

# **Christmas Carol**

by Charles Dickens  
Adapted by Josh Hartwell

Draft #6 (9/21/2019)

Represented by Ron Gwiazda,  
Abrams Artists Agency  
New York, NY  
Contact Amy Wagner:  
[amy.wagner@abramsartny.com](mailto:amy.wagner@abramsartny.com)

The action of A Christmas Carol takes place in a modern cozy living room. Here there are base characters portraying the characters from Dickens' classic--using items and costume pieces they've found around this home as props and costumes. As the play progresses, the living room and base characters gradually disappear--either just with lights and sound and actors' commitment, or with real theatrical magic and adjustable set pieces. They all transform into the Dickens characters and settings more and more convincingly.

The following was the character breakdown for the original production of this adaptation at Miners Alley Playhouse in Golden, CO. I left the base characters' names as the actors' names. This should feel like a group of theatre friends, gathered together for the holidays. Base character names can be substituted for the names of the actors in subsequent productions. Some changes can be made to fit better with new actors in the roles, but all must be approved by the playwright.

## CHARACTERS

**Jim**/Scrooge

**Lisa**/Fundraiser, Belle, Christmas Present, Gertrude,

**Meredith**/ Christmas Past, Emily, Clara, Want, Riggs

**Ella**/Tiny Tim, Ignorance, Belinda, Dilber

**Jason**/Fred, Marley, Fezziwig, Martha, Old Joe, Future

**Josh**/ Bob Cratchit, Marley, Young Scrooge, Topper, Turkey Boy

# A Christmas Carol

by Charles Dickens

Adapted by Josh Hartwell

## ACT ONE

*Lights come up on the interior of an inviting and cozy Christmas time gathering. It is post-dinner, post-dessert (for those who indulge). The room is warmly furnished and decorated. Afghans and pillows make it all the more comfier (these furnishings, decorations, and blankets--more of which are stored in an old wooden trunk--will enhance set and costume pieces throughout)*

*Theatre friends are lounging on the soft chairs and area rugs around a popping fire (US), drinking whiskey or wine (those who indulge).*

*Jim, the avuncular veteran actor who lives in this house has been reading "A Child's Christmas in Wales" by Dylan Thomas as the others listen in. Except for young Ella, who lies in her mother, Lisa's, lap.*

## JIM

Always on Christmas night there was music. An uncle played the fiddle, a cousin sang "Cherry Ripe," and another uncle sang "Drake's Drum." It was very warm in the little house. Auntie Hannah, who had got on to the parsnip wine, sang a song about Bleeding Hearts and Death, and then another in which she said her heart was like a Bird's Nest; and then everybody laughed again; and then I went to bed. Looking through my bedroom window, out into the moonlight and the unending smoke-colored snow, I could see the lights in the windows of all the other houses on our hill and hear the music rising from them up the long, steady falling night. I turned the gas down, I got into bed. I said some words to the close and holy darkness . . . and then I slept.

*He closes the book. The others react positively to the poetry and sentimentality of it all. And to Jim's excellent reading skills.*

## MEREDITH

Ok, *Child's Christmas in Wales* is just about the most Christmassy story in the world.

## JIM

*(Indicating Ella)*

It sure put someone to sleep.

LISA

It's later than she's stayed up since--

*Ella pops up from her sleeping position.*

ELLA

No it didn't. I'm not asleep.

JIM

You're not?

JASON

Aren't you *supposed* to be asleep?

MEREDITH

You always fall asleep when Jim reads Dylan Thomas. It's tradition.

ELLA

I did when I was little, but I wanted to listen until the end this time.

LISA

You can stay up. But you'll be wiped out tomorrow . . .

*During her next line, Ella somehow connects with each of the other actors as she's making her way out of the main room. Fist bumps, hugs, casual nods of acknowledgment, etc.*

ELLA

No, it's cool. I'll take my cue from that kid in Dylan Thomas. Good night, close and holy darkness. Awesome reading, Jim. I'm out, just don't do anything fun without me.

*She almost hands Josh one of her stuffed animals on her way out, but decides to take it with her.*

JOSH

That's different.

MEREDITH

Seriously, Dylan Thomas oozes Christmas.

JASON

I don't know if I want to picture something oozing Christmas.

MEREDITH

Just look at my goose bumps and tell me they don't ooze.

JOSH

Gross.

JASON

Dylan Thomas is Christmassy, but nowhere near the Christmasness that is Dickens. There, my opinion is heard.

JIM

Oh for crying out loud.

JOSH

Uh oh. Now you're in trouble.

JASON

No trouble at all. Next to Santa, Dickens is the king of Christmas. In fact that's the Christmas powerhouse trifecta: Santa Claus, Charles Dickens, Anne Murray.

LISA

Seems like you're forgetting a pretty big one.

