera bezelaxe etorri”. Ta eskeñi au asko eskertu diot, ez egin dezaigukenagatik, bere gogo onagatik

baizik. Gure Xabierto ezagutu ta gurekin batera samindu balitz bezelaxe!

–Oso ona izan bear du! –esan zuan emazteak.

–Ezagutuko bazenu esango zenuke –erantzun [zion Yonek–. Keparentzat ¹⁰] irabazpide oberen bat arkitzen ez badigu!

–Entzun al dek, Kepa? –galdetu zion amak.

–Orduan –esan zuan arrebatatoko batek–, Kepa andregaiatopatu, ta bere kontu biziko zaigu.

–Etzazula umekeririk esan! –erantzun zion Kepak gorri-gorri eginda.

–Oraindik apika gertatuko eztan arren, noizbait iritxiko da ori ere noski –jarraitu zuan aita–. Baña gerta ala gerta, ez gera noski gure Xabierto gizajoatzaz aztuko, au jua baitzaigu aurrena.

–Nola aztu, aita? –esan zioten guziak.

–Banekien maiteak. Eta oso txikia izanagatik ain ona ta ain ixilla zala oroiturik, aren irudia beti gure arteko lokaia izan dedilla.

–Alaxe izango da, aita!

–Zorionekua egiten nazute, seme-alabok –esan zien aita–, txit zorionekua.

Emazteak besarkatu zuan, alabak ere bai, bi Zubiritxo txikiak berdin egin zuten, eta Kepak eskua eman zion. Xabiertoaren erra-ña! Jaungoikoagandik etorritako izpi bat ziñan noski gotzontxo polit ori!

–Gogouts –esan zuan Ezkurrak–, zeredozerk esaten dit laster bazuazkitela. Eztakit zergatik, baña ala esango nuke. Esaidazu beraz, norena zan an gela artan ikusi degun gorputzill ura?

Etorkizun Eguarri Gogoutsak, len bezela, tratalari artera eraman zuan, baña etzuan Ezkurrak bere irudirik iñon arkitzen. Etzan Mamua gelditzen, irudi aiek elkarrekin zer ikusirik etzutela esan ziteken, zerikusi ori oraindik gertatu gabeak izate utsean arkitu nai

¹⁰ Ezabatuta dago parentesi zuzenaren barrukoa *El Diako* jatorrizkoan. Hala ere, ematen du hori jarri behar duela (Edizio prestatzailearen oharra).

ez bazan beintzat. Alakorik batean, Ezkurrak, arren une batean gelditzeko eskatu zion.

–Zeitxo ontantxe dago nere landola –zion–. Ara, uraxe da etxea. Zer izan bear dedan ikusi nai nuke.

Gogoutsak gelditu zan, baña etzuan Ezkurrak zion aldera juaan nai, bere eskuak beste aldean erakusten zuan.

–Ez, ez, etxea or dago –oarrarazi zion Ezkurrak–. Nora eramana nai nazu?

Mamuaren beatza lenean zegon. Ezkurrak, ala ere, bere landola-leiotik barrena begiratu zuan. Bai uraxe zan: erredi berberak... baña... etzan bere landola, itxuraz... bere lan-maiean beste norbait zegon beintzat.

Mamuak lengo bidea erakusten zion. Ezkurra, bere burua nun arkituko, zalantzan jarri zan, eta Gogoutsarekin batera abiatu zan berriz ere. Elkarrekin, burni-sarez itxitako barruti batera eldu ziran.

Obitegi bat! Antxe zegon noski berak ezagutu nai zuan ura. Toki egokia ildako batentzat! Sapar eta muluz josia, eriotzaren irudi zan, ez biziarena. Ildako baten billa zebillen, ona ba ildakoa ugari; bere eriotz gosea ase zezaken. Toki egokia!

Gogoutsak obi artean aurrera jo, ta aietako bat erakutsi zion. Ezkurra dardar aurreratu zan. Mamua geldi-geldi zegon, baña aunditasun berezi bat nabaitzen zion Ezkurrak.

–Agintzen didazun arlau ortara urbildu baño len, galdera bat –zion–: ikuskizun oek naitanaez gertatu bear dutenak ala gertatu litezkenak bakarrik dira?

Gogoutsak illobia erakusten zion.

–Giza bizikerak, artan jarraitzekotan, bat zertaraño iritxi leiken igarri erazten du –zion Ezkurrak–. Baña bizikera aldatzen dala, amaia ere aldatu leike. Nik ikusitakoakin ere ala gertatzen al da?

Gogoutsak, lenean tenk.

Dardar-larriz, Ezkurra urbildu zan, eta illobi trakets baten arlauan bere izena irakurri zuan!/: “Ezkurratar Iñaki!!”.

–Ni nitzan, beraz, oe artan negona? –karraxi egin zuan belau-nikaturik.

Mamu-beatzak bera ta illobia ikutu zituan.

–Ez, Gogouts! Ez!, ez! Entzun! Ni ez naiz lengoa! Ez naiz zure erakusbide gabe izango nitzana! Zertarako erakutsi Etorkizuna, bera aldatzea nere esku ez badaukat?

Ura entzunik, Gogouts-eskuak dardar egin ote zuan esango nuke.

–Gogo on! –jarraitu zuan bi belaunak lurreean zituala–. Kupituko zera noski nitzaz, ona baitzera! Esaidazu nere bizikera aldatu dezakedala! Ikuskizun oek ez egi biurtzea nere esku daukadala esaidazu!

Eskua, ezparik gabe, dardar zeukan Mamuak.

–Eguarri ospatuko det, biotzez ospatu ere, ta urte guzian gogoa izango det. “Igarotakoa” zuzenduaz, “Gaur” ondo biziko naiz, “Etorkizunari” begira. Zuek irurok erakutsitakoak ez ditut alperrikalduko! Arren! Esaidazu arlau ortako izena oraindik kendu dezakedala!

Bere nekelarrian Gogoutsaren eskuari eldu zion. Onak askatzena egin zuan, baña estualdiak indar ikaragarria ematen zion ari, ta etzuan berealakoan askatzerik lortu. Azkenik, bultzada gogor batekin egotzi zuan orde.

Eskuak gora jaso zituan Ezkurrak, otolari tankeran. Eta Gogoutsaren estalki ta txanoa aldatzen ikusi zituan. Laburtu ta laburtu, estutu ta estutu, oaren abe biurtu zitzaizkion azkenean.

BOSKARREN AAPALDIA

Esnatu zanean...

...Oe-abe biurtu zitzaizkion. Eta bere logela azaldu zitzaion. Atsegiñena, adurrik onekoena, lengo bizikera ura aldatzeko aña asti aurrean arkitzen zuala.

–Igarotakoa zuzenduaz, Gaur ondo biziko naiz Etorkizunari begira –esan zuan Ezkurrak oetik jeikiatz–. Iru arotako Gogoak nere biotzean biziko dira. O, Marlegi! Jagoba adiskidea! Onetsiak bitez Urtzi ta Eguarriak! Belauniko diot au, Jagoba, belauniko!

Asmo onak gañezka zegioten, eta urduritasunak etzion nai zuana adierazten uzten. Mamuarekin burrukan ari zala negar egiña zan, eta arpegia malkoz bustita zeukan.

–Beren tokian daude! –zion trozela ikutuaz–. Beren tokian, estun ta guzti! Emen daude, ta neroni ere bai. Ta izan litekenaren errañoak eztira nik ikusi bezela izango. Nik aienatuko ditut, ziur alare.

Izketan ari zala, bere jantziak ikutu, alde guzitatik aztertu, ta lurrean uzten zituan, gogoan zebizkin nabarmenkeriakin nasturik.

–Eztakit zer egin! –ari zan erdi parrez erdi negarrez, bere galtzetan trabatuta–. Luma bat beziñ arin, ikasle bat bezin alai, gotzon bat beziñ zorioneko nabaitzen det nere burua. Guzia biraka dabilkit. Eguarri zoriontsuak guziaz! Urteberri on! Eup...! Au dek sasoa! Eup...!

Aldameneko gelan exeri bear izan zuan, erdi itota.

–Nere morokil eltzetxoa! –oiu egin zuan sukaldera sarturik–. Ta ona Marlegiren Mamutzarra sartu zitzaidan atea! Antxe eseri

zan Gaurko Eguarri Gogouts! Leio ortatixek ikusi nuan mamu-
talde ibilkaria! Egia! Egi-egia! Gertatua da guzia. Ja!, ja!, ja!

Parrik egin gabea zan gizon arentzat, algara luze bateri asiera
eman zion lenengo karkara alaiagarria izan zan benetan.

–Eztakit zer egunetan bizi naizen ere! –zion–. Gogouts artean
zenbat egun igaro ote ditut? Eztakit! Aurtxo bat bezela nago! Ber-
din da! Zer dijuakit! Aurtxo bat izatea ez ote da onena? Eup...! Au
dek umorea! Eup...!

Oi ez bezelako kanpai-ots zaratatsu batek ixildu erazi zuan.
Dilin-din-dlon! Dilin-din-dlon! Au ots pozgarria! Ederra bai kan-
pai-otsa!

Leiora juan eta zabal-zabal iriki zitun. Etzegon ez laño ez lan-
brorik. Egun argi, otza. Odola zañetan pilpil jartzen zuan urre
margodun egun eguzkitsua. Zerua urdin-urdin zegon. Aize garbia,
kanpai-ots alaiak! Bikaña! Disdiratsua!

–Zer egun dek gaur? –galdetu zion jai-eguneko jantziakin
zijuan mutiko bateri.

–E? –esan zion mutillak arriturik.

–Ia zer egun dan gaur?

–Gaur? Eguarri!

–Eguarri? –esan zuan Ezkurrak berekiko–. Ez diat orduan
orrenbeste asti igaro. Gau batean izan dizkiat itxuraz iru gogout-
sak. Noski! Nai dutena egin bailezateke aiek! –Ta mutillari itz egi-
ñaz–: Aizak, i, mutiko!

–Zer nai? –erantzun zion mutillak.

–Ollotegia bai al dakik nun dagon, bigarren kale kantoian?

–Jakingo ez tet ba!

–Au dek mutill bizia! Ez aiz makala! Atzo erakustokian zeu-
kateken indiollo ura saldu ote ditek? Ez txiki ura, ez; guzietan aun-
diena esan nai nikek.

–Ni baño aundiagoko bat?

–Au dek mutilla! –zion Ezkurrak–. Irekin noranai juan leikek!
Orixe, orixe esan nai niken!

–Oraindik kakotik zintzilik dago.

–Bai? Ua ba ta erosi zaidak.

–Baita zera ere! –erantzun zuan mutillak.

–Ez, ez! Benetan ari nauk –jardetsi zuan Ezkurrak–. Ua erostera, ta esaiotek onera ekartzeko, nora eraman esan dezaiotedan. Dendako mutillarekin etortzen baaiz, bi errial emango dizkiat; eta bost minutu baño lenago izatekotan, pezta bat.

Mutillak etzuan besterik entzun nai izan. Tximista baño biziago ezkutatu zan.

–Yoneri bialduko diot –zion aopean Ezkurrak eskuak igurtziaz–. Nork bialtzen dion esan gabe gañera. Xabiartxo alako bi bada.

Zuzenbidea idazten ari zala, pozaren pozez dardar egiten zion eskuak. Paper puntarekin eskaratzera jetxi zan gero, ollotegiko mutillari atea irikitzera. Mutillaren zai zegola, ate-kixketari begira gelditu zan.

–Eriotz arteraño maiteko det! –zion laztanduaz–. Ta ainbeste urtean au zanik ere konturatu gabe bizi izan ez naiz ba! Bai itxura ederrekoa dala! Kisketa berezia da gero auxe! “Aparta”!... Ara! Emen degu indiolloa. Eup...! Nola ago? Eguarri zoriontsuak!

Uraxe zan ba indiolloa! Naitanaez beribillian ibilli bearko zuan arek bizi zala. Gorputz puska ura anka aien gañean juan zitekenik eziñ siñistu beintzat.

–Eztago ori Yonen etxeraño besoan eramaterik! –esan zioten Ezkurrak–. Gurdi bat artu bearko dezute.

Parrez esan zuan au, parrez ordaindu indiolloa, parrez eman zien eskupekoa bi mutillai, eta parrez ler eginda eseri bear izan zuan bere besaulkian.

Bizarra kentzea etzitzaion oi bezin erreza izan. Eskua dardar baitzeukan. Eta danik eta alaiena zaudela ere, ezta noski bizarra kentzen ari zerala dantzan ibiltzea zentzuzko gauza. Baña, tira, orduan sudur muturra bizar-labanakin moztu izan balu ere, zapi bat jarri ta kito!

Apain-apain jantzi zan, eta kalera. Bigarren Gogoutsarekin zebillela ikusi zituan bezelaxe zeuden kaleak. Jendea, barra-barra. Eskuak atzera zituala, irriparra ezpañetan zebilkin Ezkurrak. Eza-gutzen etzuten batzuek Eguarriak zoriondu zizkioten, ain arpegi

alaiz ikusita. Ta Ezkurak zionez, beñere entzundako itzik ez-tisuenak izan zitzaizkion noski.

Andik laster, lengo egunean bere landolan izandako bi jaun aietako bat zetorrela ikusi zuan. Alako zimikoa egin zion barrengo arrak. Jaun aren iritzian zer pizti mota ote zan gero! Baña bere asmotan sendo, etzuan une bateko zalantzarik ere izan.

–Jauna –esan zion bostekoa eskeñiaz–. Nola zaude? Zure egin-bearretan ondo? Eguarri zoriontsuak!

–Ezkurra jauna, noski?

–Bai. Ber-bera. Etzaizu noski nere abizena txit atsegin izango. Baña barkatzeko esan nai nizuke alegia. Ta arren...

Ezkurak oso ixilik esan zuan gañerakoa.

–Jaun aundia! –zion txapeldun arek–. Ezkurra jauna! Benetan ari al zera, ordea?

–Artu nai badidazute, ezta xentimorik ere gutxiago –esan zion Ezkurak–. Atzeratutako apur batzuek ordaindu nai nituzke. Esker ori egingo al didazute?

–Adiskide! Eztakit onenbesterañoko eskuza...

–Ezta itzik ere! Etorri derizkiozutenean, aditzen?

–Bai orixe! –erantzun zuan jaun arek, agindua betetzeko asmo osoarekin.

–Mila esker! Eskerrik asko. Jauna zuekin bedi!

Elizara jua zan gero. Ta ondoren, egurastera. Bidean arkitzen zituan aurtxoak laztantzen zituan, txiroakin itz egin, erakustokiak aztertu: itz batean, ikusitako guziak alaitzen zuan egun artan. Ezin omen ziteken noski sinistu ere kalean biratxo bat emateak onelako atsegiñik sortu zezakenik.

