

CHARLES DICKENS' GHOST STORIES

By David John Preece

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STORY OF THE PLAY

Beguiled in early childhood by his nursemaid's grim and ghoulish stories, Charles Dickens harbored all through his life a fascination with ghosts, apparitions and chilling coincidence.

This play is a collection of eerie tales from one of the greatest writers of all. The stories are a lively mixture of comedy, pathos, and the supernatural. They include "The Signalman," "The Letter From Afar," "Trial for Murder," "The Bagman's Uncle," "The Queer Chair," "Sisters From Perth," "The Portrait Painter," and "The Lawyer and the Ghost."

These stories are perfect as a Halloween offering but can also be produced at any time of the year.

CASTING

The play has been written to be performed by a company of six actors, four male and two female, who will play a variety of roles. However, with no doubling the play can accommodate a large, flexible cast. The distribution of these roles will be at the discretion of the director. This is the telling and sharing of several stories, with the actor/storytellers alternating between character-playing and succinct narration. All of the techniques of story theater are useful. The actors almost invariably do the actions they describe.

STAGING

While the stories are given scene numbers for ease of rehearsals, they should flow seamlessly in production with only a break between acts. Staging is black with minimal scenery, and black Victorian period costumes. Furniture and props are mostly mimed. Setting and atmosphere are created through lights, sound and movement.

Charles Dickens' Ghost Stories

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- (1) Prologue:** Ghosts 1-6.
- (2) "The Signal Man":** Barbox Brothers, Signalman, Miller and Jones.
- (3) "The Letter From Afar":** Lucy, Henry.
- (4) "Trial for Murder":** Dobson, Newspaper Reporter, Bardell, Ghost of Anderson, Mrs. Derrick, Judge, Attorney, Juror One, Officer, Juror Two, Woman Witness.
- (5) "The Bagman's Uncle":** Bagman, Martin, Baillie, Wife, Daughters, Son, Scottish fellows, Guards, Porters, Passengers, Young Lady, Young Gentleman, Ill-Looking Gentleman.
- (6) "The Queer Chair":** Tom Smart, Old Horse, Young Woman Servant, Widow, Jinkins, Chair Ghost.
- (7) "Sisters From Perth":** Patricia, Judith, Naval Officer, Father.
- (8) "The Portrait Painter":** Painter, the Kirkbecks, Neighbors, Young Lady, Servant, Valet, Waiter, Mr. Luke, House-keeper.
- (9) "The Lawyer and the Ghost":** Lawyer, Richard's Ghost.
- (10) Epilogue:** Ghosts 1-6.

Suggested breakdown using 4 men and 2 women.

ACTOR ONE - FEMALE

- (Sc. 1) Ghost One
- (Sc. 3) Lucy
- (Sc. 4) Mrs. Derrick, Juror Two
- (Sc. 5) Young Lady Passenger
- (Sc. 6) Young Woman Servant
- (Sc. 7) Patricia
- (Sc. 8) Young Lady

ACTOR TWO - MALE

- (Sc. 1) Ghost Two
- (Sc. 2) Barbox Brothers
- (Sc. 4) Ghost of Anderson
- (Sc. 5) Young Gentleman Passenger
- (Sc. 6) Jinkens
- (Sc. 7) Naval Officer
- (Sc. 8) Painter

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ACTOR THREE - MALE

- (Sc. 1) Ghost Three
- (Sc. 2) Signalmán
- (Sc. 4) Newspaper Reporter, Defense Counsel, Juror One
- (Sc. 5) Baillie, Porter, Ill-looking Male Passenger
- (Sc. 6) Old Horse, Chair Ghost
- (Sc. 8) Mr. Kirkbeck, Valet
- (Sc. 9) Richard's Ghost

ACTOR FOUR - MALE

- (Sc. 1) Ghost Four
- (Sc. 2) Miller
- (Sc. 3) Henry
- (Sc. 4) Dobson
- (Sc. 5) Bagman
- (Sc. 7) Mr. Jacobs (Father)
- (Sc. 8) Mr. Luke, Neighbor
- (Sc. 9) Lawyer

ACTOR FIVE - MALE

- (Sc. 1) Ghost Five
- (Sc. 2) Figure/Jones
- (Sc. 4) Bardell
- (Sc. 5) Martin
- (Sc. 6) Tom Smart
- (Sc. 8) Waiter, Servant

ACTOR SIX - FEMALE

- (Sc. 1) Ghost Six
- (Sc. 4) Judge, Officer, Woman Witness
- (Sc. 5) Baillie's Wife, Guard
- (Sc. 6) Widow
- (Sc. 7) Judith
- (Sc. 8) Mrs. Kirkbeck
- (Sc. 9) Housekeeper

PLAYWRIGHT'S NOTES

Charles Dickens was fascinated with ghosts and the macabre and he loved to tell ghost stories.

He was introduced to the grim and the ghoulish through the stories told by his nursemaid, Mary Weller. Mary had entered the employment of his family when he was just five years old. She was just thirteen years old at this time. Although to all outward appearances she was a hard-working and conscientious servant, in the privacy of the nursery she had no compunction whatsoever in filling his head with the most macabre and weird stories. Mary was employed as young Dickens' nurse for six years, until he was eleven. The macabre stories she told him were so terrifying as to color his imagination permanently and shape much of the stories that he would write. The world of the supernatural to which Dickens was introduced became vividly real to him.

Dickens had horrors and nightmares after listening to her stories...they haunted his dreams. The images which he conjured up in her stories imprinted themselves indelibly on his mind. Throughout his life, Dickens tried to exorcize these dark thoughts by pouring them into his stories.

Dickens could not forget the grim surroundings in which he lived, and for a time worked, during his younger years in London....the sprawling slums, sweat-shop factories and grimy streets teeming with the brawling, coarse and impoverished inhabitants of London.

Their dark world of despair made an ideal backcloth for the weaving of tales of ghosts and hauntings...not a street was without its grim house of mystery, not an alleyway free from some legend of ghastly happenings.

Prologue

(As the LIGHTS go down, eerie MUSIC is heard. The music fades as a winter WIND is heard howling. One by one, GHOSTLY figures appear and disappear from the darkness.)

GHOST SIX: Why do I come, to haunt you? I come as I am called.

GHOST THREE: It's required of every man 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.

GHOST TWO: Don't you remember me? I was younger then. My face was not then drained of blood.

GHOST FIVE: Do you believe in me or not?

GHOST ONE: Look upon me! I am she, neglected in youth, and miserably poor.

GHOST FOUR: I prowl the earth by night...and revisit the scenes of my long-protracted misery.

GHOST SIX: I'm doomed to wander through the world and witness what I cannot share, but might have shared on earth, and turned to happiness.

GHOST FIVE: Do you believe in me or not?

GHOST TWO: When I was alive, there was no mother's self-denying love...no father's counsel aided me.

GHOST ONE: You see me in the fire. You hear me in music, in the wind, in the dead stillness of the night. I am with you.

GHOST FIVE: Do you believe in me or not?

GHOST FOUR: Do you remember our agreement? I've come to fulfill it.

GHOST THREE: I come as I am called.

GHOST FIVE: Do you believe in me or not?

(MUSIC is heard as the GHOSTS disappear in the darkness of night. As the music fades, the SOUND of an approaching train is heard.)

End of Freeview

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