

A CHRISTMAS CAROL:
A CULTURAL HEIRLOOM

a play in five staves

by

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Adapted from Charles Dickens

Preface

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.

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Cast of Characters

Titles on the left are for the framing scenes and narration – characters on right are roles each plays from Dickens. There is room for these roles to be divided differently as needed. The decision to have Marley and others played by women was to demonstrate that many roles might be played against gender without disrupting the story in the least.

CHILD	TINY TIM
CHILD 1	BELINDA CRATCHIT – BELLE’S DAUGHTER 2
CHILD 2	CRATCHIT GIRL – WANT
CHILD 3	BOY SCROOGE – CRATCHIT BOY – IGNORANCE

CHILDREN also play CAROLERS; SLIDERS; MINERS; NARRATION

ROBERTA	SISTER – ADOLESCENT BELLE
ANDY	TOPPER – ADOLESCENT SCROOGE
YOUTH 1	FAN – LAUNDRESS
YOUTH 2	MRS. FRED – YOUNG WOMAN BELLE – BELLE’S DAUGHTER 1 – WIFE
YOUTH 3	FRED – YOUNG MAN SCROOGE – HUSBAND – LIGHTHOUSE KEEPER – MERCHANT 5
YOUTH 4	DICK WILKINS – PETER CRATCHIT – TURKEY BOY
YOUTH 5	GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PRESENT
YOUTH 6	MARTHA CRATCHIT – MERCHANT 2
YOUTH 7	ADOLESCENT BELLE - GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PAST (The original production was blessed with a pair of twins to play this role. I highly recommend twins (or any two), as it provides the dual nature of Scrooge’s history.)

YOUTH also play GHOST OF CHRISTMAS FUTURE; NARRATION; PARTY GOERS; MINERS; SAILORS; PEOPLE ON STREET; TOMBSTONES

GRANDPA	FEZZIWIG – OLD JOE
MALE 1	CRATCHIT – BELLE’S HUSBAND – MERCHANT 3
MALE 2	ADULT SCROOGE
FEMALE 1	MRS. FEZZIWIG – GENTLEMAN 1 – MERCHANT 1
FEMALE 2	GENTLEMAN 2 – CHARWOMAN
FEMALE 3	MARLEY – MRS. CRATCHIT – ADULT BELLE – MERCHANT 4

ADULTS also play NARRATION; PARTY GOERS; MINERS; PEOPLE ON STREET

Scene

The attic of a (perhaps) Victorian style house.

Time

Christmas Eve day this year, or perhaps the recent past or future.

SETTING: The attic of a Victorian style house; the storehouse of memory. Various items surround and define the space. Some may be shrouded.

AT RISE: A lone voice sings Verse 1 of THE WEXFORD CAROL as CHILD and CHILD 1 enter, looking around the attic. All the props/scenic elements/costumes for the entire production are somewhere on stage. (Cheat this direction as needed.)

GOOD PEOPLE ALL, THIS CHRISTMASTIME,
CONSIDER WELL AND BEAR IN MIND
WHAT OUR GOOD GOD FOR US HAS DONE
IN SENDING HIS BELOVED SON.
O LET US ALL BOTH SING AND PRAY
TO GOD WITH LOVE THIS CHRISTMAS DAY;
IN BETHLEHEM THAT CHRISTMAS MORN
THERE WAS AA BLESSED MESSIAH BORN.

We hear a door open and the muffled noise of a family Christmas party. It is loud and we hear an example of horribly secular Christmas music. CHILD and CHILD 1 hide as ROBERTA and ANDY enter.

ROBERTA

Have I completely scared you?

ANDY

I don't get scared.

ROBERTA

There was a look in your eye. My family's a lot to take in. They get on my nerves.

ANDY

Just a lot going on. And people are still coming.

ROBERTA

Not what you're used to, huh?

ANDY

I'm used to a couple days with my Dad and Gwen while they pack for Colorado, then back to my Mom's for the Twelve Days of bitterness.

ROBERTA

Yeah.

ANDY

I've never been in a house that had an attic. Not a real one, at least.

