

A Christmas Carol (Excerpt)

By Charles Dickens

Adapted for the stage by Geoffrey Simon Brown

December 9th, 2021

This play is written for three actors

With actor one playing

Ebenezer Scrooge (at all ages), Fezziwig, Alice Cratchit, Penny & Topper

Actor two playing

Bob Cratchit, Ethel, Jacob Marley, Creakle, Gertie Fezziwig, Peter & Ben Cratchit, Emily, Koch, Simon, & The Ghost of Christmas Present

Actor three playing

Fred, Bethel, Fan Scrooge, Belle, Belinda, Margaret & Tim Cratchit, Walton, Dilber, Caroline, Pickle, & The Ghost of Christmas Past

Notes:

I have imagined the set as simple throughout: a simple chair or chairs and a ghost light

The bulk of work moving through time and space being done with lighting and sound

Blocks of light denoting rooms or memories

Costumes following a similar neutrality; characters changing through acting rather than wardrobe

All of this is open to evolution

A line break indicates a thought changing direction

A paragraph break indicates a thought unspoken

A beat indicates several thoughts unspoken

A silence indicates there is nothing to say

/ indicates the beginning of the following line

*[An empty stage
A ghost light, lit
Work lights on, curtains pulled back
As much as possible, all hidden mechanics of the theatre are fully visible here]*

*[The performers walk onstage
All overhead lights go off
Leaving only the dim ghost light
The faces of the actors illuminated
And nothing else]*

ONE: Marley was dead
To begin with
There was no doubt about that

TWO: Old Marley was as dead as a doornail

THREE: This must be distinctly understood or nothing wonderful can come of this story

TWO: Did Scrooge know he was dead?

ONE: Of course he did
Scrooge and he were partners for I don't know how many years
Scrooge was his sole executor, his sole administrator, his sole friend, and sole mourner

THREE: And even Scrooge was not so dreadfully cut up by the sad event

TWO: Oh, but he was a tight-fisted hand at the grindstone, Scrooge

ONE: A squeezing, wrenching, grasping, scraping, clutching, covetous, old sinner

THREE: 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

TWO: Scrooge never painted out old Marley's name
So there it stood years afterwards
Above the warehouse door:
Scrooge and Marley

ONE: Let's start our story here
At the firm of Scrooge and Marley

THREE: In a moment
I want you to imagine
You're in a city called London

TWO: It's 1843

THREE: And of all the good days in the year

ONE: It's Christmas Eve
1. Scrooge & Marley's

*[The music swells
The lights shift
One sits, becoming Ebenezer Scrooge
Two sits, becoming Bob Cratchit
An office builds around them
As they work, the sound fades into the ticking of a clock]*

*[Bob shivers and rubs his hands together
This subtle noise pulls Scrooge entirely out of his work
He glares at Bob
Bob puts his hands up in a silent apology
And goes back to his work
Carefully, Bob turns to the fire to warm his hands
His chair squeaks
Again, Scrooge stops what he is doing and glares
Even harder
At Bob
Bob mouths 'Sorry' and Scrooge goes back to work
Silence again
Bob sneezes
Scrooge stands up from his seat
Bob ducks behind his chair
Just then, the door bursts open]*

FRED: A merry Christmas, uncle!
God save you!

SCROOGE: Bah!
Humbug!

FRED: Christmas a humbug?
Uncle, you don't mean that, I am sure

SCROOGE: I do
Merry Christmas?
What reason have you to be merry?
You're poor enough

FRED: What reason have you to be dismal?
You're rich enough

SCROOGE: What else can I be when I live in such a world of fools as this?
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?
If I could work my will
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
Keep Christmas in your own way and let me keep it in mine

Much good it has ever done you

FRED: I dare say there are many things from which I have derived good that I have not profited from Christmas among the rest

I have always thought of Christmas time as a good time

A kind, forgiving, charitable, pleasant time

The only time I know of when men and women seem to open their shut up hearts freely

And 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!

[*Bob applauds*]

SCROOGE: Let me hear another sound from *you* and you'll keep your Christmas by losing your job!

[*To Fred*] You're quite a powerful speaker, sir

I wonder you don't go into parliament

FRED: Come, uncle

Dine with Emily and I tomorrow

We bring our dinner to the street and invite our friends, the whole community to join us

Say that I'll see you

SCROOGE: You'll see me in my grave before you see me dining with you on Christmas

Good afternoon

FRED: I want nothing from you

I ask nothing of you

We have never had any quarrel to which I have been a party

Why cannot we be friends?

