

‘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