ROBERTA

We used to come up here when I was a kid. Tell ghost stories. The shadows can be scary. To a kid.

(CHILDREN start to quietly enter upstage.)

ANDY

Yeah. So. Were they serious about the banjo?

ROBERTA

Uncle Barney. Pretty lame, I know.

ANDY

Not very Christmasy is all. Carols are one thing, but it's nearing a jamboree down there.

ROBERTA

Family. Whatta ya gonna do? No one should bother us up here.

(They get close, lean in to, but not quite, kiss.)

CHILD 1

Roberta and Andy, sitting in a tree,

CHILDREN (all)

K-I-S-S-I-N-G.

CHILD 1

First comes love,

CHILDREN (all)

then comes marriage, then comes Bobby in the baby carriage.

CHILD 1

Sucking her thumb. Peeing in her pants. Bobby's doing a hula-dance!

ROBERTA

Would you go away! Get out of here. Go!

CHILD 1

Uncle Barney said to come see what you were up to.

ROBERTA

Nothing. Just trying to get some peace and quiet.

I'll be quiet.

CHILD 2

Get out of here! Now!

ROBERTA

(CHILDREN start to exit, but then after
ROBERTA turns away, they don't.)

Sorry. Families are such a pain. Especially big ones.

ROBERTA

I don't mind.

ANDY

Seriously? You're too sweet.

ROBERTA

(They attempt to kiss again.)

Ooooooooooh! (Kissing noises.)

CHILDREN (all)

Oh, for Chr...

ROBERTA

AAAaaaaaaaargh!

YOUTH (all)

(Yells of various kinds. CHILDREN scream.)

Totally gotcha.

YOUTH 1

Stop it!

YOUTH 7

(to ANDY) 'Sup? Andy, right? Handy Andy. So...you and Bobbie, huh?

YOUTH 2

Roberta.

ROBERTA

Roberta. Sorry.

YOUTH 2

YOUTH 3

Wanna see her naked baby pictures?

ROBERTA

Drop dead!

YOUTH 4

I think Grandpa C. keeps his old albums up here. Dude, help me look.

YOUTH 1

This place is a wreck. Look at all this junk.

(YOUTH look around.)

CHILDREN (singing)

I saw Bobby kissing Andy!

ROBERTA

Mom! Would you guys go downstairs? Leave us alone. Mom!

YOUTH 5

(holding up a ring)

Check this out! Looks Scottish or something.

YOUTH 2

British. I bet that's like Great-Great-Grandma's.

FEMALE 2(from off stage)

You bellowed?

YOUTH 1

The old country. It would be so cool to move to London.

ROBERTA

I just wanted to get away from...

FEMALE 2 (appearing with FEMALE 1)

Us?

CHILD 1

They were kissing.

YOUTH 2

Embarrassed?

Ashamed? YOUTH 1

Here it is! YOUTH 3

What're you looking for? FEMALE 1

Bobby's naked baby pics. YOUTH 4

Let's post 'em online! YOUTH 3

That's not it. YOUTH 2

OK, everyone out. FEMALE 2

(MALE 1 and FEMALE 3 enter.)

MALE 1
...said it was up here in back. Isn't this great? They don't make attics like this any more.

FEMALE 3
This would make a great office...or bedroom.

FEMALE 1
We were just sending everyone downstairs so Bobbie...I'm sorry, Roberta, could have some time away from the maddening crowds.

MALE 1
We just came up for Dad's fiddle.

YOUTH 1
Are you serious?

YOUTH 3
Found it! Nope. Sorry. These are just old papers.

FEMALE 3
We'll be out of your hair in two shakes.

(GRANDPA and MALE 2 enter.)

GRANDPA
Find it? It's right behind the...

MALE 1
Not yet.

YOUTH 3
Found it!

FEMALE 3
The fiddle?

YOUTH 4
Naked Bobbie.

CHILD 3
Naked Barbie?

(YOUTH 3 sets a photo album down on
the centrally located table.)

YOUTH 3
Ro-bert-a. Feast your eyes...

FEMALE 2
That's the old family album.