JIM

Maybe *A Christmas Carol* was at one time the story with the most holiday heart. But when it's just a given that some fill-in-the-blank theatre company will do it every single year, it loses its impact.

JOSH

Denver Center's not doing it this year.

JASON

But, I offer you further food for thought . . . not only is Dickens the Christmasiest, it's most easily done in the most different ways. Like the hip-hop Christmas Carol I did in 2016 . . .

LISA

Why does it have to be different? Isn't it better to just tell the story that everyone knows and loves?

MEREDITH

We all love the story. Especially Scrooge McDuck. Read Dickens next.

JIM

Christmas Carol the traditional way, or in outer space, or a Turkish bath, it doesn't matter.

*(Getting up to get more wine)*

I am not reading that next or at any time tonight.

*(Seeing that the wine is gone)*

Or any other night.

JOSH

I told you that you were in trouble. Dickens makes him grouchy.

JASON

*(Grabbing an over-sized copy of the Dickens from a book shelf and attempting to hand it to Jim)*

Great. Use it. Channel that grouchiness!

LISA

Who wouldn't get grouchy after you've done it, like, what, about a million times?

JIM

I'm not grouchy. It just puts me in a different mood entirely. Dylan Thomas digs into my childhood and everything I hold sentimental about the holidays. That tender family coziness. You bring up Dickens, I think about what it's become and it puts me on edge. Just talking about it gets me going.

*Jim exits, presumably to get more wine.*

LISA

We've all been part of that story, in one fashion or another, plenty of times.

MEREDITH

No problem. I'll read it to you. Everyone, gather around.

JASON

Don't you open that book.

*(tapping his head)*

It's all up here. We'll do the whole story from memory. All the world's a stage, right? We're all professionals--especially me. This house is full of props and old costumes. Have you seen the basement here? We'll piece it together.

LISA

We're not piecing anything without our Scrooge.

JOSH

*(Sipping from his own wine glass)*

Just sing the song. The song always motivates him.

LISA

What song? "Bohemian Rhapsody?"

JOSH

No.

*(Trying to remember the song)*

Da da da da--

MEREDITH

"When You Wish Upon a Star?"

JOSH

*(Plugging one ear)*

No. Shh.

JASON

"Freebird?"

JOSH

You know, *the song*. Sing it loud and with passion. He won't be able to resist. It's Pavlovian. Transformative.

MEREDITH

No, forget about it. I'll do Scrooge.

*(Terribly, and without even attempting a valid Scrooge voice)*

Welcome to my counting house. No I will not give any money for the poor.

JASON

You have to stop.

LISA

If we were gonna do it, we'd have to start with Marley.

JASON

Shotgun Marley!

JOSH

You can't have Marley. I'm always Marley.

JASON

We'll flip for it. I'm really good at flipping coins.

LISA

*(Already starting. Already in character)*

Marley was dead.

JOSH

Don't start flipping coins. Marley is totally my role.

JASON

Yeah, we know he was dead. That's like one of the major plot points--if not the most important one--in the story. We've got this.

*(To Josh as he takes a plastic coin from one of the shelves)*  
You. Call it. We both wanna play him; it's only fair.

JOSH

That's probably a trick coin.

LISA

No. I've started. That's me starting. I mean that's usually the first line, right? "Marley was dead."

JASON

Yes, yes, yes!

JOSH

Where's the audience?

LISA, JASON & MEREDITH

Audience on this side.

*Lisa points to audience center, Jason points to audience left, Meredith to audience right.*

JASON

But this side has the window seat

MEREDITH

So? Upstage. Because the fireplace.

JASON

Why would we need a fireplace?

LISA

Just make audience on all three sides. Come on. Marley. Dead!

*Jason suddenly becomes Fred, Scrooge's nephew.*

FRED

Marley was dead as a door-nail!

*Everyone starts rearranging the room.*

MEREDITH

We're just jumping right on into it? Without any warning? Without a Scrooge?

JOSH

All you gotta do is sing the song.

FUNDRAISER

*(Lisa has become the Fundraiser)*

What is there that's particularly dead about a door-nail? I would think a coffin-nail would be a more appropriate way to put it.

*The lights change (one ensemble member can "change" them with one of a group of dimmer switches in the living room).*

*Meredith and Josh continue to clear the room. The ottoman that Jim had his feet upon can be moved over to the side to become Cratchit's seat. The chest from which props and costumes have been pilfered is turned on its side to become Scrooge's lectern.*

*And already, things start to get more "theatrical."*

FRED

The point I'm *trying* to make is that Scrooge knew Marley was as dead as . . . whatever kind of nail you prefer.

FUNDRAISER

Of course he did. Scrooge and Marley had been partners for . . . how long?