Eguardi aldera, bere illobareneruntz abiatu zan.

–Nagusia etxean al da? –galdetu zion neskatxari.

–Bai, jauna.

–Nun dago, enetxo?

–Jan-gelan, etxeakoandrearekin. Emendik, bidea erakutsiko dizut.

–Au da neskaxa pertxenta! Eskerrik asko, badakit bidea! Etxekoa nazu –esan zion Ezkurrak atea irikiaz–. Bakarrik juango naiz.

Ate-zirrikitutik begiratu zuan. Senar-emazteak mai aurrean zeuden. Au, apain benetan. Baña amaitu nai eta beti zerbaiten ikutu bearra arkitzen duanaren urduritasuna nabaitzen zitzaien.

–Ibon! –deitu zuan Ezkurrak.

Ura ikara-jauzka egin zuan ezkon-illobak! Jauna! Zeñek pent-satu bear zuan ba Ezkurrak egun artan an azaldu bear zuanik?

–Aitaren eta Semearen! Zein da? –esan zuan Ibonek.

–Ni nauk, ire osaba. Zuekin bazkaltzera etorri nauk, zuek nai badezute beintzat...

Nai! bi besoak eten etzizkiotenean, atetik iges egingo ote ziotenen bildurrez. Bost minutu barru etxean baño obeto zegon, antxe jaioa zirudin. Bere illoba aiek zein baño zein maitekorrago azaldu zitzaizkion, eta Mikel beste neskaxekin etzan atzera gelditu. Ura billera! Aiek jostabide alaiak! Ura alkartasuna! Ango zoriona!

* * *

Urrengo egunean, goiz, oso goiz juan zan bere landolara. Yon baño lenago irixteagatik zerbait emango zukean! Ura baño lenago iritxita, asarre itxura egin nai baitzion! Ogei durokoak baño atsegin aundiagoa zemaioeken!

Ta lortu zuan! Lortu zuan! Erlojuak, Yon etorri baño len jo zituan bederatziak. Bederatzi eta laurdenak... eta Yonik azaldu gabe. Emezortzi minutu t'erdi beranduago zetorren!... Ezkurra zai-zai zeukan: langelako atea saizuloruntz irikita, idazlaria noiz etorriko irrikitzen zegon.

Noizbait sartu zan gizajoa. Txapela ta lepo-berokia eskuan zekarzkin. Sartu orduko bere alkian eseri, ta erlojua, lasterketa bizian, atzera utzi nai balu bezela, luma artuta ekin zion.

–Aizak –esan zion Ezkurrak, oi zuan zakarkeriarekin, purrustaka–. Lanera etortzeko garaiak al dituk oek?

–Barkatu, jauna –erantzun zuan Yonek–, barkatu, baña...

–Zer baña, ta zer bañaondo? Bederatziak jo zitekela ogei minutu badituk. Ator onera!

–Beingoagatik! Urtean beingoa baita ba! –arren egin zion giza-joak–. Azkenekoa izango da! Atzo jaitxo bat izan genun etxean ta...

–Ta neri zer zijuakit? –karraxi egin zion Ezkurrak–. Ni ez niok txotxolokeri ta ergelkeriak entzuteko, badakik?, eta orain, gertatu zaikenagatik... –jarraitu zuan alkitik bat-batean jetxi ta eman zion bultzadakin Yon gizajoa ia ankaz gora botiaz–, gertatu zaikenagatik, gaurtik aurrera geiago ordaindu nai diat!

Yon, bildurtuta, zeredozeren bila asi zan. Nagusiak burua galdu zuala iruditurik, zerbaitekin kankarrekoen bat ematea oldoztu zuan. Kordea galdu erazi, ta norbaiteri laguntza eske juateko astia izango zuala uste alegia.

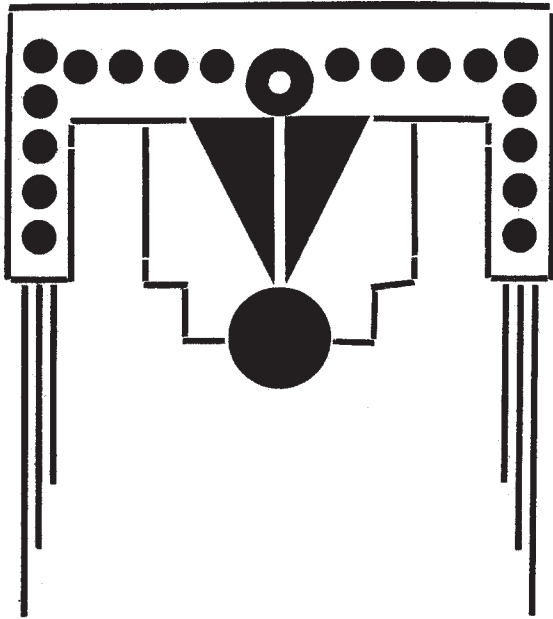
–Eguarri zoriontsuak, Zubiri! –zion, ordea, Ezkurrak alaiki ta biotzez–. Eguarri zoriontsuak, Yon, adiskide! Geiago ordaindu eta ire sendia azi ta aurrera ateratzen lagundu nai diat. Gaur arratsaldean luzaro itz egingo diagu, afari-meriendatxo baten aurrean. Piztu zak sua, ta kontu gero lerro bat ere idatzi, ikatz geiago bota ta su ona jarri arte!

* * *

Agindu baño ere geiago egin zuan Ezkurrak. Askoz geiago. Xabiartxok (ez baitzan il) bigarren aita arkitu zuan. Nagusirik onena, adiskide ona ta abertzale ona izan zan. Aren aldaketa ikusita par egin ziotenak ere arkitu zituan, baña etzituan Ezkurrak aien parrak aintzakotzat artzen, jende “kasta” batek isekaz artzen ez duan gauzik mundu ontan ezuala bai baitzekin. Biotza atsegiñetan igeri zebilkin eta auxe aski zuan.

Etzuan gogoutsekin artu-emanik geiago izan, baña Eguarri iñork baño obeto ospatzen zuala esan oi zuten guziak. Berdin esango al da gugatik ere! Ta Xabiartxok zion bezela: Guziok onetsi gaitzala Jainkoak!

AMAIA



A CHRISTMAS CAROL

by Charles Dickens

I have endeavoured in this Ghostly little book, to raise the Ghost of an Idea, which shall not put my readers out of humour with themselves, with each other, with the season, or with me. May it haunt their houses pleasantly, and no one wish to lay it.

Their faithful Friend and Servant,

C. D. December, 1843.

STAVE 1: *Marley's Ghost*

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 dread-

fully 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 Saint Paul's Churchyard for instance — literally to astonish his son's weak mind.

Scrooge never painted out Old Marley's name. There it stood, years afterwards, above the ware-house door: Scrooge and Marley. The firm was known as Scrooge and Marley. Sometimes people new to the business called Scrooge Scrooge, and sometimes Marley, but he answered to both names. It was all the same to him.

Oh! But he was a tight-fisted hand at the grindstone, Scrooge! a squeezing, wrenching, grasping, scraping, clutching, covetous old sinner! Hard and sharp as flint, from which no steel had ever struck out generous fire; secret, and self-contained, and solitary as an oyster. The cold within him froze his old features, nipped his pointed nose, shrivelled his cheek, stiffened his gait; made his eyes red, his thin lips blue; and spoke out shrewdly in his grating voice. A frosty rime was on his head, and on his eyebrows, and his wiry chin. He carried his own low temperature always about with him; he iced his office in the dog-days; and didn't thaw it one degree at Christmas.

External heat and cold had little influence on Scrooge. No warmth could warm, no wintry weather chill him. No wind that blew was bitterer than he, no falling snow was more intent upon its purpose, no pelting rain less open to entreaty. Foul weather didn't know where to have him. The heaviest rain, and snow, and hail, and sleet, could boast of the advantage over him in only one respect. They often came down handsomely, and Scrooge never did.

Nobody ever stopped him in the street to say, with gladsome looks, "My dear Scrooge, how are you. When will you come to see me." No beggars implored him to bestow a trifle, no children asked him what it was o'clock, no man or woman ever once in all his life inquired the way to such and such a place, of Scrooge. Even the blindmen's dogs appeared to know him; and when they saw him coming on, would tug their owners into doorways and up courts; and then would wag their tails as though they said, "No eye at all is better than an evil eye, dark master!"

But what did Scrooge care! It was the very thing he liked. To edge his way along the crowded paths of life, warning all human sympathy to keep its distance, was what the knowing ones call nuts to Scrooge.

Once upon a time — of all the good days in the year, on Christmas Eve — old Scrooge sat busy in his counting-house. It was cold, bleak, biting weather: foggy withal: and he could hear the people in the court outside, go wheezing up and down, beating their hands upon their breasts, and stamping their feet upon the pavement stones to warm them. The city clocks had only just gone three, but it was quite dark already: it had not been light all day: and candles were flaring in the windows of the neighbouring offices, like ruddy smears upon the palpable brown air. The fog came pouring in at every chink and keyhole, and was so dense without, that although the court was of the narrowest, the houses opposite were mere phantoms. To see the dingy cloud come drooping down, obscuring everything, one might have thought that Nature lived hard by, and was brewing on a large scale.

The door of Scrooge's counting-house was open that he might keep his eye upon his clerk, who in a dismal little cell beyond, a sort of tank, was copying letters. Scrooge had a very small fire, but the clerk's fire was so very much smaller that it looked like one coal. But he couldn't replenish it, for Scrooge kept the coal-box in his own room; and so surely as the clerk came in with the shovel, the master predicted that it would be necessary for them to part. Wherefore the clerk put on his white comforter, and tried to warm himself at the candle; in which effort, not being a man of a strong imagination, he failed.

"A merry Christmas, uncle! God save you!" cried a cheerful voice. It was the voice of Scrooge's nephew, who came upon him so quickly that this was the first intimation he had of his approach.

"Bah!" said Scrooge, "Humbug!"

He had so heated himself with rapid walking in the fog and frost, this nephew of Scrooge's, that he was all in a glow; his face was ruddy and handsome; his eyes sparkled, and his breath smoked again.

"Christmas a humbug, uncle!" said Scrooge's nephew. "You don't mean that, I am sure."

"I do," said Scrooge. "Merry Christmas! What right have you to be merry? what reason have you to be merry? You're poor enough."

"Come, then," returned the nephew gaily. "What right have you to be dismal? what reason have you to be morose? You're rich enough."

Scrooge having no better answer ready on the spur of the moment, said, "Bah!" again; and followed it up with "Humbug."

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

“What else can I be,” returned the uncle, “when I live in such a world of fools as this Merry Christmas! Out upon merry Christmas. What’s Christmas time to you but a time for paying bills without money; a time for finding yourself a year older, but not an hour richer; a time for balancing your books and having every item in’em through a round dozen of months presented dead against you? If I could work my will,” said Scrooge indignantly, “every idiot who goes about with “Merry Christmas” on his lips, should be boiled with his own pudding, and buried with a stake of holly through his heart. He should!”

“Uncle!” pleaded the nephew.

“Nephew!” returned the uncle, sternly, “keep Christmas in your own way, and let me keep it in mine.”

“Keep it!” repeated Scrooge’s nephew. “But you don’t keep it.”

“Let me leave it alone, then,” said Scrooge. “Much good may it do you! Much good it has ever done you!”

“There are many things from which I might have derived good, by which I have not profited, I dare say,” returned the nephew: “Christmas among the rest. But I am sure I have always thought of Christmas time, when it has come round — apart from the veneration due to its sacred name and origin, if anything belonging to it can be apart from that — as a good time: a kind, forgiving, charitable, pleasant time: the only time I know of, in the long calendar of the year, when men and women seem by one consent to open their shut-up hearts freely, and to think of people below them as if they really were fellow-passengers to the grave, and not another race of creatures bound on other journeys. And therefore, uncle, though it has never put a scrap of gold or silver in my pocket, I believe that it *has* done me good, and *will* do me good; and I say, God bless it!”

The clerk in the tank involuntarily applauded. Becoming immediately sensible of the impropriety, he poked the fire, and extinguished the last frail spark for ever.

“Let me hear another sound from *you*,” said Scrooge, “and you’ll keep your Christmas by losing your situation. You’re quite a powerful speaker, sir,” he added, turning to his nephew. “I wonder you don’t go into Parliament.”

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

Scrooge said that he would see him — yes, indeed he did. He went the whole length of the expression, and said that he would see him in that extremity first.

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

“Why did you get married?” said Scrooge.

“Because I fell in love.”

“Because you fell in love!” growled 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 to see me before that happened. Why give it as a reason for not coming now?”

“Good afternoon,” said Scrooge.

“I want nothing from you; I ask nothing of you; why cannot we be friends?”

“Good afternoon,” said Scrooge.

“I am sorry, with all my heart, to find you so resolute. We have never had any quarrel, to which I have been a party. But I have made the trial in homage to Christmas, and I’ll keep my Christmas humour to the last. So A Merry Christmas, uncle!”

“Good afternoon!” said Scrooge.

“And A Happy New Year!”

“Good afternoon!” said Scrooge.

His nephew left the room without an angry word, notwithstanding. He stopped at the outer door to bestow the greeting of the season on the clerk, who, cold as he was, was warmer than Scrooge; for he returned them cordially.

“There’s another fellow,” muttered Scrooge; who overheard him: “my clerk, with fifteen shillings a week, and a wife and family, talking about a merry Christmas. I’ll retire to Bedlam.”

This lunatic, in letting Scrooge’s nephew out, had let two other people in. They were portly gentlemen, pleasant to behold, and now stood, with their hats off, in Scrooge’s office. They had books and papers in their hands, and bowed to him.

“Scrooge and Marley’s, I believe,” said one of the gentlemen, referring to his list. “Have I the pleasure of addressing Mr Scrooge, or Mr Marley?”

“Mr Marley has been dead these seven years,” Scrooge replied. “He died seven years ago, this very night.”

“We have no doubt his liberality is well represented by his surviving partner,” said the gentleman, presenting his credentials.

It certainly was; for they had been two kindred spirits. At the ominous word “liberality”, Scrooge frowned, and shook his head, and handed the credentials back.

“At this festive season of the year, Mr Scrooge,” said the gentleman, taking up a pen, “it is more than usually desirable that we should make some slight provision for the Poor and destitute, who suffer greatly at the present time. Many thousands are in want of common necessities; hundreds of thousands are in want of common comforts, sir.”

“Are there no prisons?” asked Scrooge.

“Plenty of prisons,” said the gentleman, laying down the pen again.

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

“They are. Still,” returned the gentleman, “I wish I could say they were not.”

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

“Both very busy, sir.”