(ALL gather around the album.)

YOUTH 5
I thought you said you knew where they were.

CHILD 3
Who's that?

GRANDPA
Let me see that. That is your Great Uncle Chuck. My brother.

FEMALE 1
You didn't have a brother named Chuck. Let me see that. That's you.

GRANDPA
Me? Give me that book. Oh yes, I remember. I was a cute little dickens, eh?

CHILD 1
That can't be you, Grandpa. That one's you.

GRANDPA

That's my Grandpa. His immigration papers are up here somewhere.

FEMALE 1

I have them down in the study. Part of my little ancestry project.

YOUTH 1

You need to clean out all this junk.

GRANDPA

Junk? These are family heirlooms.

YOUTH 1

Heirlooms don't fall apart.

FEMALE 3

Mind your manners.

CHILD 3

I thought it was "hair-loom."

YOUTH 2

It's heirloom.

CHILD 3

But it starts with an H.

YOUTH 2

Welcome to English. It's heirloom, Gov'na.

YOUTH 5

That's what old people call junk.

MALE 1

They don't make stuff like this anymore.

YOUTH 6

There's a reason for that. Look at this ratty old sign.

(YOUTH 6 holds up an old looking sign that reads, "SCROOGE and MARLEY" Softly we hear "LULLY LULLAY" on flute.)

CHILD 1

Cool. Can I have it?

Looks old.	YOUTH 7
That's genuine English script.	MALE 1
Scrooge and Marley. Scrooge and... I haven't seen that in years.	GRANDPA
Is that an heirloom?	CHILD 2
After a fashion. [In a way.]	GRANDPA
Story time.	FEMALE 2
What?	CHILD 3
Oh...didn't they just call us for dinner?	GRANDPA
I didn't hear anything.	FEMALE 3
Your newest great-grandchild is yet to arrive. They just called. Their plane's delayed.	FEMALE 3
We have time.	FEMALE 2
What?	CHILD 3
I thought...It's a bit scary.	GRANDPA
I wasn't any older than this peanut here when you first told me.	MALE 2
Really? I remember...you've gotten old. When did that happen?	GRANDPA

CHILDREN (various – all at once)

What’s a Scrooge? Who’s Marley? Is this a ghost story? Did this really happen?

YOUTH (various – all at once)

Not again. I’ve heard it before. Come on. Didn’t we do this last Christmas?

GRANDPA

Quiet!

(“LULLY LULLAY” stops.)

Give me that sign. Scrooge and... Yes. You’re right. Make hay while the sun shines. But I’m getting too old to tell this story all by myself. If I’m going to do this, I’m going to need some help.

ADULTS

At your service. Let’s go. I’m ready.

YOUTH 5

Even us? Not just the adults this time?

YOUTH 2

I’ll be the FX department.

YOUTH 1

Only if I can be a ghost.

YOUTH 7

There are ghosts?

FEMALE 3

Spirits. Not ghosts.

MALE 2

Arrrrgh! (to YOUTH 1) Totally got you.

YOUTH 1

Did not.

MALE 2

Totally.

GRANDPA

Ghosts! Most seriously. There are indeed ghosts. Yes, and you must play one.

YOUTH 1

OK. I’m in.

GRANDPA

All of you must play. Even this little peanut. And Roberta? Do you and Andy mind us invading?

ROBERTA

Sure, Grandpa. (to ANDY) It's kind of a family tradition.

ANDY

If you want.

MALE 2

Don't worry, if this doesn't scare him off, nothing will.

GRANDPA

OK then. Everybody ready?

(GRANDPA hands YOUTH 6 the sign.)

You could say that this is the oldest heirloom I possess.

(During the following narration, the ensemble sets the stage for Scrooge's office. Similarly, at other changes in location, the ensemble rearranges the space to create the scene. It is important that everything that makes the scenes be pulled from what is in the attic. This means limiting pieces to what is essential to evoke the scene – not to overload the attic with unnecessary items. This script values the imagination of the audience. All the design need do is provide enough to evoke a feeling of the historic – provide those heirlooms that resonate with a greater collective memory.)