FRED

I don't know how many years. My Uncle Scrooge never told me. But *years*. As far back as . . . when Christmas Carolers were singing "the song."

JASON & MEREDITH

*(Singing)*

God rest ye merry, gentlemen  
Let nothing you dismay

JOSH

That's the song!

ALL

Remember, Christ, our Saviour  
Was born on Christmas day  
To save us all from Satan's power  
When we were gone astray  
O tidings of comfort and joy  
Comfort and joy  
O tidings of comfort and joy

SCROOGE

*(Quickly re-entering)*

Baaaaaaah!

*The singing stops.*

*Jim has changed his clothes--added pieces thus transforming into Scrooge.*

ALL

There he is!

FRED

Ebenezer Scrooge, as we used to know him.

FUNDRAISER & FRED

As he was.

FUNDRAISER

As he's been so many times before.

FRED

Uncle Scrooge had been everything to Jacob Marley: his sole executor . . .

FUNDRAISER

His sole administrator . . .

FRED

His sole friend . . .

*Josh has found a small chalkboard and chalk and written "Scrooge and Marley," then hangs it.*

FUNDRAISER

And sole mourner.

FRED

His sole everything, let's just put it that way. Really quite pathetic.

FUNDRAISER

The poor little man.

*Josh and Meredith exit. Scrooge pulls a scale and bags of coins from one of his many bookshelves—he starts weighing the money.*

FUNDRAISER

Scrooge never even covered over Marley's name. There it stood, years afterwards, above the warehouse door: Scrooge and Marley.

*Everything theatrical that happens from here on out can be achieved with items that might be found in an older actor's home. Until things become more and more infused with the true magic.*

FRED

Oh! But he was a tight-fisted old Scrooge! A squeezing, wrenching, scraping, covetous, old sinner! Secret, and solitary as—

FUNDRAISER

Just say that he was cruel and cheap and that he kept to himself. Let's move this along, shall we not? Anyone he encountered was too afraid to engage. Just look at him.

SCROOGE

Keep your distance!

FRED

No beggars begged him for anything, no children asked him what time it was, nobody stopped to ask him directions.

SCROOGE

Keep your distance! Keep your distance!

FRED

But once upon a particular time, on one of the best days in the year . . .

FUNDRAISER

On Christmas Eve . . . old Scrooge sat busy and pouty in his office.

*Fundraiser and Fred exit as they sing . . .*

FRED & FUNDRAISER

O tidings of comfort and joy,  
Comfort and joy  
O tidings of comfort and joy

SCROOGE

Baaahh! Blech. That song again. Can't even carry a tune. Or harmonize. Most vile sound I've ever heard.

*Offstage, there's a huge crash like pots and pans in a cement mixer.*

BOB

(OS)

My fault! My fault. I'll clean it up.

SCROOGE

Cratchit!

BOB

(OS)

Don't worry about me, I'm fine.

*(Entering)*

Just took a little stumble. Again. Nothing broken, no head-wounds.

SCROOGE

Why are you not working? Making all that racket.

BOB

The racket was made unintentionally. The mess has been seen to. And work is back to . . . being worked upon. Sir.

SCROOGE

You're still talking instead of working. I won't tolerate your clamor in my counting house. Almost as intolerable as the singing outside.

BOB

I do agree that particular singing was not up to London's usual caroler standards.

SCROOGE

I don't need you to agree with me, Cratchit.

*Scrooge's nephew, Fred bursts into the room from off the street, startling Cratchit.*

FRED

A merry Christmas, Uncle Scrooge! God save you

SCROOGE

Bah! Humbug!

FRED

Christmas a humbug, uncle? You don't mean that, I am sure.

SCROOGE

I do, *Fred*.

*(Mockingly)*

"Merry Christmas! Oh, look how merry I am. It's Christmas so I'll pin my smelly old socks to the mantle." Bah. What reason have you to be merry? You're poor enough.

FRED

What reason do *you* have to be miserable and gloomy? You're rich enough.

SCROOGE

Bah! How can anyone be rich enough? I have the right to be miserable and gloomy. I am a stable genius and I see this world of fools for what it is.

FRED

Cheer up, Uncle!

*(Teasingly moving closer to him)*

Oh, what's this behind your ear?

SCROOGE

You keep your distance.

FRED

*(Magically removing a shiny coin from behind Scrooge's ear)*

Ta-da!

SCROOGE

*(Snatching it away from him)*

Give me that!

BOB

How'd you do that?

FRED

Magic, Mr. Cratchit. I'm good with coins.

SCROOGE

Merry Christmas! Stick your merry Christmas in your ear! 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 had it my way, every idiot who goes around with "Merry Christmas" on his lips, should be boiled with his own pudding, and buried with a stake of holly through his heart!

*(miming a stake of holly jamming into his heart)*

FRED

You can't mean all that, Uncle!