“Oh! I was afraid, from what you said at first, that something had occurred to stop them in their useful course,” said Scrooge. “I’m very glad to hear it.”

“Under the impression that they scarcely furnish Christian cheer of mind or body to the multitude,” returned the gentleman, “a few of us are endeavouring to raise a fund to buy the Poor some meat and drink, and means of warmth. We choose this time, because it is a time, of all others, when Want is keenly felt, and Abundance rejoices. What shall I put you down for?”

“Nothing!” Scrooge replied.

“You wish to be anonymous?”

“I wish to be left alone,” said Scrooge. “Since you ask me what I wish, gentlemen, that is my answer. I don’t make merry myself at Christmas and I can’t afford to make idle people merry. I help to support the establishments I have mentioned: they cost enough: and those who are badly off must go there.”

“Many can’t go there; and many would rather die.”

“If they would rather die,” said Scrooge, “they had better do it, and decrease the surplus population. Besides — excuse me — I don’t know that.”

“But you might know it,” observed the gentleman.

“It’s not my business,” Scrooge returned. “It’s enough for a man to understand his own business, and not to interfere with other people’s. Mine occupies me constantly. Good afternoon, gentlemen!”

Seeing clearly that it would be useless to pursue their point, the gentlemen withdrew. Scrooge resumed his labours with an improved opinion of himself, and in a more facetious temper than was usual with him.

Meanwhile the fog and darkness thickened so, that people ran about with flaring links, proffering their services to go before horses in carriages, and conduct them on their way. The ancient tower of a church, whose gruff old bell was always peeping slyly down at Scrooge out of a gothic window in the wall, became invisible, and struck the hours and quarters in the clouds, with tremulous vibrations afterwards as if its teeth were chattering in its frozen head up there. The cold became intense. In the main street, at the corner of the court, some labourers were repairing the gas-pipes, and had lighted a great fire in a brazier, round which a party of ragged men and boys were gathered: warming their hands and winking their eyes before the blaze in rapture. The water-plug being left in solitude, its overflowings sullenly congealed, and turned to misanthropic ice. The brightness of the shops where holly sprigs and berries crackled in the lamp-heat of the windows, made pale faces ruddy as they passed. Poulterers’ and grocers’ trades became a splendid joke: a glorious pageant, with which it was next to impossible to believe that such dull principles as bargain and sale had anything to do. The Lord Mayor, in the stronghold of the mighty Mansion House, gave orders to his fifty cooks and butlers to keep Christmas as a Lord Mayor’s household should; and even the little tailor, whom he had fined five shillings on the previous Monday for being drunk and bloodthirsty in the streets, stirred up tomorrow’s pudding in his garret, while his lean wife and the baby sallied out to buy the beef.

Foggier yet, and colder! Piercing, searching, biting cold. If the good Saint Dunstan had but nipped the Evil Spirit’s nose with a touch of such weather as that, instead of using his familiar weapons, then indeed he would have roared to lusty purpose. The owner of one scant young nose, gnawed and mumbled by the hungry cold as bones are gnawed by dogs, stooped down at Scrooge’s keyhole to regale him with a Christmas carol: but at the first sound of God bless you, merry gentleman! May nothing you dismay! Scrooge seized the ruler with such energy of action that the singer fled in terror, leaving the keyhole to the fog and even more congenial frost.

At length the hour of shutting up the counting-house arrived. With an ill-will Scrooge dismounted from his stool, and tacitly admitted the fact to the expectant clerk in the Tank, who instantly snuffed his candle out, and put on his hat.

“You’ll want all day tomorrow, I suppose?” said Scrooge.

“If quite convenient, Sir.”

“It’s not convenient,” said Scrooge, “and it’s not fair. If I was to stop half-a-crown for it, you’d think yourself ill-used, I’ll be bound?”

The clerk smiled faintly.

“And yet,” said Scrooge, “you don’t think *me* ill-used, when I pay a day’s wages for no work.”

The clerk observed that it was only once a year.

“A poor excuse for picking a man’s pocket every twenty-fifth of December!” said Scrooge, buttoning his great-coat to the chin. “But I suppose you must have the whole day. Be here all the earlier next morning!”

The clerk promised that he would; and Scrooge walked out with a growl. The office was closed in a twinkling, and the clerk, with the long ends of his white comforter dangling below his waist (for he boasted no great-coat), went down a slide on Cornhill, at the end of a lane of boys, twenty times, in honour of its being Christmas Eve, and then ran home to Camden Town as hard as he could pelt, to play at blindman’s buff.

Scrooge took his melancholy dinner in his usual melancholy tavern; and having read all the newspapers, and beguiled the rest of the evening with his banker’s-book, went home to bed. He lived in chambers which had once belonged to his deceased partner. They were a gloomy suite of rooms, in a lowering pile of building up a yard, where it had so little business to be, that one could scarcely help fancying it must have run there when it was a young house, playing at hide-and-seek with other houses, and have forgotten the way out again. It was old enough now, and dreary enough, for nobody lived in it but Scrooge, the other rooms being all let out as offices. The yard was so dark that even Scrooge, who knew its every stone, was fain to grope with his hands. The fog and frost so hung about the black old gateway of the house, that it seemed as if the Genius of the Weather sat in mournful meditation on the threshold.

Now, it is a fact, that there was nothing at all particular about the knocker on the door, except that it was very large. It is also a fact, that Scrooge had seen it, night and morning, during his whole residence in that place; also that Scrooge had as little of what is called fancy about him as any man in the City

of London, even including — which is a bold word — the corporation, aldermen, and livery. Let it also be borne in mind that Scrooge had not bestowed one thought on Marley, since his last mention of his seven-year's dead partner that afternoon. And then let any man explain to me, if he can, how it happened that Scrooge, having his key in the lock of the door, saw in the knocker, without its undergoing any intermediate process of change: not a knocker, but Marley's face.

Marley's face. It was not in impenetrable shadow as the other objects in the yard were, but had a dismal light about it, like a bad lobster in a dark cellar. It was not angry or ferocious, but looked at Scrooge as Marley used to look: with ghostly spectacles turned up upon its ghostly forehead. The hair was curiously stirred, as if by breath or hot-air; and, though the eyes were wide open, they were perfectly motionless. That, and its livid colour, made it horrible; but its horror seemed to be in spite of the face and beyond its control, rather than a part of its own expression.

As Scrooge looked fixedly at this phenomenon, it was a knocker again.

To say that he was not startled, or that his blood was not conscious of a terrible sensation to which it had been a stranger from infancy, would be untrue. But he put his hand upon the key he had relinquished, turned it sturdily, walked in, and lighted his candle.

He *did* pause, with a moment's irresolution, before he shut the door; and he *did* look cautiously behind it first, as if he half expected to be terrified with the sight of Marley's pigtail sticking out into the hall. But there was nothing on the back of the door, except the screws and nuts that held the knocker on, so he said "Pooh, pooh!" and closed it with a bang.

The sound resounded through the house like thunder. Every room above, and every cask in the wine-merchant's cellars below, appeared to have a separate peal of echoes of its own. Scrooge was not a man to be frightened by echoes. He fastened the door, and walked across the hall, and up the stairs, slowly too: trimming his candle as he went.

You may talk vaguely about driving a coach-and-six up a good old flight of stairs, or through a bad young Act of Parliament; but I mean to say you might have got a hearse up that staircase, and taken it broadwise, with the splinter-bar towards the wall and the door towards the balustrades: and done it easy. There was plenty of width for that, and room to spare; which is perhaps the reason why Scrooge thought he saw a locomotive hearse going on before him in the gloom. Half-a-dozen gas-lamps out of the street wouldn't have lighted the entry too well, so you may suppose that it was pretty dark with Scrooge's dip.

Up Scrooge went, not caring a button for that: darkness is cheap, and Scrooge liked it. But before he shut his heavy door, he walked through his rooms to see that all was right. He had just enough recollection of the face to desire to do that.

Sitting-room, bed-room, lumber-room. All as they should be. Nobody under the table, nobody under the sofa; a small fire in the grate; spoon and basin ready; and the little saucepan of gruel (Scrooge has a cold in his head) upon the hob. Nobody under the bed; nobody in the closet; nobody in his dressing-gown, which was hanging up in a suspicious attitude against the wall. Lumber-room as usual. Old fire-guard, old shoes, two fish-baskets, washing-stand on three legs, and a poker.

Quite satisfied, he closed his door, and locked himself in; double-locked himself in, which was not his custom. Thus secured against surprise, he took off his cravat; put on his dressing-gown and slippers, and his night-cap; and sat down before the fire to take his gruel.

It was a very low fire indeed; nothing on such a bitter night. He was obliged to sit close to it, and brood over it, before he could extract the least sensation of warmth from such a handful of fuel. The fireplace was an old one, built by some Dutch merchant long ago, and paved all round with quaint Dutch tiles, designed to illustrate the Scriptures. There were Cains and Abels, Pharaoh's daughters, Queens of Sheba, Angelic messengers descending through the air on clouds like feather-beds, Abrahams, Belshazzars, Apostles putting off to sea in butter-boats, hundreds of figures to attract his thoughts; and yet that face of Marley, seven years dead, came like the ancient Prophet's rod, and swallowed up the whole. If each smooth tile had been a blank at first, with power to shape some picture on its surface from the disjointed fragments of his thoughts, there would have been a copy of old Marley's head on every one.

"Humbug!" said Scrooge; and walked across the room.

After several turns, he sat down again. As he threw his head back in the chair, his glance happened to rest upon a bell, a disused bell, that hung in the room, and communicated for some purpose now forgotten with a chamber in the highest story of the building. It was with great astonishment, and with a strange, inexplicable dread, that as he looked, he saw this bell begin to swing. It swung so softly in the outset that it scarcely made a sound; but soon it rang out loudly, and so did every bell in the house.

This might have lasted half a minute, or a minute, but it seemed an hour. The bells ceased as they had begun, together. They were succeeded by a clanking noise, deep down below; as if some 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 voice, no doubt about it.

"Who are you?"

"Ask me who I *was* ."

"Who *were* you then." said Scrooge, raising his voice. "You're particular, for a shade." He was going to say "*to* a shade," but substituted this, as more appropriate.

"In life I was your partner, Jacob Marley."

"Can you — can you sit down?" asked Scrooge, looking doubtfully at him.

"I can."

“Do it, then.”

Scrooge asked the question, because he didn't know whether a ghost so transparent might find himself in a condition to take a chair; and felt that in the event of its being impossible, it might involve the necessity of an embarrassing explanation. But the ghost sat down on the opposite side of the fireplace, as if he were quite used to it.

“You don't believe in me,” observed the Ghost.

“I don't,” said Scrooge.

“What evidence would you have of my reality beyond that of your senses?”

“I don't know,” said Scrooge.

“Why do you doubt your senses?”

“Because,” said Scrooge, “a little thing affects them. A slight disorder of the stomach makes them cheats. You may be an undigested bit of beef, a blot of mustard, a crumb of cheese, a fragment of an underdone potato. There's more of gravy than of grave about you, whatever you are!”

Scrooge was not much in the habit of cracking jokes, nor did he feel, in his heart, by any means waggish then. The truth is, that he tried to be smart, as a means of distracting his own attention, and keeping down his terror; for the spectre's voice disturbed the very marrow in his bones.

To sit, staring at those fixed, glazed eyes, in silence for a moment, would play, Scrooge felt, the very deuce with him. There was something very awful, too, in the spectre's being provided with an infernal atmosphere of its own. Scrooge could not feel it himself, but this was clearly the case; for though the Ghost sat perfectly motionless, its hair, and skirts, and tassels, were still agitated as by the hot vapour from an oven.

“You see this toothpick?” said Scrooge, returning quickly to the charge, for the reason just assigned; and wishing, though it were only for a second, to divert the vision's stony gaze from himself.

“I do,” replied the Ghost.

“You are not looking at it,” said Scrooge.

“But I see it,” said the Ghost, “notwithstanding.”

“Well!” returned Scrooge, “I have but to swallow this, and be for the rest of my days persecuted by a legion of goblins, all of my own creation. Humbug, I tell you; humbug!”

At this the spirit raised a frightful cry, and shook its chain with such a dismal and appalling noise, that Scrooge held on tight to his chair, to save him-

self from falling in a swoon. But how much greater was his horror, when the phantom taking off the bandage round its head, as if it were too warm to wear in-doors, its lower jaw dropped down upon its breast!

Scrooge fell upon his knees, and clasped his hands before his face.

“Mercy!” he said. “Dreadful apparition, why do you trouble me?”

“Man of the worldly mind!” replied the Ghost, “do you believe in me or not?”

“I do,” said Scrooge. “I must. But why do spirits walk the earth, and why do they come to me?”

“It is required of every man,” the Ghost returned, “that the spirit within him should walk abroad among his fellow-men, and travel far and wide; and if that spirit goes not forth in life, it is condemned to do so after death. It is doomed to wander through the world — oh, woe is me! — and witness what it cannot share, but might have shared on earth, and turned to happiness!”

Again the spectre raised a cry, and shook its chain, and wrung its shadowy hands.

“You are fettered,” said Scrooge, trembling. “Tell me why?”

“I wear the chain I forged in life,” replied the Ghost. “I made it link by link, and yard by yard; I girded it on of my own free will, and of my own free will I wore it. Is its pattern strange to *you* ?”

Scrooge trembled more and more.

“Or would you know,” pursued the Ghost, “the weight and length of the strong coil you bear yourself? It was full as heavy and as long as this, seven Christmas Eves ago. You have laboured on it, since. It is a ponderous chain!”

Scrooge glanced about him on the floor, in the expectation of finding himself surrounded by some fifty or sixty fathoms of iron cable: but he could see nothing.

“Jacob,” he said, imploringly. “Old Jacob Marley, tell me more. Speak comfort to me, Jacob.”

“I have none to give,” the Ghost replied. “It comes from other regions, Ebenezer Scrooge, and is conveyed by other ministers, to other kinds of men. Nor can I tell you what I would. A very little more, is all permitted to me. I cannot rest, I cannot stay, I cannot linger anywhere. My spirit never walked beyond our counting-house — mark me! — in life my spirit never roved beyond the narrow limits of our money-changing hole; and weary journeys lie before me!”

It was a habit with Scrooge, whenever he became thoughtful, to put his hands in his breeches pockets. Pondering on what the Ghost had said, he did so now, but without lifting up his eyes, or getting off his knees.

“You must have been very slow about it, Jacob,” Scrooge observed, in a business-like manner, though with humility and deference.

“Slow!” the Ghost repeated.

“Seven years dead,” mused Scrooge. “And travelling all the time?”

“The whole time,” said the Ghost. “No rest, no peace. Incessant torture of remorse.”

“You travel fast?” said Scrooge.