SCROOGE: Good afternoon

FRED: I am sorry, with all my heart, to find you so resolute

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!

SCROOGE: GOOD

AFTERNOON

[*Fred begins to exit*

Then]

FRED: Merry Christmas to you, Bob

BOB: Yes!

Merry Christmas, Fred!

[Fred exits]

BOB: And a happy new year!

SCROOGE: There's another fellow
My clerk
With fifteen shillings a week and a wife and family
Talking about a merry Christmas
I'll retire to Bedlam

[Bethel & Ethel enter]

BETHEL: Scrooge and Marley's, I believe

SCROOGE: Oh, here we go

ETHEL: Have I the pleasure of addressing Mr. Scrooge or Mr. Marley?

SCROOGE: Mr. Marley has been dead for seven years
He died seven years ago, this very night

[The ghost light flickers]

ETHEL: I am so/ sorry for your loss

BETHEL: My sincerest condolences

SCROOGE: I've moved on

ETHEL: Well
While I never had the pleasure of meeting Mr.
Marley, was it?
I have no doubt his
Um
Liberality

SCROOGE: Ha!

ETHEL: Is well represented by his surviving partner

BETHEL: You see, at this festive season of the year, Mr. Scrooge
It is especially important that we make provision for the poor and destitute
Who suffer greatly at the present time

SCROOGE: Are there no prisons?

ETHEL: Oh yes
Plenty of prisons

SCROOGE: And the union workhouses?
Are they still in operation?

ETHEL: They are

BETHEL: I wish I could say they were not

SCROOGE: Oh good!
I was afraid, from what you said at first, that something had occurred to stop them in their useful course
I'm very glad to hear it

ETHEL: I
Don't think you are understanding us, Mr. Scrooge
A few of us are endeavouring to raise a fund
To buy the poor some meat and drink and means of warmth

BETHEL: What shall I put you down for?

SCROOGE: Nothing

ETHEL: Ah, you wish to be left anonymous!

SCROOGE: No, I wish to be left alone!
Look, I don't make merry myself at Christmas and I can't afford to make idle people merry
I am in the business of money lending, not giving
If someone can't afford their house, then it's my job to take it from them
And I don't care if it's Christmas Day or any other day
If you can't pay your way through life
Then you're liable to lose it
My taxes already support the establishments I have mentioned
They certainly cost enough
And those who are badly off must go there

ETHEL: Many can't go there
And many would rather die!

SCROOGE: If they would rather die, they had better do it, and decrease the surplus population!
Besides it's none of my business

BETHEL: It's all of our business!

SCROOGE: It's not mine!
It's enough for a man to understand his own business and not to interfere with other people's
Mine occupies me constantly

ETHEL: But Mr/ Scrooge, sir!

SCROOGE: GOOD AFTERNOON

[Bethel and Ethel exit]

SCROOGE: Thank you!

*[Scrooge sits down to work
Just as the bell begins to toll]*

SCROOGE: And there it is!
End of the day and nothing done
This whole afternoon has been an utter waste
Christmas!
Humbug!
Mr. Cratchit!

BOB: Yes, sir?

SCROOGE: Make sure to be here early tomorrow
There will be plenty of work to make up for in the morning

BOB: But Mr. Scrooge
Tomorrow's Christmas

SCROOGE: Yes, Mr. Cratchit
That has been made abundantly clear to me

BOB: Mr. Scrooge
Sir
It's just
It's usually expected on Christmas to be given the day

SCROOGE: The entire day?

BOB: If quite convenient, sir

SCROOGE: It's not convenient
It's not convenient and it's not fair
If I was to dock you half a crown for it, you'd think yourself ill used
And yet you don't think *me* ill used when I pay a day's wages for no work

BOB: It is only once a year, sir

SCROOGE: A poor excuse for picking a man's pocket every twenty fifth of December
But I suppose you'll want to take the day from me nonetheless

[Beat]

BOB: Yes, sir?

[Beat]

SCROOGE: Be here all the earlier the next morning

BOB: I will

Good night
Have a merry
Have a
Good night, Mr. Scrooge

SCROOGE: Bah

2. Marley's ghost

*[The streets are dark with smog
And Scrooge winds through them
Children, carollers, bustling bodies hurrying home on Christmas Eve
All scatter upon seeing him
Shadows from the streetlights play tricks on our eyes
And his
Maybe Marley is standing in the shadows
Maybe Scrooge almost sees him]*

*[Whispering in the wind
He stops]*

SCROOGE: Hello?

Hello?