SCROOGE

All that and more! You keep Christmas in your own way, and let me keep it in mine.

FRED

Keep it! But you don't keep it at all. You don't even celebrate—

SCROOGE

Let me leave it alone, then. Much good it has ever done you!

FRED

I don't need to gain anything in order to consider something "good." Especially at Christmas. I have always thought of Christmas time as a kind, forgiving, charitable, pleasant time: the only time I know, of any throughout the year, when men and women open their hearts freely, and think of everyone else as fellow-passengers to the grave! 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!

*Cratchit bursts into sudden applause.*

BOB

I agree, sir!

SCROOGE

*(Glowering at Cratchit)*

Well, you're just bubbling full of agreement, aren't you? Let me hear another sound from *you*, Cratchit, and you'll keep your Christmas by losing your position here.

BOB

Sorry, sir. Don't know what came over me.

SCROOGE

*(Turning on Fred)*

You are quite a powerful speaker, Fred. You should go into politics.

FRED

*(Handing Scrooge a paper invitation)*

Just this once, Uncle. It may change you. Join Clara and me for dinner at our home tomorrow.

SCROOGE

*(Feigning excitement)*

Hah! I'd rather gouge out my own eyeballs.

*(Then tearing up the invitation and dropping it into Fred's hat)*

I'd rather be slowly devoured by feral dogs!

And I don't need changing. I'm fine the way I am.

FRED

I'm sorry to find you so determined. But because it's Christmas, I thought I'd try again.

*(Going to exit, then quickly turning back around at the door)*

And I'll carry on my Christmas spirit to the very end. So A Merry Christmas, Uncle!

SCROOGE

Good afternoon.

FRED

Good afternoon to you, too. And A Happy New Year!

SCROOGE

Good afternoon!

FRED

*(Extra jovial)*

Good afternoon!

And a merry Christmas to you and your family, too, Mr. Cratchit.

BOB

And to you, sir. God bless you. And thank you for the magic show.

*Fred exits.*

SCROOGE

You're worse than he is, Cratchit. A clerk, with fifteen shillings a week, and a wife and who knows how many miserable little children . . .

BOB

Well, there's Martha and Belinda and Peter and--

SCROOGE

Oh, do recite all their names so I may not care about each of them. A whole pathetic houseful and you're "agreeing" about a merry Christmas.

FUNDRAISER

*(Entering just as Fred has exited)*

Scrooge and Marley's, I believe?

SCROOGE

Bah! Why won't these vermin leave me alone?

FUNDRAISER

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

*Bob takes some of Scrooge's counted coins offstage, and strikes the scales.*

SCROOGE

Well, let me see. Mr. Marley died seven years ago, this very night. So what do you think?

FUNDRAISER

Bless his soul. I have no doubt his generosity is well represented by his surviving partner. I am here seeking help for the Poor and Destitute, who suffer so greatly and who are in want of common necessities.

SCROOGE

Are there no prisons?

FUNDRAISER

Prisons, sir?

SCROOGE

Shove 'em all in there. Throw away the key. Then I won't have to look at them.

FUNDRAISER

Poverty is not a crime, sir. Certainly, you're not talking about putting innocent men women and children in cages.

SCROOGE

Union workhouses then?

FUNDRAISER

Those workhouses are grubby, ghastly places. We especially try to feed and house the poor at this time of year.

SCROOGE

Yes it is quite frigid out there.

FUNDRAISER

What shall I put you down for then?

SCROOGE

*(Falsely brightening up again)*

Well, since you put it that way! How about you put me down for . . . NOTHING! I don't even make *myself* merry at Christmas. How could I afford to make idle people merry? I help support these prisons and work houses. These poor and needy interlopers you speak of must go there.

*Bob re-enters.*

FUNDRAISER

Many would rather die.

SCROOGE

Splendid! If they would rather die, they had better do it, and decrease the surplus population.

FUNDRAISER

But, sir, all I'm asking is—

SCROOGE

I know just what you're asking.

*(Mockingly)*

“Gimme, gimme, gimme. Let's punish the wealthy by rewarding the laziness of the poor.”

Now, good afternoon!

SCROOGE

And let me make it clear to you that when I say good afternoon, that's my very generous way of saying GET OUT.

*He goes back to work.*

FUNDRAISER

*(Quietly to Bob)*

Merry Christmas, sir.

SCROOGE

*(Without looking up)*

You're still here!

BOB

Run.

*Fundraiser exits. Scrooge returns to his labors with an improved opinion of himself. Time passes as the men work until the clock tower outside the offices strikes—a low, solemn tone.*

BOB

Ahem. Is it quite all right to shut down the offices, sir?

*Pause as Scrooge keeps working away.*

BOB

It is that time, sir.