“On the wings of the wind,” replied the Ghost.

“You might have got over a great quantity of ground in seven years,” said Scrooge.

The Ghost, on hearing this, set up another cry, and clanked its chain so hideously in the dead silence of the night, that the Ward would have been justified in indicting it for a nuisance.

“Oh! captive, bound, and double-ironed,” cried the phantom, “not to know, that ages of incessant labour by immortal creatures, for this earth must pass into eternity before the good of which it is susceptible is all developed. Not to know that any Christian spirit working kindly in its little sphere, whatever it may be, will find its mortal life too short for its vast means of usefulness. Not to know that no space of regret can make amends for one life’s opportunities misused! Yet such was I! Oh! such was I!”

“But you were always a good man of business, Jacob,” faltered Scrooge, who now began to apply this to himself.

“Business!” cried the Ghost, wringing its hands again. “Mankind was my business. The common welfare was my business; charity, mercy, forbearance, and benevolence, were, all, my business. The dealings of my trade were but a drop of water in the comprehensive ocean of my business!”

It held up its chain at arm’s length, as if that were the cause of all its unavailing grief, and flung it heavily upon the ground again.

“At this time of the rolling year,” the spectre said, “I suffer most. Why did I walk through crowds of fellow-beings with my eyes turned down, and never raise them to that blessed Star which led the Wise Men to a poor abode? Were there no poor homes to which its light would have conducted *me!* “

Scrooge was very much dismayed to hear the spectre going on at this rate, and began to quake exceedingly.

“Hear me!” cried the Ghost. “My time is nearly gone.”

“I will,” said Scrooge. “But don’t be hard upon me! Don’t be flowery, Jacob! Pray!”

“How it is that I appear before you in a shape that you can see, I may not tell. I have sat invisible beside you many and many a day.”

It was not an agreeable idea. Scrooge shivered, and wiped the perspiration from his brow.

“That is no light part of my penance,” pursued the Ghost. “I am here to-night to warn you, that you have yet a chance and hope of escaping my fate. A chance and hope of my procuring, Ebenezer.”

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

“You will be haunted,” resumed the Ghost, “by Three Spirits.”

Scrooge’s countenance fell almost as low as the Ghost’s had done.

“Is that the chance and hope you mentioned, Jacob?” he demanded, in a faltering voice.

“It is.”

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

“Without their visits,” said the Ghost, “you cannot hope to shun the path I tread. Expect the first to-morrow, when the bell tolls One.”

“Couldn’t I take ’em all at once, and have it over, Jacob?” hinted Scrooge.

“Expect the second on the next night at the same hour. The third upon the next night when the last stroke of Twelve has ceased to vibrate. Look to see me no more; and look that, for your own sake, you remember what has passed between us.”

When it had said these words, the spectre took its wrapper from the table, and bound it round its head, as before. Scrooge knew this, by the smart sound its teeth made, when the jaws were brought together by the bandage. He ventured to raise his eyes again, and found his supernatural visitor confronting him in an erect attitude, with its chain wound over and about 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 doorstep. 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 closed the window, and examined the door by which the Ghost had entered. It was double-locked, as he had locked it with his own hands, and the bolts were undisturbed. He tried to say "Humbug!" but stopped at the first syllable. And being, from the emotion he had undergone, or the fatigues of the day, or his glimpse of the Invisible World, or the dull conversation of the Ghost, or the lateness of the hour, much in need of repose; went straight to bed, without undressing, and fell asleep upon the instant.

STAVE 2: *The First of the Three Spirits*

When Scrooge awoke, it was so dark, that looking out of bed, he could scarcely distinguish the transparent window from the opaque walls of his chamber. He was endeavouring to pierce the darkness with his ferret eyes, when the chimes of a neighbouring church struck the four quarters. So he listened for the hour.

To his great astonishment the heavy bell went on from six to seven, and from seven to eight, and regularly up to twelve; then stopped. Twelve! It was past two when he went to bed. The clock was wrong. An icicle must have got into the works. Twelve!

He touched the spring of his repeater, to correct this most preposterous clock. Its rapid little pulse beat twelve: and stopped.

“Why, it isn’t possible,” said Scrooge, “that I can have slept through a whole day and far into another night. It isn’t possible that anything has happened to the sun, and this is twelve at noon!”

The idea being an alarming one, he scrambled out of bed, and groped his way to the window. He was obliged to rub the frost off with the sleeve of his dressing-gown before he could see anything; and could see very little then. All he could make out was, that it was still very foggy and extremely cold, and that there was no noise of people running to and fro, and making a great stir, as there unquestionably would have been if night had beaten off bright day, and taken possession of the world. This was a great relief, because “three days after sight of this First of Exchange pay to Mr. Ebenezer Scrooge or his order,” and so forth, would have become a mere United States’ security if there were no days to count by.

Scrooge went to be again, and thought, and 1 thought, and thought it over and over, and could make nothing of it. The more he thought, the more perplexed he was; and the more he endeavoured not to think, the more he thought Marley’s Ghost bothered him exceedingly. Every time he resolved within himself, after mature inquiry, that it was all a dream, his mind flew back, like a strong spring released, to its first position, and presented the same problem to be worked all through, “Was it a dream or not?”

Scrooge lay in this state until the chime had gone three quarters more, when he remembered, on a sudden, that the Ghost had warned him of a visitation when the bell tolled one. He resolved to lie awake until the hour was past; and, considering that he could no more go to sleep than go to Heaven, this was perhaps the wisest resolution in his power.

The quarter was so long, that he was more than once convinced he must have sunk into a doze unconsciously, and missed the clock. At length it broke upon his listening ear.

“Ding, dong!”

“A quarter past,” said Scrooge, counting.

“Ding, dong!”

“Half past!” said Scrooge.

“Ding, dong!”

“A quarter to it,” said Scrooge.

“Ding, dong!”

“The hour itself,” said Scrooge, triumphantly, “and nothing else!”

He spoke before the hour bell sounded, which it now did with a deep, dull, hollow, melancholy ONE. Light flashed up in the room upon the instant, and the curtains of his bed were drawn.

The curtains of his bed were drawn aside, I tell you, by a hand. Not the curtains at his feet, nor the curtains at his back, but those to which his face was addressed. The curtains of his bed were drawn aside; and Scrooge, starting up into a half-recumbent attitude, found himself face to face with the unearthly visitor who drew them: as close to it as I am now to you, and I am standing in the spirit at your elbow.

It was a strange figure — like a child: yet not so like a child as like an old man, viewed through some supernatural medium, which gave him the appearance of having receded from the view, and being diminished to a child's proportions. Its hair, which hung about its neck and down its back, was white as if with age; and yet the face had not a wrinkle in it, and the tenderest bloom was on the skin. The arms were very long and muscular; the hands the same, as if its hold were of uncommon strength. Its legs and feet, most delicately formed, were, like those upper members, bare. It wore a tunic of the purest white and round its waist was bound a lustrous belt, the sheen of which was beautiful. It held a branch of fresh green holly in its hand; and, in singular contradiction of that wintry emblem, had its dress trimmed with summer flowers. But the strangest thing about it was, that from the crown of its head there sprung a bright clear jet of light, by which all this was visible; and which was doubtless the occasion of its using, in its duller moments, a great extinguisher for a cap, which it now held under its arm.

Even this, though, when Scrooge looked at it with increasing steadiness, was *not* its strangest quality. For as its belt sparkled and glittered now in one part and now in another, and what was light one instant, at another time was dark, so the figure itself fluctuated in its distinctness: being now a thing with one arm, now with one leg, now with twenty legs, now a pair of legs without a head, now a head without a body: of which dissolving parts, no outline would be visible in the dense gloom wherein they melted away. And in the very wonder of this, it would be itself again; distinct and clear as ever.

“Are you the Spirit, sir, whose coming was foretold to me?” asked Scrooge.

“I am!”

The voice was soft and gentle. Singularly low, as if instead of being so close beside him, it were at a distance.

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

“I am the Ghost of Christmas Past.”

“Long past?” inquired Scrooge: observant of its dwarfish stature.

“No. Your past.”

Perhaps, Scrooge could not have told anybody why, if anybody could have asked him; but he had a special desire to see the Spirit in his cap; and begged him to be covered.

“What!” exclaimed the Ghost, “would you so soon put out, with worldly hands, the light I give? Is it not enough that you are one of those whose passions made this cap, and force me through whole trains of years to wear it low upon my brow!”

Scrooge reverently disclaimed all intention to offend or any knowledge of having wilfully bonneted the Spirit at any period of his life. He then made bold to inquire what business brought him there.

“Your welfare!” said the Ghost.

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 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 vestige 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 floating in the air, each one connected with a thousand thoughts, and hopes, and joys, and cares long, long, forgotten.

"Your lip is trembling," said the Ghost. "And what is that upon your cheek?"

Scrooge muttered, with an unusual catching in his voice, that it was a pimple; and begged the Ghost to lead him where he would.

"You recollect the way?" inquired the Spirit.

"Remember it!" cried Scrooge with fervour; "I could walk it blindfold."

"Strange to have forgotten it for so many years!" observed the Ghost. "Let us go on."

They walked along the road; Scrooge recognising every gate, and post, and tree; until a little market-town appeared in the distance, with its bridge, its church, and winding river. Some shaggy ponies now were seen trotting towards them with boys upon their backs, who called to other boys in country gigs and carts, driven by farmers. All these boys were in great spirits, and shouted to each other, until the broad fields were so full of merry music, that the crisp air laughed to hear it.

"These are but shadows of the things that have been," said the Ghost. "They have no consciousness of us."

The jocund travellers came on; and as they came, Scrooge knew and named them every one. Why was he rejoiced beyond all bounds to see them! Why did his cold eye glisten, and his heart leap up as they went past! Why was he filled with gladness when he heard them give each other Merry Christmas, as they parted at cross-roads and bye-ways, for their several homes! What was merry Christmas to Scrooge? Out upon merry Christmas! What good had it ever done to him?

"The school is not quite deserted," said the Ghost. "A solitary child, neglected by his friends, is left there still."

Scrooge said he knew it. And he sobbed.

They left the high-road, by a well-remembered lane, and soon approached a mansion of dull red brick, with a little weathercock-surmounted cupola, on the roof, and a bell hanging in it. It was a large house, but one of broken fortunes; for the spacious offices were little used, their walls were damp and mossy, their windows broken, and their gates decayed. Fowls clucked and strutted in the stables; and the coach-houses and sheds were over-run with

grass. Nor was it more retentive of its ancient state, within; for entering the dreary hall, and glancing through the open doors of many rooms, they found them poorly furnished, cold, and vast. There was an earthy savour in the air, a chilly bareness in the place, which associated itself somehow with too much getting up by candle-light, and not too much to eat.

They went, the Ghost and Scrooge, across the hall, to a door at the back of the house. It opened before them, and disclosed a long, bare, melancholy room, made barer still by lines of plain deal forms and desks. At one of these a lonely boy was reading near a feeble fire; and Scrooge sat down upon a form, and wept to see his poor forgotten self as he used to be.

Not a latent echo in the house, not a squeak and scuffle from the mice behind the panneling, not a drip from the half-thawed water-spout in the dull yard behind, not a sigh among the leafless boughs of one despondent poplar, not the idle swinging of an empty store-house door, no, not a clicking in the fire, but fell upon the heart of Scrooge with a softening influence, and gave a freer passage to his tears.

The Spirit touched him on the arm, and pointed to his younger self, intent upon his reading. Suddenly a man, in foreign garments: wonderfully real and distinct to look at: stood outside the window, with an axe stuck in his belt, and leading an ass laden with wood by the bridle.

“Why, it’s Ali Baba!” Scrooge exclaimed in ecstasy. “It’s dear old honest Ali Baba! Yes, yes, I know! One Christmas time, when yonder solitary child was left here all alone, he *did* come, for the first time, just like that. Poor boy! And Valentine,” said Scrooge, “and his wild brother, Orson; there they go! And what’s his name, who was put down in his drawers, asleep, at the Gate of Damascus; don’t you see him! And the Sultan’s Groom turned upside-down by the Genii; there he is upon his head! Serve him right. I’m glad of it. What business had *he* to be married to the Princess!”

To hear Scrooge expending all the earnestness of his nature on such subjects, in a most extraordinary voice between laughing and crying; and to see his heightened and excited face; would have been a surprise to his business friends in the city, indeed.

“There’s the Parrot!” cried Scrooge. “Green body and yellow tail, with a thing like a lettuce growing out of the top of his head; there he is! Poor Robin Crusoe, he called him, when he came home again after sailing round the island. “Poor Robin Crusoe, where have you been, Robin Crusoe?” The man thought he was dreaming, but he wasn’t. It was the Parrot, you know. There goes Friday, running for his life to the little creek! Halloo! Hoop! Halloo!”

Then, with a rapidity of transition very foreign to his usual character, he said, in pity for his former self, "Poor boy!" and cried again.

"I wish," Scrooge muttered, putting his hand in his pocket, and looking about him, after drying his eyes with his cuff: "but it's too late now."

"What is the matter?" asked the Spirit.

"Nothing," said Scrooge. "Nothing. There was a boy singing a Christmas Carol at my door last night. I should like to have given him something: that's all."

The Ghost smiled thoughtfully, and waved its hand: saying as it did so, "Let us see another Christmas!"

Scrooge's former self grew larger at the words, and the room became a little darker and more dirty. The panels shrunk, the windows cracked; fragments of plaster fell out of the ceiling, and the naked laths were shown instead; but how all this was brought about, Scrooge knew no more than you do. He only knew that it was quite correct; that everything had happened so; that there he was, alone again, when all the other boys had gone home for the jolly holidays.

He was not reading now, but walking up and down despairingly. Scrooge looked at the Ghost, and with a mournful shaking of his head, glanced anxiously towards the door.

It opened; and a little girl, much younger than the boy, came darting in, and putting her arms about his neck, and often kissing him, addressed him as her "Dear, dear brother."

"I have come to bring you home, dear brother!" said the child, clapping her tiny hands, and bending down to laugh. "To bring you home, home, home!"

"Home, little Fan?" returned the boy.

"Yes!" said the child, brimful of glee. "Home, for good and all. Home, for ever and ever. Father is so much kinder than he used to 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.

"Always a delicate creature, whom a breath might have withered," said the Ghost. "But she had a large heart!"

"So she had," cried Scrooge. "You're right, I will not gainsay it, Spirit. God forbid!"

"She died a woman," said the Ghost, "and had, as I think, children."

"One child," Scrooge returned.

"True," said the Ghost. "Your nephew!"

Scrooge seemed uneasy in his mind; and answered briefly, "Yes."