Who's there?

[The whispering stops]

Nothing

*[Scrooge reaches his front door
Suddenly
Out of the shadows
Appears the face of his deceased partner]*

MARLEY: Ebenezer!

[Scrooge falls backwards]

SCROOGE: Ah!

Jacob Marley?

*[He stands up
The face is gone]*

SCROOGE: Pooh pooh!

[He grabs the ghost light]

*His candle
And uses it to light his way
We are now inside his bedroom]*

[Whispering from the darkness]

SCROOGE: Humbug

*[He sits
The bell beside him begins to ring
Then every bell in the house begins to ring
Sound from every direction
Louder and louder]*

SCROOGE: Humbug!

*[We hear a massive bang
Chains rattling
The ghost light goes out
Scrooge lets go of it]*

SCROOGE: It's humbug still!
I won't believe it!

*[With an enormous eruption of sound
The ghost of Jacob Marley appears
In blazing light]*

MARLEY: Ebenezer Scrooge!

SCROOGE: Who are you?

MARLEY: In life I was your partner, Jacob Marley

SCROOGE: Humbug

MARLEY: You don't believe in me?
Why do you doubt your senses?

SCROOGE: Because a little thing affects them
A slight disorder of the stomach
You may be an
An
An undigested bit of beef
A crumb of cheese
A fragment of underdone potato
There's more of gravy than of grave about you, whatever you are!
Humbug, I tell you!
Hum/bug!

[At this Jacob cries out and shakes his chain]

*The sound is so great the walls shake
The windows rattle]*

SCROOGE: Mercy!
Dreadful apparition
Why do you trouble me?

MARLEY: It is required of every man
That the spirit within him walk abroad among his fellow beings
And if that spirit goes not forth in life
It is condemned to do so after death
I lived a life with eyes cast down
Never gazing beyond my own self concern
In life my spirit never roved beyond the narrow limits of our money changing hole
So now I persist here
Doomed to wander through the world and witness what I cannot share!

SCROOGE: You are fettered

MARLEY: I wear the chain I forged in life
I made it of my own free will and of my own free will I wore it
Is its pattern strange to you?
Your chain was as heavy and as long as this seven Christmas Eves ago
You have laboured on it since

SCROOGE: But why should you be punished, Jacob?
You were always a good man of business

MARLEY: Business!?
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!

SCROOGE: Jacob
Old Jacob Marley
Speak comfort to me, Jacob!

MARLEY: I have none to give, Ebenezer Scrooge
I am here tonight to warn you
That you have yet a chance and hope of escaping my fate
A chance and hope of my procuring

SCROOGE: You were always a good friend to me
Thank'ee!

MARLEY: You will be haunted by three spirits

SCROOGE: Is that the chance and hope you mentioned, Jacob?

MARLEY: It is

SCROOGE: I
I think I'd rather not

MARLEY: Expect the first tonight
When the bell tolls one

SCROOGE: Couldn't I take 'em all at once and have it over?

MARLEY: Expect the second tomorrow at the same hour
The third upon the next night when the stroke of twelve has ceased to vibrate
Look to see me no more!

SCROOGE: Jacob!

*[Marley is gone
His last words boom and echo through the room
Becoming a cacophony filled with phantoms and spirits
Chained
Wailing
As the noise builds to a climax
Scrooge covers his ears
Until the noise becomes
A bell ringing one]*

3. The first of the three spirits

SCROOGE: One
That's the time that Marley said
But

*[Suddenly the ghost light erupts with light
The spirit is revealed]*

PAST: Hello!

SCROOGE: Ahhh!

Hello

Are
Are you the spirit whose coming was foretold to me?

PAST: I am!

SCROOGE: Who
And what
Are you?

PAST: I am the Ghost of Christmas Past

SCROOGE: Long past?

PAST: No!
Your past

SCROOGE: I see

Would you mind putting something on to cover your light?
It's a little bright

PAST: The light I give comes from all the souls that have come before us
Every moment
Every memory
Would you so soon put it out?

SCROOGE: Well/ it's

PAST: Would you have me live in darkness?

SCROOGE: No/ I

PAST: Would you rather live in darkness yourself?!

SCROOGE: No!
I
Nevermind
The light is
Very
It's very nice

PAST: Thank you

SCROOGE: May I ask what business brought you here?

PAST: Business?
Your welfare!
Your reclamation!

SCROOGE: My reclamation?
Oh
[Scrooge attempts to get into bed]
Well
In that case
No need to bother
I'm feeling very well already
All I need is a good night's rest, I'll be fully reclaimed, thank you very much
Good/ night!

PAST: Rise!

[The spirit lifts Scrooge from his bed]

SCROOGE: Ahhhhh!
What are you doing?

PAST: And walk with me!

*[Scrooge is lifted off his feet
Hovering above the ground]*

SCROOGE: Spirit
I am a mortal
And liable to fall

PAST: Bear but a touch of my hand here
[Laying their hand on his heart]
And you shall be upheld in more ways than this
Are you ready?

SCROOGE: No

[The spirit grins again]

PAST: Come!

*[They pull Scrooge through the window
He screams
As they fly above the city
Until the buildings vanish beneath them
When they land they are standing on an open country road
Snow dusts the ground]*

4. Childhood

SCROOGE: Good heaven!
I know this place
I was a boy here
Oh, the smell, spirit!
I remember everything

PAST: You remember the way?

SCROOGE: Remember it!
I could walk it blindfolded!

PAST: Strange to have forgotten it for so many years

SCROOGE: Oh my goodness
There they are
My schoolmates!

Just as they were
There's George
And Steerforth
They're so small
And Tommy Traddles!
My friend!
Tommy!

PAST: These are but shadows of the things that have been
They have no consciousness of us

You're smiling

SCROOGE: Yes
It's silly
To see them so happy
All going home for the holidays

PAST: Yes
But the school is not quite deserted

*[The ghost light brightens
And a classroom begins to build around them]*

PAST: A solitary child
Neglected by his family
Remains there still

*[A pool of light opens up
A memory
Scrooge looks at it]*

SCROOGE: It's me, spirit

PAST: Yes

SCROOGE: There I am
With my books
Oh how I loved these books
They were my escape

PAST: Your escape from what?

SCROOGE: Christmas was
A very lonely time for me
Then

My father couldn't afford to bring me home
So I spent my holidays here
Working off the cost of my schooling
I was very much alone

Poor boy

*[Scrooge reaches out towards his younger self
But steps into the memory
Becoming a boy again
He sits at his desk reading
The schoolmaster enters]*

CREAKLE: Master Scrooge
Just you left for the holidays again, is it?

BOY SCROOGE: Yes, sir

CREAKLE: Good
Solitude sharpens a man
Pack up here and see Tungay to begin a cleaning of the grounds
Won't be much time for stories
Will there?

BOY SCROOGE: No, sir

CREAKLE: Remember not to be distracted by frivolity, Ebenezer
It is for the idle
Clean up here
And you can start with the upstairs lavatories

BOY SCROOGE: Yes, sir

*[Creakle leaves
Suddenly a door bursts open]*

BOY SCROOGE: Fan!

FAN: Ebenezer!
Oh Ebenezer

BOY SCROOGE: Fan!
Fan, you're here!
Look at how you've grown, Fan!

FAN: Yes
I am seven years old now
I am a prim and proper, fully grown up, dignified lady

BOY SCROOGE: What are you doing here?

FAN: I have come to bring you home, dear brother!

BOY SCROOGE: Home, little fan?

FAN: Yes
Father's been so much kinder these last months
So much that I was not afraid to ask once more if you might come home
And this time he said yes!
And you're never to come back here!
You're to come home again!
And we're to be together all Christmas long and have the merriest time in the world!

BOY SCROOGE: Fan, are you serious?

[Creakle is there]

CREAKLE: Who's this, then?

BOY SCROOGE: This is my sister!
She's come to bring me home!

CREAKLE: Home?

FAN: Home!

CREAKLE: And when will you be returning?

FAN: Never!
He's never coming back!
He's coming home for ever and ever!
Forevereverevereverever/everever!

BOY SCROOGE: Fan!

FAN: Let's go!

[She runs off]

BOY SCROOGE: Wait!
Fan!
I need to get my coats on
Fan!

FAN: Come on, slowpoke!

BOY SCROOGE: *[To Creakle]* Merry Christmas, Sir

*[Creakle says nothing; just scowls
Scrooge runs after her
As he does, the memory fades
And he transforms into his older self
Creakle is gone
Fan has become the spirit once more]*

PAST: Did you ever return to your school, then?