Although they had but that moment left the school behind them, they were now in the busy thoroughfares of a city, where shadowy passengers passed and repassed; where shadowy carts and coaches battle for the way, and all the strife and tumult of a real city were. It was made plain enough, by the dressing of the shops, that here too it was Christmas time again; but it was evening, and the streets were lighted up.

The Ghost stopped at a certain warehouse door, and asked Scrooge if he knew it.

"Know it!" said Scrooge. "Was I apprenticed here!"

They went in. At sight of an old gentleman in a Welch wig, sitting behind such a high desk, that if he had been two inches taller he must have knocked his head against the ceiling, Scrooge cried in great excitement:

“Why, it’s old Fezziwig! Bless his heart; it’s Fezziwig alive again!”

Old Fezziwig laid down his pen, and looked up at the clock, which pointed to the hour of seven. He rubbed his hands; adjusted his capacious waistcoat; laughed all over himself, from his shows to his organ of benevolence; and called out in a comfortable, oily, rich, fat, jovial voice:

“Yo ho, there! Ebenezer! Dick!”

Scrooge’s former self, now grown a young man, came briskly in, accompanied by his fellow-’prentice.

“Dick Wilkins, to be sure!” said Scrooge to the Ghost. “Bless me, yes. There he is. He was very much attached to me, was Dick. Poor Dick! Dear, dear!”

“Yo ho, my boys!” said Fezziwig. “No more work to-night. Christmas Eve, Dick. Christmas, Ebenezer! Let’s have the shutters up,” cried old Fezziwig, with a sharp clap of his hands, “before a man can say, Jack Robinson!”

You wouldn’t believe how those two fellows went at it! They charged into the street with the shutters — one, two, three — had’em up in their places — four, five, six — barred’em and pinned’em — seven, eight, nine — and came back before you could have got to twelve, panting like race-horses.

“Hilli-ho!” cried old Fezziwig, skipping down from the high desk, with wonderful agility. “Clear away, my lads, and let’s have lots of room here! Hilli-ho, Dick! Chirrup, Ebenezer!”

Clear away! There was nothing they wouldn’t have cleared away, or couldn’t have cleared away, with old Fezziwig looking on. It was done in a minute. Every movable was packed off, as if it were dismissed from public life for evermore; the floor was swept and watered, the lamps were trimmed, fuel was heaped upon the fire; and the warehouse was as snug, and warm, and dry, and bright a ball-room, as you would desire to see upon a winter’s night.

In came a fiddler with a music-book, and went up to the lofty desk, and made an orchestra of it, and tuned like fifty stomach-aches. In came Mrs. Fezziwig, one vast substantial smile. In came the three Miss Fezziwigs, beaming and lovable. In came the six young followers whose hearts they broke. In came all the young men and women employed in the business. In came the housemaid, with her cousin, the baker. In came the cook, with her brother’s particular friend, the milkman. In came the boy from over the way, who was suspected of not having board enough from his master; trying to hide himself

behind the girl from next door but one, who was proved to have had her ears pulled by her Mistress. In they all came, one after nother; some shyly, some boldly, some gracefully, some awkwardly, some pushing, some pulling; in they all came, anyhow and everyhow. Away they all went, twenty couple at once; hands half round and back again the other way; down the middle and up again; round and round in various stages of affectionate grouping; old top couple always turning up in the wrong place; new top couple starting off again, as soon as they got there; all top couples at last, and not a bottom one to help them. When this result was brought about, old Fezziwig, clapping his hands to stop the dance, cried out, "Well done!" and the fiddler plunged his hot face into a pot of porter, especially provided for that purpose. But scorning rest, upon his reappearance, he instantly began again, though there were no dancers yet, as if the other fiddler had been carried home, exhausted, on a shutter, and he were a bran-new man resolved to beat him out of sight, or perish.

There were more dances, and there were forfeits, and more dances, and there was cake, and there was negus, and there was a great piece of Cold Roast, and there was a great piece of Cold Boiled, and there were mince-pies, and plenty of beer. But the great effect of the evening came after the Roast and Boiled, when the fiddler (an artful dog, mind! The sort of man who knew his business better than you or I could have told it him!) struck up "Sir Roger de Coverley." Then old Fezziwig stood out to dance with Mrs. Fezziwig. Top couple, too; with a good stiff piece of work cut out for them; three or four and twenty pair of partners; people who were not to be trifled with; people who *would* dance, and had no notion of walking.

But if they had been twice as many: ah, four times: old Fezziwig would have been a match for them, and so would Mrs. Fezziwig. As to *her*, she was worthy to be his partner in every sense of the term. If that's not high praise, tell me higher, and I'll use it. A positive light appeared to issue from Fezziwig's calves. They shone in every part of the dance like moons. You couldn't have predicted, at any given time, what would become of'em next. And when old Fezziwig and Mrs. Fezziwig had gone all through the dance; advance and retire, hold hands with your partner, bow and curtsy; corkscrew; thread-the-needle, and back again to your place; Fezziwig cut — cut so deftly, that he appeared to wink with his legs, and came upon his feet again without a stagger.

When the clock struck eleven, this domestic ball broke up. Mr and Mrs Fezziwig took their stations, one on either side of the door, and shaking hands with every person individually as he or she went out, wished him or her a Merry Christmas. When everybody had retired but the two'prentices, they

did the same to them; and thus the cheerful voices died away, and the lads were left to their beds; which were under a counter in the back-shop.

During the whole of this time, Scrooge had acted like a man out of his wits. His heart and soul were in the scene, and with his former self. He corroborated everything, remembered everything, enjoyed everything, and underwent the strangest agitation. It was not until now, when the bright faces of his former self and Dick were turned from them, that he remembered the Ghost, and became conscious that it was looking full upon him, while the light upon its head burnt very clear.

“A small matter,” said the Ghost, “to make these silly folks so full of gratitude.”

“Small!” echoed Scrooge.

The Spirit signed to him to listen to the two apprentices, who were pouring out their hearts in praise of Fezziwig: and when he had done so, said,

“Why! Is it not? He has spent but a few pounds of your mortal money: three or four perhaps. Is that so much that he deserves this praise?”

“It isn’t that,” said Scrooge, heated by the remark, and speaking unconsciously like his former, not his latter, self. “It isn’t that, Spirit. He has the power to render us happy or unhappy; to make our service light or burdensome; a pleasure or a toil. Say that his power lies in words and looks; in things so slight and insignificant that it is impossible to add and count’em up: what then? The happiness he gives, is quite as great as if it cost a fortune.”

He felt the Spirit’s glance, and stopped.

“What is the matter?” asked the Ghost.

“Nothing particular,” said Scrooge.

“Something, I think?” the Ghost insisted.

“No,” said Scrooge, “No. I should like to be able to say a word or two to my clerk just now! That’s all.”

His former self turned down the lamps as he gave utterance to the wish; and Scrooge and the Ghost again stood side by side in the open air.

“My time grows short,” observed the Spirit. “Quick!”

This was not addressed to Scrooge, or to any one whom he could see, but it produced an immediate effect. For again Scrooge saw himself. He was older now; a man in the prime of life. His face had not the harsh and rigid lines of later years; but it had begun to wear the signs of care and avarice. There was an eager, greedy, restless motion in the eye, which showed the passion that had taken root, and where the shadow of the growing tree would fall.

He was not alone, but sat by the side of a fair young girl in a mourning-dress: in whose eyes there were tears, which sparkled in the light that shone out of the Ghost of Christmas Past.

"It matters little," she said, softly. "To you, very little. Another idol has displaced me; and if it can cheer and comfort you in time to come, as I would have tried to do, I have no just cause to grieve."

"What Idol has displaced you?" he rejoined.

"A golden one."

"This is the even-handed dealing of the world!" he said. "There is nothing on which it is so hard as poverty; and there is nothing it professes to condemn with such severity as the pursuit of wealth!"

"You fear the world too much," she answered, gently. "All your other hopes have merged into the hope of being beyond the chance of its sordid reproach. I have seen your nobler aspirations fall off one by one, until the master-passion, Gain, engrosses you. Have I not?"

"What then?" he retorted. "Even if I have grown so much wiser, what then? I am not changed towards you."

She shook her head.

"Am I?"

"Our contract is an old one. It was made when we were both poor and content to be so, until, in good season, we could improve our worldly fortune by our patient industry. You *are* changed. When it was made, you were another man."

"I was a boy," he said impatiently.

"Your own feeling tells you that you were not what you are," she returned. "I am. That which promised happiness when we were one in heart, is fraught with misery now that we are two. How often and how keenly I have thought of this, I will not say. It is enough that I *have* thought of it, and can release you."

"Have I ever sought release?"

"In words. No. Never."

"In what, then?"

"In a changed nature; in an altered spirit; in another atmosphere of life; another Hope as its great end. In everything that made my love of any worth or value in your sight. If this had never been between us," said the girl, looking mildly, but with steadiness, upon him; "tell me, would you seek me out and try to win me now? Ah, no!"

He seemed to yield to the justice of this supposition, in spite of himself. But he said with a struggle, "You think not."

"I would gladly think otherwise if I could," she answered, "Heaven knows! When I have learned a Truth like this, I know how strong and irresistible it must be. But if you were free to-day, to-morrow, yesterday, can even I believe that you would choose a dowerless girl — you who, in your very confidence with her, weigh everything by Gain: or, choosing her, if for a moment you were false enough to your one guiding principle to do so, do I not know that your repentance and regret would surely follow? I do; and I release you. With a full heart, for the love of him you once were."

He was about to speak; but with her head turned from him, she resumed.

"You may — the memory of what is past half makes me hope you will — have pain in this. A very, very brief time, and you will dismiss the recollection of it, gladly, as an unprofitable dream, from which it happened well that you awoke. May you be happy in the life you have chosen!"

She left him, and they parted.

"Spirit!" said Scrooge, "show me no more! Conduct me home. Why do you delight to torture me?"

"One shadow more!" exclaimed the Ghost.

"No more!" cried Scrooge. "No more. I don't wish to see it. Show me no more!"

But the relentless Ghost pinioned him in both his arms, and forced him to observe what happened next.

They were in another scene and place; a room, not very large or handsome, but full of comfort. Near to the winter fire sat a beautiful young girl, so like that last that Scrooge believed it was the same, until he saw *her*, now a comely matron, sitting opposite her daughter. The noise in this room was perfectly tumultuous, for there were more children there, than Scrooge in his agitated state of mind could count; and, unlike the celebrated herd in the poem, they were not forty children conducting themselves like one, but every child was conducting itself like forty. The consequences 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 pillaged by the young brigands most ruthlessly. What would I not have given to 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 meas-

uring 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 the 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 wooden platter! The immense 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 children 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 attentively 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 very 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 voice, “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 upon the Ghost, and seeing that it looked upon him with a face, in which in some strange way there were fragments of all the faces it had shown him, wrestled with it.

“Leave me! Take me back. Haunt me no longer!”

In the struggle, if that can be called a struggle in which the Ghost with no visible resistance on its own part was undisturbed by any effort of its adversary, Scrooge observed that its light was burning high and bright; and dimly connecting that with its influence over him, he seized the extinguisher-cap, and by a sudden action pressed it down upon its head.

The Spirit dropped beneath it, so that the extinguisher covered its whole form; but though Scrooge pressed it down with all his force, he could not hide the light, which streamed from under it, in an unbroken flood upon the ground.

He was conscious of being exhausted, and overcome by an irresistible drowsiness; and, further, of being in his own bedroom. He gave the cap a parting squeeze, in which his hand relaxed; and had barely time to reel to bed, before he sank into a heavy sleep.

STAVE 3: *The Second of the Three Spirits*

Awaking in the middle of a prodigiously tough snore, and sitting up in bed to get his thoughts together, Scrooge had no occasion to be told that the bell was again upon the stroke of One. He felt that he was restored to consciousness in the right nick of time, for the especial purpose of holding a conference with the second messenger despatched to him through Jacob Marley's intervention. But, finding that he turned uncomfortably cold when he began to wonder which of his curtains this new spectre would draw back, he put them every one aside with his own hands; and lying down again, established a sharp look-out all round the bed. For he wished to challenge the Spirit on the

moment of its appearance, and did not wish to be taken by surprise, and made nervous.

Gentlemen of the free-and-easy sort, who plume themselves on being acquainted with a move or two, and being usually equal to the time-of-day, express the wide range of their capacity for adventure by observing that they are good for anything from pitch-and-toss to manslaughter; between which opposite extremes, no doubt, there lies a tolerably wide and comprehensive range of subjects. Without venturing for Scrooge quite as hardily as this, I don't mind calling on you to believe that he was ready for a good broad field of strange appearances, and that nothing between a baby and rhinoceros would have astonished him very much.

Now, being prepared for almost anything, he was not by any means prepared for nothing; and, consequently, when the Bell struck One, and no shape appeared, he was taken with a violent fit of trembling. Five minutes, ten minutes, a quarter of an hour went by, yet nothing came. All this time, he lay upon 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 apprehensive 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 petrification 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 chesnuts, 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 sat a jolly Giant, glorious to see: who bore a glowing torch, in shape not unlike Plenty's horn, and held it up, high up, to shed its light on Scrooge, as he came peeping round the door.

"Come in!" exclaimed the Ghost. "Come in. and know me better, man!"

Scrooge entered timidly, and hung his head before this Spirit. He was not the dogged Scrooge he had been; and though the Spirit's eyes were clear and kind, he did not like to meet them.

"I am the Ghost of Christmas Present," said the Spirit. "Look upon me!"

Scrooge reverently did so. It was clothed in one simple green robe, or mantle, bordered with white fur. This garment hung so loosely on the figure, that its capacious breast was bare, as if disdaining to be warded or concealed by any artifice. Its feet, observable beneath the ample folds of the garment, were also bare; and on its head it wore no other covering than a holly wreath, set here and there with shining icicles. Its dark brown curls were long and free: free as its genial face, its sparkling eye, its open hand, its cheery voice, its unconstrained demeanour, and its joyful air. Girded round its middle was an antique scabbard; but no sword was in it, and the ancient sheath was eaten up with rust.

"You have never seen the like of me before!" exclaimed the Spirit.

"Never," Scrooge made answer to it.

"Have never walked forth with the younger members of my family; meaning (for I am very young) my elder brothers born in these later years?" pursued the Phantom.

"I don't think I have," said Scrooge. "I am afraid I have not. Have you had many brothers, Spirit?"

"More than eighteen hundred," said the Ghost.

"A tremendous family to provide for!" muttered Scrooge.

The Ghost of Christmas Present rose.

"Spirit," said Scrooge submissively, "conduct me where you will. I went forth last night on compulsion, and I learnt a lesson which is working now. To-night, if you have aught to teach me, let me profit by it."

"Touch my robe!"

Scrooge did as he was told, and held it fast.

Holly, mistletoe, red berries, ivy, turkeys, geese, game, poultry, brawn, meat, pigs, sausages, oysters, pies, puddings, fruit, and punch, all vanished instantly. So did the room, the fire, the ruddy glow, the hour of night, and they stood in the city streets on Christmas morning, where (for the weather was severe) the people made a rough, but brisk and not unpleasant kind of music, in scraping the snow from the pavement in front of their dwellings, and from the tops of their houses: whence it was mad delight to the boys to see it come plumping down into the road below, and splitting into artificial little snow-storms.

The house fronts looked black enough, and the windows blacker, contrasting with the smooth white sheet of snow upon the roofs, and with the dirtier snow upon the ground; which last deposit had been ploughed up in deep furrows by the heavy wheels of carts and waggons; furrows that crossed and recrossed each other hundreds of times where the great streets branched off; and made intricate channels, hard to trace in the thick yellow mud and icy water. The sky was gloomy, and the shortest streets were choked up with a dingy mist, half thawed, half frozen, whose heavier particles descended in shower of sooty atoms, as if all the chimneys in Great Britain had, by one consent, caught fire, and were blazing away to their dear hearts' content. There was nothing very cheerful in the climate or the town, and yet was there an air of cheerfulness abroad that the clearest summer air and brightest summer sun might have endeavoured to diffuse in vain.

For the people who were shovelling away on the housetops were jovial and full of glee; calling out to one another from the parapets, and now and then exchanging a facetious snowball — better-natured missile far than many a wordy jest — laughing heartily if it went right and not less heartily if it went wrong. The poulterers' shops were still half open, and the fruiterers' were radiant in their glory. There were great, round, pot-bellied baskets of chestnuts, shaped like the waistcoats of jolly old gentlemen, lolling at the doors, and tumbling out into the street in their apoplectic opulence. There were ruddy, brown-faced, broad-girthed Spanish Onions, shining in the fatness of their growth like Spanish Friars, and winking from their shelves in wanton slyness at the girls as they went by, and glanced demurely at the hung-up mistletoe. There were pears and apples, clustered high in blooming pyramids; there were bunches of grapes, made, in the shopkeepers' benevolence to dangle from conspicuous hooks, that people's mouths might water gratis as they passed; there were piles of filberts, mossy and brown, recalling, in their fragrance, ancient walks among the woods, and pleasant shufflings ankle deep through withered leaves; there were Norfolk Biffins, squab and swarthy, setting off the yellow of the oranges and lemons, and, in the great compactness of their juicy

persons, urgently entreating and beseeching to be carried home in paper bags and eaten after dinner. The very gold and silver 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 by-streets, lanes, and nameless turnings, innumerable people, carrying their dinners to the baker's shops. The sight of these poor revellers 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 cook-

ing, 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 deprive them of their means of dining every seventh day, often the only day on which they can be said to dine at all," said Scrooge. "Wouldn't you?"

"I!" cried the Spirit.

"You seek to close these places on the Seventh Day?" said Scrooge. "And it comes to the same thing."

"Iseek!" exclaimed the Spirit.

"Forgive me if I am wrong. It has been done in your name, or at least in that of your family," said Scrooge.

"There are some upon this earth of yours," returned the Spirit, "who lay claim to know us, and who do their deeds of passion, pride, ill-will, hatred, envy, bigotry, and selfishness in our name, who are as strange to us and all out kith and kin, as if they had never lived. Remember that, and charge their doings on themselves, not us."

Scrooge promised that he would; and they went on, invisible, as they had been before, into the suburbs of the town. It was a remarkable quality of the Ghost (which Scrooge had observed at the baker's), that notwithstanding his gigantic size, he could accommodate himself to any place with ease; and that he stood beneath a low roof quite as gracefully and like a supernatural creature, as it was possible he could have done in any lofty hall.

And perhaps it was the pleasure the good Spirit had in showing off this power of his, or else it was his own kind, generous, hearty nature, and his sympathy with all poor men, that led him straight to Scrooge's clerk's; for

there he went, and took Scrooge with him, holding to his robe; and on the threshold of the door the Spirit smiled, and stopped to bless Bob Cratchit's dwelling with the sprinkling of his torch. Think of that! Bob had but fifteen bob a-week himself; he pocketed on Saturdays but fifteen copies of his Christian name; and yet the Ghost of Christmas Present blessed his four-roomed house!

Then up rose Mrs Cratchit, Cratchit's wife, dressed out but poorly in a twice-turned gown, but brave in ribbons, which are cheap and make a goodly show for sixpence; and she laid the cloth, assisted by Belinda Cratchit, second of her daughters, also brave in ribbons; while Master Peter Cratchit plunged a fork into the saucepan of potatoes, and getting the corners of his monstrous shirt collar (Bob's private property, conferred upon his son and heir in honour of the day) into his mouth, rejoiced to find himself so gallantly attired, and yearned to show his linen in the fashionable Parks. And now two smaller Cratchits, boy and girl, came tearing in, screaming that outside the baker's they had smelt the goose, and known it for their own; and basking in luxurious thoughts of sage-and-onion, these young Cratchits danced about the table, and exalted Master Peter Cratchit to the skies, while he (not proud, although his collars nearly choked him) blew the fire, until the slow potatoes bubbling up, knocked loudly at the saucepan-lid to be let out and peeled.

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

"Here's Martha, mother!" said a girl, appearing as she spoke.

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

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

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

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

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

So Martha hid herself, and in came little Bob, the father, with at least three feet of comforter exclusive of the fringe, hanging down before him; and his

threadbare clothes darned up and brushed, to look seasonable; and Tiny Tim upon his shoulder. Alas for Tiny Tim, he bore a little crutch, and had his limbs supported by an iron frame!

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

“Not coming,” said Mrs Cratchit.

“Not coming!” said Bob, with a sudden declension in his high spirits; for he had been Tim’s blood horse all the way from church, and had come home rampant. “Not coming upon Christmas Day!”

Martha didn’t like to see him disappointed, if it were only in joke; so she came out prematurely from behind the closet door, and ran into his arms, while the two young Cratchits hustled Tiny Tim, and bore him off into the wash-house, that he might hear the pudding singing in the copper.

“And how did little Tim behave?” asked Mrs Cratchit, when she had rallied Bob on his credulity and Bob had hugged his daughter to his heart’s content.

“As good as gold,” said Bob, “and better. Somehow he gets thoughtful, sitting by himself so much, and thinks the strangest things you ever heard. He told me, coming home, that he hoped the people saw him in the church, because he was a cripple, and it might be pleasant to them to remember upon Christmas Day, who made lame beggars walk, and blind men see.”

Bob’s voice was tremulous when he told them this, and trembled more when he said that Tiny Tim was growing strong and hearty.

His active little crutch was heard upon the floor, and back came Tiny Tim before another word was spoken, escorted by his brother and sister to his stool before the fire; and while Bob, turning up his cuffs — as if, poor fellow, they were capable of being made more shabby — compounded some hot mixture in a jug with gin and lemons, and stirred it round and round and put it on the hob to simmer; Master Peter, and the two ubiquitous young Cratchits went to fetch the goose, with which they soon returned in high procession.

Such a bustle ensued that you might have thought a goose the rarest of all birds; a feathered phenomenon, to which a black swan was a matter of course; and in truth it was something very like it in that house. Mrs Cratchit made the gravy (ready beforehand in a little saucepan) hissing hot; Master Peter mashed the potatoes with incredible vigour; Miss Belinda sweetened up the apple-sauce; Martha dusted the hot plates; Bob took Tiny Tim beside him in a tiny corner at the table; the two young Cratchits set chairs for everybody, not forgetting themselves, and mounting guard upon their posts, crammed spoons into their mouths, lest they should shriek for goose before their turn

came to be helped. At last the dishes were set on, and grace was said. It was succeeded by a breathless pause, as Mrs Cratchit, looking slowly all along the carving-knife, prepared to plunge it in the breast; but when she did, and when the long expected gush of stuffing issued forth, one murmur of delight arose all round the board, and even Tiny Tim, 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 doubts about the quantity of flour. Everybody had something to say about it, but nobody said or thought it was at all a small pudding for a large family. It would have been flat heresy to do so. Any Cratchit would have blushed to hint at such a thing.

At last the dinner was all done, the cloth was cleared, the hearth swept, and the fire made up. The compound in the jug being tasted, and considered perfect, apples and oranges were put upon the table, and a shovel-full of chestnuts on the fire. Then all the Cratchit family drew round the hearth, in what Bob Cratchit called a circle, meaning half a one; and at Bob Cratchit's elbow

stood the family display of glass; two tumblers, and a custard-cup without a handle.

These held the hot stuff from the jug, however, as well as golden goblets would have done; and Bob served it out with beaming looks, while the chestnuts on the fire sputtered and cracked noisily. Then Bob proposed:

“A Merry Christmas to us all, my dears. God bless us!”

Which all the family re-echoed.

“God bless us every one!” said Tiny Tim, the last of all.

He sat very close to his father’s side upon his little stool. Bob held his withered little hand in his, as if he loved the child, and wished to keep him by his side, and dreaded that he might be taken from him.

“Spirit,” said Scrooge, with an interest he had never felt before, “tell me if Tiny Tim will live.”

“I see a vacant seat,” replied the Ghost, “in the poor chimney-corner, and a crutch without an owner, carefully preserved. If these shadows remain unaltered 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 overcome with penitence and grief.

“Man,” said the Ghost, “if man you be in heart, not adamant, forbear that wicked cant until you have discovered 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 Heaven, you are more worthless and less fit to live 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 give 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’ll drink his health for your sake and the Day’s,” said Mrs Cratchit, “not for his. Long life to him. A merry Christmas and a happy new year! He’ll be very merry and very happy, I have no doubt!”

The children drank the toast after her. It was the first of their proceedings which had no heartiness. Tiny Tim drank it last of all, but he didn’t care twopence for it. Scrooge was the Ogre of the family. The mention of his name cast a dark shadow on the party, which was not dispelled for full five minutes.

After it had passed away, they were ten times merrier than before, from the mere relief of Scrooge the Baleful being done with. Bob Cratchit told them how he had a situation in his eye for Master Peter, which would bring in, if obtained, full five-and-sixpence weekly. The two young Cratchits laughed tremendously at the idea of Peter’s being a man of business; and Peter himself looked thoughtfully at the fire from between his collars, as if he were deliberating what particular investments he should favour when he came into the receipt of that bewildering income. Martha, who was a poor apprentice at a milliner’s, then told them what kind of work she had to do, and how many hours she worked at a stretch, and how she meant to lie a-bed to-morrow morning for a good long rest; to-morrow being a holiday she passed at home. Also how she had seen a countess and a lord some days before, and how the lord “was much about as tall as Peter;” at which Peter pulled up his collars so high that you couldn’t have seen his head if you had been there. All this time the chesnuts and the jug went round and round; and bye and bye they had a song, about a lost child travelling in the snow, from Tiny Tim; who had a plaintive little voice, and sang it very well indeed.

There was nothing of high mark in this. They were not a handsome family; they were not well dressed; their shoes were far from being water-proof; their clothes were scanty; and Peter might have known, and very likely did, the inside of a pawnbroker’s. But, they were happy, grateful, pleased with one another, and contented with the time; and when they faded, and looked happier yet in the bright sprinklings of the Spirit’s torch at parting, Scrooge had his eye upon them, and especially on Tiny Tim, until the last.

By this time it was getting dark, and snowing pretty heavily; and as Scrooge and the Spirit went along the streets, the brightness of the roaring fires in kitchens, parlours, and all sorts of rooms, was wonderful. Here, the

flickering of the blaze showed preparations for a cosy dinner, with hot plates baking through and through before the fire, and deep red curtains, ready to be drawn to shut out cold and darkness. There all the children of the house were running out into the snow to meet their married sisters, brothers, cousins, uncles, aunts, and be the first to greet them. Here, again, were shadows on the window-blind of guests assembling; and there a group of handsome girls, all hooded and fur-booted, and all chattering at once, tripped lightly off to some near neighbour's house; where, woe upon the single man who saw them enter — artful witches, well they knew it — in a glow!

But, if you had judged from the numbers of people on their way to friendly gatherings, you might have thought that no one was at home to give them welcome when they got there, instead of every house expecting company, and piling up its fires half-chimney high. Blessings on it, how the Ghost exulted! How it bared its breadth of breast, and opened its capacious palm, and floated on, outpouring, with a generous hand, its bright and harmless mirth on everything within its reach! The very lamplighter, who ran on before, dotting the dusky street with specks of light, and who was dressed to spend the evening somewhere, laughed out loudly as the Spirit passed: though little kenneled the lamplighter that he had any company but Christmas!

And now, without a word of warning from the Ghost, they stood upon a bleak and desert moor, where monstrous masses of rude stone were cast about, as though it were the burial-place of giants; and water spread itself wheresoever it listed; or would have done so, but for the frost that held it prisoner; and nothing grew but moss and furze, and coarse, rank grass. Down in the west the setting sun had left a streak of fiery red, which glared upon the desolation for an instant, like a sullen eye, and frowning lower, lower, lower yet, was lost in the thick gloom of darkest night.

“What place is this?” asked Scrooge.

“A place where Miners live, who labour in the bowels of the earth,” returned the Spirit. “But they know me. See!”

A light shone from the window of a hut, and swiftly they advanced towards it. Passing through the wall of mud and stone, they found a cheerful company assembled round a glowing fire. An old, old man and woman, with their children and their children's children, and another generation beyond that, all decked out gaily in their holiday attire. The old man, in a voice that seldom rose above the howling of the wind upon the barren waste, was singing them a Christmas song : it had been a very old song when he was a boy; and from time to time they all joined in the chorus. So surely as they

raised their voices, the old man got quite blithe and loud; and so surely as they stopped, his vigour 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 said that Christmas was a humbug, as I live!” cried Scrooge’s nephew. “He believed it too!”

“More shame for him, Fred!” said Scrooge’s niece, indignantly. Bless those women; they never do anything by halves. They are always in earnest.

She was very pretty: exceedingly pretty. With a dimpled, surprised-looking, capital face; a ripe little mouth, that seemed made to be kissed — as no doubt it was; all kinds of good little dots about her chin, that melted into one another when she laughed; and the sunniest pair of eyes you ever saw in any little creature’s head. Altogether she was what you would have called provoking, you know; but satisfactory, too. Oh, perfectly satisfactory!

“He’s a comical old fellow,” said Scrooge’s nephew, “that’s the truth: and not so pleasant as he might be. However, his offences carry their own punishment, and I have nothing to say against him.”

“I’m sure he is very rich, Fred,” hinted Scrooge’s niece. “At least you always tell *me* so.”