SCROOGE: Yes
Just a few days after that
In fact

My father was
A strict man
And he didn't keep much patience for me

His spirit of generosity seemed to leave him the moment I arrived
Back to school and then to work
I never went home again
Actually
That was the last Christmas we spent together
Fan and I

PAST: She died a young woman

SCROOGE: Yes
She was fragile
Even then
But there was nothing I could do

PAST: She had, as I think, children

SCROOGE: One child

PAST: True
Your nephew

SCROOGE: Fred

[They share a moment of silence]

PAST: Let me show you a different Christmas

*[The ghost's light brightens again
And a new memory appears
Music
And the sounds of a party]*

5. Fezziwig

[Scrooge and the spirit peer into an elaborately decorated warehouse]

PAST: Do you know this place?

SCROOGE: Know it?
Was I not apprenticed here?
Why, it's old Fezziwig!

Bless his heart
It's Fezziwig alive again!
And Gertie
Fezziwig's wife
She ran the place as much as he did

PAST: A family business then?

SCROOGE: It felt that way
For all of us

Oh bless me
Fezzi's about to give one of his speeches

*[Scrooge leans into the memory
And falls in
Becoming Fezziwig
Gertie joins him]*

FEZZIWIG: Hilli-ho!
Clear away my lads and lets have lots of room here!
Shutters up, friends!
Shutters up!

GERTIE: Come in!
Come in!
Don't be shy!

[Fezziwig stands on a chair]

FEZZIWIG: Welcome!
Welcome, all!
Hello!
Now I'm sure no one wants to hear an old man blather on
So I shall keep this brief

GERTIE: I'll believe it when I hear it!

[Fezziwig laughs]

FEZZIWIG: Thank you, Gertie!
I'd like to celebrate another wonderful year
In the company of family
In the company of friends
In the company of rogues and clowns alike

GERTIE: Oh, out with you!

FEZZIWIG: For me, business has always been about more than just profit
But also a chance, like anything in life, to help create a world we want to live in
To leave the world a little bit better for our having lived

I think we all need to do that in whatever way we can

And when things are hard
It can be harder to see that
Harder to see beyond the present moment
Outside of us and ours alone
When something goes wrong
It is tempting to think it was never meant to go right
And to stop trying for something better

I know that this year hasn't been an easy one for us
But standing here tonight, it's easy to remember why it's worth it
In fact
Standing here
I think myself to be the luckiest man on earth
To be blessed by the company of such extraordinary souls
As

[He is overcome; Gertie steps in]

GERTIE: Now
I hope you like food
And I hope you like dancing
Because if you don't, I'm afraid I've locked the doors and am not to let you out until you've eaten us out
of house and home and danced yourself into exhaustion
Okay!
Merry Christmas all and let's get on with it!

FEZZIWIG: Merry Christmas!

*[The crowd cheers
The party starts up again
The light softens on Fezziwig as he becomes Scrooge again]*

PAST: A small matter
To make these silly folks so full of gratitude

SCROOGE: Small!

PAST: Why?
Is it not?

SCROOGE: He has the power to render us happy or unhappy
To make our service light or burdensome

PAST: He has but spent a few pounds of your mortal money
Is that so much he deserves this praise?

SCROOGE: It isn't that, spirit
His power lies in things so slight that it is impossible to add and count them up
The happiness he gives is quite as great as if it cost a fortune

[Beat]

PAST: What's the matter?

SCROOGE: Nothing
I should just like to say a word or two to my clerk just now
That's all

PAST: And I believe that's you there
Dancing with that young woman

SCROOGE: Oh spirit

PAST: You remember this then?

SCROOGE: Yes I
I

*[He is swept into the memory, becoming his younger self
The spirit becoming Belle]*

YOUNG SCROOGE: I don't know how I came to deserve this
You're beautiful and caring and full of life
And I'm poor
And clumsy/ and

BELLE: And kind and charming and handsome

YOUNG SCROOGE: I mean it
I want to make something of myself
I want to give you everything you deserve

BELLE: I don't need anything else, Ebenezer
Just this
I want to laugh
I want you to hold me
And love me
I want to live somewhere that I can see the stars
And sit by a fire
Nothing more
I don't want all the money in the world
Just enough to keep warm
And to fill our bellies each day

[Beat]

YOUNG SCROOGE: You look sad

BELLE: Yes
I was just thinking on all those who don't even have enough for that

YOUNG SCROOGE: Well I'm sorry for making you sad
I shouldn't like to see it

BELLE: Well, that's very sweet
But I don't particularly care if you like to see it
Sometimes I'm going to be sad
Sometimes I'm going to be desolate
It's important to feel sad and angry about the things we'd like to change
Because it reminds us to do something to change them
But for the moment, I feel very glad
And I would like very much to dance again

YOUNG SCROOGE: I would like to dance with you

BELLE: Good

YOUNG SCROOGE: Good