“What of that, my dear!” said Scrooge’s nephew. “His wealth is of no use to him. He don’t do any good with it. He don’t make himself comfortable with it. He hasn’t the satisfaction of thinking — ha, ha, ha! — that he is ever going to benefit Us with it.”

“I have no patience with him,” observed Scrooge’s niece. Scrooge’s niece’s sisters, and all the other ladies, expressed the same opinion.

“Oh, I have!” said Scrooge’s nephew. “I am sorry for him; I couldn’t be angry with him if I tried. Who suffers by his ill whims? Himself, always. Here, he takes it into his head to dislike 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 haven’t 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 him — if he finds me going there, in good temper, year after year, and saying Uncle Scrooge, how are you? If it only puts him in the vein to leave his poor clerk fifty pounds, *that’s* something; and I think I shook him yesterday.”

It was their turn to laugh now at the notion of his shaking Scrooge. But being thoroughly good-natured, and not much caring what they laughed at, so that they laughed at any rate, he encouraged them in their merriment, and passed the bottle joyously.

After tea, they had some music. For they were a musical family, and knew what they were about, when they sung a Glee or Catch, I can assure you: especially Topper, who could growl away in the bass like a good one, and never swell the large veins in his forehead, or get red in the face over it. Scrooge’s niece played well upon the harp; and played among other tunes a simple little air (a mere nothing: you might learn to whistle it in two minutes), which had been familiar to the child who fetched Scrooge from the boarding-school, as he had been reminded by the Ghost of Christmas Past. When this strain of music sounded, all the things that Ghost had shown him, came upon his mind; he softened more and more; and thought that if he could have lis-

tened to it often, years ago, he might have cultivated the kindnesses of life for his own happiness with his own hands, without resorting to the sexton's spade that buried Jacob Marley.

But they didn't devote the whole evening to music. After a while they played at forfeits; for it is good to be children sometimes, and never better than at Christmas, when its mighty Founder was a child himself. Stop! There was first a game at blind-man's buff. Of course there was. And I no more believe Topper was really blind than I believe he had eyes in his boots. My opinion is, that it was a done thing between him and 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 being in office, they were so very confidential together, behind the curtains.

Scrooge's niece was not one of the 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 love 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 what was going on, that his voice made no sound in their ears, he sometimes came out with his guess quite loud, and very often guessed quite right, too; for the sharpest needle, best Whitechapel, warranted not to cut in the eye, was not sharper than Scrooge; blunt as he took it in his head to be.

The Ghost was greatly pleased to find him in this mood, and looked upon him with such favour, that he begged like a boy to be allowed to stay until the guests departed. But this the Spirit said could not be done.

“Here is a new game,” said Scrooge. “One half hour, Spirit, only one!”

It was a Game called Yes and No, where Scrooge’s nephew had to think of something, and the rest must find out what; he only answering to their questions yes or no, as the case was. The brisk fire of questioning to which he was exposed, elicited from him that he was thinking of an animal, a live animal, rather a disagreeable animal, a savage animal, an animal that growled and grunted sometimes, and talked sometimes, and lived in London, and walked about the streets, and wasn’t made a show of, and wasn’t led by anybody, and didn’t live in a menagerie, and was never killed in a market, and was not a horse, or an ass, or a cow, or a bull, or a tiger, or a dog, or a pig, or a cat, or a bear. At every fresh question that was put to him, this nephew burst into a fresh roar of laughter; and was so inexpressibly tickled, that he was obliged to get up off the sofa and stamp. At last the plump sister, falling into a similar state, cried out:

“I have found it out! I know what it is, Fred! I know what it is!”

“What is it?” cried Fred.

“It’s your Uncle Scro-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 strange, too, that while Scrooge remained unaltered in his outward form, the Ghost grew older, clearly older. Scrooge had observed this change, but never spoke of it, until they left a children's Twelfth Night party, when, looking at the Spirit as they stood together in an open place, he noticed that its hair was grey.

"Are spirits' lives so short?" asked Scrooge.

"My life upon this globe, is very brief," replied the Ghost. "It ends to-night."

"To-night!" cried Scrooge.

"To-night at midnight. Hark! The time is drawing near."

The chimes were ringing the three quarters past eleven at that moment.

"Forgive me if I am not justified in what I ask," said Scrooge, looking intently at the Spirit's robe, "but I see something strange, and not belonging to yourself, protruding from your skirts. Is it a foot or a claw!"

"It might be a claw, for the flesh there is upon it," was the Spirit's sorrowful reply. "Look here."

From the foldings of its robe, it brought two children; wretched, abject, frightful, hideous, miserable. They knelt down at its feet, and clung upon the outside of its garment.

"Oh, Man! look here. Look, look, down here!" exclaimed the Ghost.

They were a boy and girl. Yellow, meagre, ragged, scowling, wolfish; but prostrate, too, in their humility. Where graceful youth should have filled their features out, and touched them with its freshest tints, a stale and shrivelled hand, like that of age, had pinched, and twisted them, and pulled them into shreds. Where angels might have sat enthroned, devils lurked, and glared out menacing. No change, no degradation, no perversion of humanity, in any grade, through all the mysteries of wonderful creation, has monsters half so horrible and dread.

Scrooge started back, appalled. Having them shown to him in this way, he tried to say they were fine children, but the words choked themselves, rather than be parties to a lie of such enormous magnitude.

“Spirit! are they yours?” Scrooge could say no more.

“They are Man’s,” said the Spirit, looking down upon them. “And they cling to me, appealing from their fathers. This boy is Ignorance. This girl is Want. Beware them both, and all of their degree, but most of all beware this boy, for on his brow I see that written which is Doom, unless the writing be erased. Deny it!” cried the Spirit, stretching out its hand towards the city. “Slander those who tell it ye! Admit it for your factious purposes, and make it worse! And bide the end!”

“Have they no refuge or resource?” cried Scrooge.

“Are there no prisons?” said the Spirit, turning on him for the last time with his own words. “Are there no workhouses?”

The bell struck twelve.

Scrooge looked about him for the Ghost, and saw it not. As the last stroke ceased to vibrate, he remembered the prediction of old Jacob Marley, and lifting up his eyes, beheld a solemn Phantom, draped and hooded, coming, like a mist along the ground, towards him.

STAVE 4: *The Last of the Spirits*

The Phantom slowly, gravely, silently approached. When it came, 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.

“Last night, I believe.”

“Why, what was the matter with him?” asked a third, taking a vast quantity of snuff out of a very large snuff-box. “I thought he’d never die.”

“God knows,” said the first, with a yawn.

“What has he done with his money?” asked a red-faced gentleman with a pendulous excrescence on the end of his nose, that shook like the gills of a turkey-cock.

“I haven’t heard,” said the man with the large chin, yawning again. “Left it to his Company, perhaps. He hasn’t left it to *me*. That’s all I know.”

This pleasantry was received with a general laugh.

“It’s likely to be a very cheap funeral,” said the same speaker; “for upon my life I don’t know of anybody to go to it. Suppose we make up a party and volunteer?”

“I don’t mind going if a lunch is provided,” observed the gentleman with the excrescence on his nose. “But I must be fed, if I make one.”

Another laugh.

“Well, I am the most disinterested among you, after all,” said the first speaker, “for I never wear black gloves, and I never eat lunch. But I’ll offer to go, if anybody else will. When I come to think of it, I’m not at all sure that I wasn’t his most particular friend; for we used to stop and speak whenever we met. Bye, bye!”

Speakers and listeners strolled away, and mixed with other groups. Scrooge knew the men, and looked towards the Spirit for an explanation.

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 esteem: 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 skaiter, 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 stragging 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 bones. Sitting in among the wares he dealt in, by a charcoal stove, made of old bricks, was a grey-haired rascal, nearly seventy years of age; who had screened himself from the cold air without, by a frousy curtaining of miscellaneous tatters, hung upon a line; and smoked his pipe in all the luxury of calm retirement.

Scrooge and the Phantom came into the presence of this man, just as a woman with a heavy bundle slunk into the shop. But she had scarcely entered, when another woman, similarly laden, came in too; and she was closely followed by a man in faded black, who was no less startled by the sight of them, than they had been upon the recognition of each other. After a short period of blank astonishment, in which the old man with the pipe had joined them, they all three burst into a laugh.

“Let the charwoman alone to be the first!” cried she who had entered first. “Let the laundress alone to be the second; and let the undertaker’s man alone to be the third. Look here, old Joe, here’s a chance! If we haven’t all three met here without meaning it!”

“You couldn’t have met in a better place,” said old Joe, removing his pipe from his mouth. “Come into the parlour. You were made free of it long ago, you know; and the other two an’t strangers. Stop till I shut the door of the shop. Ah! How it skreeks! There an’t such a rusty bit of metal in the place as its own hinges, I believe; and I’m sure there’s no such old bones here, as mine. Ha, ha! We’re all suitable to our calling, we’re well matched. Come into the parlour. Come into the parlour.”

The parlour was the space behind the screen of rags. The old man raked the fire together with an old stair-rod, and having trimmed his smoky lamp (for it was night), with the stem of his pipe, put it in his mouth again.

While he did this, the woman who had already spoken threw her bundle on the floor, and sat down in a flaunting manner on a stool; crossing her elbows on her knees, and looking with a bold defiance at the other two.

“What odds then! What odds, Mrs Dilber?” said the woman. “Every person has a right to take care of themselves. *He* always did!”

“That’s true, indeed!” said the laundress. “No man more so.”

“Why then, don’t stand staring as if you was afraid, woman; who’s the wiser? We’re not going to pick holes in each other’s coats, I suppose?”

“No, indeed!” said Mrs Dilber and the man together. “We should hope not.”

“Very well, then!” cried the woman. “That’s enough. Who’s the worse for the loss of a few things like these? Not a dead man, I suppose.”

“No, indeed!” said Mrs Dilber, laughing.

“If he wanted to keep ’em after he was dead, a wicked old screw,” pursued the woman, “why wasn’t he natural in his lifetime? If he had been, he’d have had somebody to look after him when he was struck with Death, instead of lying gasping out his last there, alone by himself.”

“It’s the truest word that ever was spoke,” said Mrs Dilber. “It’s a judgment on him.”

“I wish it was a little heavier judgment,” replied the woman; “and it should have been, you may depend upon it, if I could have laid my hands on anything else. Open that bundle, old Joe, and let me know the value of it. Speak out plain. I’m not afraid to be the first, nor afraid for them to see it. We know pretty well 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 seal 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 leaning forward on her crossed arms. “Bed-curtains!”

“You don’t mean to say you took them 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 any thing 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 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!” laughed the same woman, when old Joe, producing a flannel bag with money in it, told out their several gains upon the ground. “This is the end of it, you see! He frightened every one away from him when he was alive, to profit us when he was dead! Ha, ha, ha!”

“Spirit!” said Scrooge, shuddering from head to foot. “I see, I see. The case of this unhappy man might be my own. My life tends that way, now. Merciful Heaven, what is this!”

He recoiled in terror, for the scene had changed, and now he almost touched a bed: a bare, uncurtained bed: on which, beneath a ragged sheet, there lay a something covered up, which, though it was dumb, announced itself in awful language.

The room was very dark, too dark to be observed with any accuracy, though Scrooge glanced round it in obedience to a secret impulse, anxious to know what kind of room it was. A pale light, rising in the outer air, fell straight upon the bed; and on it, plundered and bereft, unwatched, unwept, uncared for, was the body of this man.

Scrooge glanced towards the Phantom. Its steady hand was pointed to the head. The cover was so carelessly adjusted that the slightest raising of it, the motion of a finger upon Scrooge's part, would have disclosed the face. He thought of it, felt how easy it would be to do, and longed to do it; but had no more power to withdraw the veil than to dismiss the spectre at his side.

Oh cold, cold, rigid, dreadful Death, set up thine altar here, and dress it with such terrors as thou hast at thy command: for this is thy dominion! But of the loved, revered, and honoured head, thou canst not turn one hair to thy dread purposes, or make one feature odious. It is not that the hand is heavy and will fall down when released; it is not that the heart and pulse are still; but that the hand was open, generous, and true; the heart brave, warm, and tender; and the pulse a man's. Strike, Shadow, strike! And see his good deeds springing from the wound, to sow the world with life immortal.

No voice pronounced these words in Scrooge's ears, and yet he heard them when he looked upon the bed. He thought, if this man could be raised up now, what would be his foremost thoughts? Avarice, hard-dealing, griping cares? They have brought him to a rich end, truly!

He lay, in the dark empty house, with not a man, a woman, or a child, to say that he was kind to me in this or that, and for the memory of one kind word I will be kind to him. A cat was tearing at the door, and there was a sound of gnawing rats beneath the hearth-stone. What *they* wanted in the room of death, and why they were so restless and disturbed, Scrooge did not dare to think.

"Spirit!" he said, "this is a fearful place. In leaving it, I shall not leave its lesson, trust me. Let us go!"

Still the Ghost pointed with an unmoved finger to the head.

"I understand you," Scrooge returned, "and I would do it, if I could. But I have not the power, Spirit. I have not the power."

Again it seemed to look upon him.

"If there is any person in the town, who feels emotion caused by this man's death," said Scrooge quite agonised, "show that person to me, Spirit, I beseech you!"

The Phantom spread its dark robe before him for a moment, like a wing; and withdrawing it, revealed a room by daylight, where a mother and her children 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 boarding 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-drunken woman whom 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 light 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 streets familiar 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 live. Pray come to me.” Now, it wasn’t,” cried Bob, “for the sake of anything he might be able to do for us, so much as for his kind way, that this was quite delightful. It really seemed as if he had known our Tiny Tim, and felt with us.”

“I’m sure he’s a good soul!” said Mrs Cratchit.

“You would be surer of it, my dear,” returned Bob, “if you saw and spoke to him. I shouldn’t be at all surprised, mark what I say, if he got Peter a better situation.”

“Only hear that, Peter,” said Mrs Cratchit.

“And then,” cried one of the girls, “Peter will be keeping company with some one, and setting up for himself.”

“Get along with you!” retorted Peter, grinning.

“It’s just as likely as not,” said Bob, “one of these days; though there’s plenty of time for that, my dear. But however and whenever we part from one another, I am sure we shall none of us forget poor Tiny Tim — shall we — or this first parting that there was among us?”

“Never, father!” cried they all.

“And I know,” said Bob, “I know, my dears, that when we recollect how patient and how mild he was; although he was a little, little child; we shall not quarrel easily among ourselves, and forget poor Tiny Tim in doing it.”

“No, never, father!” they all cried again.

“I am very happy,” said little Bob, “I am very happy!”

Mrs Cratchit kissed him, his daughters kissed him, the two young Cratchits kissed him, and Peter and himself shok hands. Spirit of Tiny Tim, thy childish essence was from God!

“Spectre,” said Scrooge, “something informs me that our parting moment is at hand. I know it, but I know not how. Tell me what man that was whom we saw lying dead?”

The Ghost of Christmas Yet To Come conveyed him, as before — though at a different time, he thought: indeed, there seemed no order in these latter visions, save that they were in the Future — into the resorts of business men, but showed him not himself. Indeed, the Spirit did not stay for anything, but went straight on, as to the end just now desired, until besought by Scrooge to tarry for a moment.

“This courts,” said Scrooge, “through which we hurry now, is where my place of occupation is, and has been for a length of time. I see the house. Let me behold what I shall be, in days to come.”

The Spirit stopped; the hand was pointed elsewhere.

“The house is yonder,” Scrooge exclaimed. “Why do you point away?”

The inexorable finger underwent no change.

Scrooge hastened to the window of his office, and looked in. It was an office still, but not his. The furniture was not the same, and the figure in the chair was not himself. The Phantom pointed as before.

He joined it once again, and wondering why and whither he had gone, accompanied it until they reached an iron gate. He paused to look round before entering.

A churchyard. Here, then, the wretched man whose name he had now to learn, lay underneath the ground. It was a worthy place. Walled in by hous-

es; overrun by grass and weeds, the growth of vegetation's death, not life; choked up with too much burying; fat with repleted appetite. A worthy place!

The Spirit stood among the graves, and pointed down to One. He advanced towards it trembling. The Phantom was exactly as it had been, but he dreaded that he saw new meaning in its solemn shape.

"Before I draw nearer to that stone to which you point," said Scrooge, "answer me one question. Are these the shadows of the things that Will be, or are they shadows of things that May be, only?"

Still the Ghost pointed downward to the grave by which it stood.

"Men's courses will foreshadow certain ends, to which, if persevered in, they must lead," said Scrooge. "But if the courses be departed from, the ends will change. Say it is thus with what you show me!"

The Spirit was immovable as ever.

Scrooge crept towards it, trembling as he went; and following the finger, read upon the stone of the neglected grave his own name, Ebenezer Scrooge.

"Am *I* that man who lay upon the bed?" he cried, upon his knees.

The finger pointed from the grave to him, and back again.

"No, Spirit! Oh no, no!"

The finger still was there.

"Spirit!" he cried, tight clutching at its robe, "hear me! I am not the man I was. I will not be the man I must have been but for this intercourse. Why show me this, if I am past all hope?"

For the first time the hand appeared to shake.

"Good Spirit," he pursued, as down upon the ground he fell before it: "Your nature intercedes for me, and pities me. Assure me that I yet may change these shadows you have shown me, by an altered life!"

The kind hand trembled.

"I will honour Christmas in my heart, and try to keep it all the year. I will live in the Past, the Present, and the Future. The Spirits of all Three shall strive within me. I will not shut out the lessons that they teach. Oh, tell me I may sponge away the writing on this stone!"

In his agony, he caught the spectral hand. It sought to free itself, but he was strong in his entreaty, and detained it. The Spirit, stronger yet, repulsed him.

Holding up his hands in a last prayer to have his fate reversed, he saw an alteration in the Phantom's hood and dress. It shrunk, collapsed, and dwindled down into a bedpost.

STAVE 5: *The End of It*

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, mislaying 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 school-boy. I am as giddy as a drunken man. A merry Christmas to every-body! A happy New Year to all the world! Hallo here! Whoop! Hallo!”

He had frisked into the sitting-room, and was now standing there: perfectly winded.

“There’s the saucepan that the gruel was in!” cried Scrooge, starting off again, and going round the fire-place. “There’s the door, by which the Ghost of Jacob Marley entered! There’s the corner where the Ghost of Christmas Present, sat! There’s the window where I saw the wandering Spirits! It’s all right, it’s all true, it all happened. Ha ha ha!”

Really, for a man who had been out of practice for so many years, it was a splendid laugh, a most illustrious laugh. The father of a long, long line of brilliant laughs!

“I don’t know what day of the month it is!” said Scrooge. “I don’t know how long I’ve been among the Spirits. I don’t know anything. I’m quite a baby. Never mind. I don’t care. I’d rather be a baby. Hallo! Whoop! Hallo here!”

He was checked in his transports by the churches ringing out the lustiest peals he had ever heard. Clash, clang, hammer, ding, dong, bell. Bell, dong, ding, hammer, clang, clash! Oh, glorious, glorious!

Running to the window, he opened it, and put out his stirring, cold cold, piping for the blood to dance to; Golden sunlight; Heavenly sky; sweet fresh air; merry bells. Oh, glorious. Glorious!

“What’s to-day?” cried Scrooge, calling downward to a boy in Sunday clothes, who perhaps had loitered in to look about him.

“Eh?” returned the boy, with all his might of wonder.

“What’s to-day, my fine fellow?” said Scrooge.

“To-day?” replied the boy. “Why, Christmas Day .”

“It’s Christmas Day!” said Scrooge to himself. “I haven’t missed it. The Spirits have done it all in one night. They can do anything they like. Of course they can. Of course they can. Hallo, my fine fellow!”

“Hallo!” returned the boy

“Do you know the Poulterer’s, in the next street but one, at the corner?” Scrooge inquired.

“I should hope I did,” replied the lad.

“An intelligent boy!” said Scrooge. “A remarkable boy! Do you know whether they’ve sold the prize Turkey that was hanging up there? Not the little prize Turkey; the big one?”

“What, the one as big as me?” returned the boy.

“What a delightful boy!” said Scrooge. “It’s a pleasure to talk to him. Yes, my buck!”

“It’s hanging there now,” replied the boy.

“Is it?” said Scrooge. “Go and buy it.”

“Walk- er !” exclaimed the boy.

“No, no,” said Scrooge, “I am in earnest. Go and buy it, and tell’em to bring it here, that I may give them the irection where to take it. Come back with the man, and I’ll give you a shilling. Come back with him in less than five minutes, and I’ll give you half-a-crown!”

“I’ll send it to Bob Cratchit’s!” whispered Scrooge, rubbing his hands, and splitting with a laugh. “He sha’n’t know who sends it. It’s twice the size of Tiny Tim. Joe Miller never made such a joke as sending it to Bob’s will be!”

The hand in which he wrote the address was not a steady one, but write it he did, somehow, and went down stairs to open the street door, ready for

the coming of 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 snapped'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 of 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, sir! A merry Christmas to you!" And Scrooge said often afterwards, that of all the blithe sounds he had ever heard, those were the blithest in his ears.

He had not gone far, when coming on towards him he beheld the portly gentleman, who had walked into his counting-house the day before, and said, "Scrooge and Marley's, I believe?" It sent a pang across his heart to think how this old gentleman would look upon him when they met; but he knew what path lay straight before him, and he took it.

"My dear sir," said Scrooge, quickening his pace, and taking the old gentleman by both his hands. "How do you do? I hope you succeeded yesterday. It was very kind of you. A merry Christmas to you, sir!"

"Mr Scrooge?"

"Yes," said Scrooge. "That is my name, and I fear it may not be pleasant to you. Allow me to ask your pardon. And will you have the goodness —" here Scrooge whispered in his ear.

“Lord bless me!” cried the gentleman, as if his breath were gone. “My dear Mr Scrooge, are you serious?”

“If you please,” said Scrooge. “Not a farthing less. A great many back-payments are included in it, I assure you. Will you do me that favour?”

“My dear sir,” said the other, shaking hands with him. “I don’t know what to say to such munifi‐”

“don’t say anything, please,” retorted Scrooge. “Come and see me. Will you come and see me?”

“I will!” cried the old gentleman. And it was clear he meant to do it.

“Thank’ee,” said Scrooge. “I am much obliged to you. I thank you fifty times. Bless you!”

He went to church, and walked about the streets, and watched the people hurrying to and fro, and patted children on the head, and questioned beggars, and looked down into the kitchens of houses, and up to the windows: and found that everything could yield him pleasure. He had never dreamed that any walk — that anything — could give him so much happiness. In the afternoon he turned his steps towards his nephew’s house.

He passed the door a dozen times, before he had the courage to go up and knock. But he made a dash, and did it:

“Is your master at home, my dear?” said Scrooge to the girl. Nice girl! Very.

“Yes, sir.”

“Where is he, my love?” said Scrooge.

“He’s in the dining-room, sir, along with mistress. I’ll show you up-stairs, if you please.”

“Thank’ee. He knows me,” said Scrooge, with his hand already on the dining-room lock. “I’ll go in here, my dear.”

He turned it gently, and sidled his face in, round the door. They were looking at the table (which was spread out in great array); for these young house-keepers are always nervous on such points, and like to see that everything is right.

“Fred!” said Scrooge.

Dear heart alive, how his niece by marriage started! Scrooge had forgotten, for the moment, about her sitting in the corner with the footstool, or he wouldn’t have done it, on any account.

“Why bless my soul!” cried Fred, “who’s that?”

“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, 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 continued, leaping from his stool, and giving Bob such a dig in the waistcoat that he staggered back into the Tank again: “and therefore I am about to raise your salary!”

Bob trembled, and got a little nearer to the ruler. He had a momentary idea of knocking Scrooge down with it; holding him, and calling to the people in the court for help and a strait-waistcoat.

“A merry Christmas, Bob!” said Scrooge, with an earnestness that could not be mistaken, as he clapped him on the back. “A merrier Christmas, Bob, my good fellow, than I have given you for many a year! I’ll raise your salary, and endeavour to assist your struggling family, and we will discuss your affairs this very afternoon, over a Christmas bowl of smoking bishop, Bob! Make up the fires, and buy another coal-scuttle before you dot another i, Bob Cratchit.”

Scrooge was better than his word. He did it all, and infinitely more; and to Tiny Tim, who did not die, he was a second father. He became as good a friend, as good a master, and as good a man, as the good old city knew, or any other good old city, town, or borough, in the good old world. Some people laughed to see the alteration in him, but he let them laugh, and little heeded them; for he was wise enough to know that nothing ever happened on this globe, for good, at which some people did not have their fill of laughter in the outset; and knowing that such as these would be blind anyway, he thought it quite as well that they should wrinkle up their eyes in grins, as have the malady in less attractive forms. His own heart laughed: and that was quite enough for him.

He had no further intercourse with Spirits, but lived upon the Total Abstinence Principle, ever afterwards; and it was always said of him, that he knew how to keep Christmas well, if any man alive possessed the knowledge. May that be truly said of us, and all of us! And so, as Tiny Tim observed, God Bless Us, Every One!

HIZTEGIA

abesperen: tenor.
adion: aukera (on).
aizeki: haizemaile, abaniko.
alaka: auhenka, kexuka.
alatz: mirakulu, mirari.
antxitu: kandelari mukia kendu.
aolku: Ahuku, aholku, segizio, progua.
argi-biurtu: argizari, kandela.
arrirudi: estatua.
aztakin: haztaga.
bakaldun: errege.
bakalzigor: zetro.
bakaulki: tronu.
baltzu: konpainia, sozietate.
baltzukide: sozio, konpainia kide.
ben-ben: serio-serio, zintzo-zintzo.
beroneurkia: tenperatura.
berunpilla: bala.
bialdu: apostolu.
burniziri: su-mako, su-pala, su-makila.
buztiñarri: lauza berinatu, axuleiu.
buztiñerre: adreilu.
edesti: kontakizun.
edestu: kontatu.
egospen: digestio.
egutz: eguraldi, atmosfera.
eleszail: deskribaezin.
enda: arraza.
eres, eresi: musika soinu, kantu.
eresingi: partitura.

ereskin: musika tresna.
erredi: altzari.
erridi: aberri, eskualde.
eskobara: eskuare.
estun: begi (katearena), eraztun, koroa, lotura.
ezkutuki: misterio.
gaizkatu: salbatu.
garbontzi: garbi-ontzi, garbi-mahai, konketa.
godar: godotar, gotiko.
gogai: pentsamendu.
gogoki: espiritu.
gogouts: espiritu.
gorgoilla: diru-zorro.
goroiki: soka.
gotillun: malenkoniatsu, triste.
gotzon: aingeru.
idazkol: (idazki ol) bulego.
idazkortza: (idatz hortz) luma (idaztekoa).
idegabe: paregabe.
igali: fruitu, fruta.
igalitegia: fruitu-denda.
igazi: igaro.
igurkitu: eskuilatu.
ildegi: hilerri.
ingi: paper.
ingor: (ingi gogor) kartoi.
ingorritxo: bisita-txartel.
ingurtitxo: folletin.
irazaki: izaki, sorkari.
iskindu: azpildu.
ispel: ostra.
izkillu: arma.
izperringi: egunkari.
kixkur, lepoko kixkur: gorbata.
kopin: panpina.
landola: (lan ol) bulego.
larortz: sardexka.
laspel: gas.

latetxe: (lagi etxe) Legebiltzar, Parlamentu.
latidazki: (lagi idazki) lege-idazki.
lekaro: eremu, basamortu.
lekatxo: banilla.
losun: logale, logura.
ludibirla: mundu bola.
lurraska: ildo, arrasto, gurpil hatz.
lurtamu: mapa.
malo: iratxo.
maniura: harpa.
men: irudimen.
murrin: malenkonía(tsu).
nardaberaki: erdeinuz.
obitegi: hilerri.
odijela: izotz burruntzí.
okore: (ogi ore) tarta, hostore, hostopil.
okoretegi: gozotegia.
oldozkor: pentsakor.
oldoztu: pentsatu.
ontarte: mesede, grazia, babes.
oskixil: (oski isil) txapin, zapatila.
ozkorritu: gorritu.
ozte: jendetza.
salerostetxe: denda.
saletxe: denda.
saloki: denda.
salosketa: sal-erosketa.
salostari: merkatari.
saloste: sal-eroste.
salostetxe: salerostetxe, denda.
sestokari: bromoso, barre eragile, piperdun.
soroilu: solairu, zoru.
sorreri: sortasun.
suaga: kanoi.
suaga-berunpilla: kanoi-bala.
trozel: ohe-errezel.
txadi: (etxe-di) kale.
txaki: (etxe-ki) gela, egongela.

txestallu: dasta, ahogozo, zapore.
txibota: (*figuratuan*) dirua, xoxa.
txirikin: etxeko mantal.
txorizlari: (txori hizlari) loro.
umao: kontserba.
upulurda: gerrontze, barneko.
urdanka: urde hanka.
urdunputx: ziape.
Urtzi: Jainko.
ur-zuri: (hur-zuri) almendra, arbendol.
xirribikari: biolin-jotzaile.
zaindoki: babesleku.
zali: koilara.
zeitxo: plazatxo.
zingokaitz: (zingo: zunda) barneraezin, hondargabe.
zursare: sareta, pertsiana.

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