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Family Plays

A Christmas Carol

By Charles Dickens
Dramatized by Martha B. King

" I will honor Christmas in my heart
and try to keep it all the year.
I will live in the past, the present and the future.
I will not shut out the lessons they teach..."

A CHRISTMAS CAROL dramatized by Martha B. King from the Charles Dickens classic. An annual holiday tradition.

SUMMARY

The Cratchit children, preparing for a hearty Christmas in spite of their poverty, are dismayed to learn that their father will have to work on Christmas Day, as his employer, Mr. Scrooge, is mean and miserly. But fragile Tiny Tim convinces his brothers and sisters to go caroling at Mr. Scrooge's office to help him remember it's Christmas.

On Christmas Eve, after Scrooge shoos away all well wishers, dismisses Bob Cratchit with savage ill humor, and locks up for the night, his dead partner's ghost undertakes to show him the error of his ways. The three ghosts of Christmases past, present and future visit Scrooge, revealing to him the enlightening truths of what has been, what is, and what will be should he continue in his stingy and heartless ways.

When Christmas Day dawns, Scrooge is a changed man and with new joy goes about making amends for the needless pain he has caused. The play ends with Scrooge's visit to Bob Cratchit's home, and Tiny Tim's ever hopeful and uplifting toast at the Cratchit dinner table, "God bless us, every one."

PLAY CODE: CH4

APPROX. RUNNING TIME: 75 MINUTES

CAST: 30 + (9 F, 15 M, 6 EITHER) PLUS OPTIONAL CHORUS, OR 13 MINIMUM (5 F, 7 M, 1 EITHER) WITH DOUBLING. GOOD ROLES FOR CHILDREN AND ADULTS.

SETTING: UNIT SET USING SCREENS FOR SUGGESTED SETTINGS

COSTUMES: 19TH CENTURY ENGLISH COSTUMES

PLAYWRIGHT: **Martha B. King's** dramatization gives life to Dickens' Christmas season classic creating scenes with dialogue, rather than using a narrator, to carry the action of the story. This play script is as fun to read as it is to perform or enjoy on stage. Other plays by Martha B. King include: RIDDLE ME REE and PETER PETER, PUMPKIN EATER.

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(A CHRISTMAS CAROL)

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ORIGINAL PRODUCTION CREDIT

This dramatization of A CHRISTMAS CAROL was first produced on December 26, 1939, by the JACK AND JILL PLAYERS of Chicago, Illinois, under the direction of Miss Marie Agnes Foley. A later production of this play was given by the Portland, OREGON CIVIC THEATRE.

SCENE SYNOPSIS

ACT ONE

Scene 1. The Cratchit kitchen

Scene 2. Scrooge's office

ACT TWO

Scene 1. The schoolroom—of the past

Scene 2. Fezziwig's ball—of the past

Scene 3. The Cratchit kitchen—of the past

ACT THREE

Scene 1. A graveyard—of the future

Scene 2. The Cratchit kitchen—of the future

Scene 3. Scrooge's office—the real present

Scene 4. The Cratchit kitchen

PRODUCTION NOTES

The full stage is designed for the Cratchit kitchen with only a few pieces of furniture. A movable set consisting of a low back wall and two wings or a curtain may be used center stage for Scrooge's office, the schoolroom, the ball, and the graveyard.

Scrooge and the ghost stand on ladders behind the movable set, giving the appearance of viewing the action from the air. Scene changes are effected by blackouts, lights and sound effects without lowering the main curtain. Curtain drops at end of acts only.

(Property List included page 57.)

Play Script Design: Randy Blevins, jrbdesign

CAST OF CHARACTERS

ACT ONE

BOB CRATCHIT
MRS. CRATCHIT
THE CRATCHIT CHILDREN
 TINY TIM, AGE 10
 PETER, AGE 17
 BELINDA, AGE 15
 MARTHA, AGE 18
 EDWARD, AGE 8
 ELIZABETH, AGE 7
EBENEZER SCROOGE
FRED, SCROOGE'S NEPHEW
MAN
MARLEY'S GHOST
THE GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PAST

ACT TWO

THE GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PRESENT
EBENEZER SCROOGE
EBENEZER, AS A YOUNG BOY
FAN, HIS LITTLE SISTER
SCHOOLBOYS
 GEORGE
 ROB
 FRED
MR. FEZZIWIG
MRS. FEZZIWIG
EBENEZER, APPRENTICE
DICK, FELLOW APPRENTICE
CHARLOTTE
FIDDLER
DANCERS
THE CRATCHIT FAMILY

ACT THREE

THE GHOST OF CHRISTMAS FUTURE
EBENEZER SCROOGE
JOE, A FENCE FOR STOLEN GOODS
A CHARWOMAN
A LAUNDRESS
AN UNDERTAKER'S MAN
THE CRATCHIT FAMILY
MAN

A Christmas Carol
by Charles Dickens
Dramatized by Martha B. King

ACT ONE
SCENE ONE

(The Cratchit kitchen, cheerful and hearty like the Cratchits, but scantily furnished. It is early morning. The room is cold. Mrs. Cratchit hurries in to start the fire for breakfast. Peter follows.)

PETER: Wait, Mother, I'm coming. I'll lay the fire. *(He snatches sticks from box.)*

MRS. C: *(Lovingly)* Oh, Peter. I told you to get some extra sleep. You worked so late last night.

PETER: Do you think I could sleep and let my mother lay the fire?

MRS. C: You're a dear. But I declare, I couldn't sleep a wink myself.

PETER: Is Tiny Tim worse?

MRS. C: No, Tim's the same as usual. It's your father that's on my mind. Peter, it's the day before Christmas and Mr. Scrooge still hasn't told your father he could take the holiday off.

PETER: Nobody can refuse to give Christmas Day.

MRS. C: Nobody with a heart. Oh, it's a dreadful thing to say of any man, but that Scrooge has a piece of ice where a heart should be.

PETER: I think I'll go and talk to him myself.

MRS. C: *(Horried)* Peter! Your father wouldn't hear of it.

PETER: Don't tell him. He's coming now.

BOB: *(Enters; puts an arm around Mrs. C. and warms hands at the stove)* Good morning, my dear.

(Mrs. C. pats his face lovingly.)

PETER: 'Morning, Father.

BOB: Good morning, son. It's a raw, cold morning, it is.

MRS. C: Warm yourself by the fire, dear. Your breakfast will be ready in a minute.

BOB: I don't seem to feel hungry this morning.

MRS. C: Now you just sit down and compose yourself. You can't go to work without eating your breakfast—hungry or no hungry.

BOB: I looked in at Tiny Tim as I came down.

PETER: How is he this morning?

BOB: Cheerful, as always.

MRS. C: I do wish he'd get some color in his cheeks again.

PETER: I'll take him outdoors today, Mother.

BOB: *(Clearing throat)* Hm... Tim wanted me to ask you if he could come down for breakfast with me.

MRS. C: Oh, no, he mustn't. He'll catch his death of cold.

BOB: *(Disappointed)* Yes. Yes, that's what I told him.

MRS. C: After it gets warmer in here—

PETER: I could carry him down, Mother, and bring a blanket to wrap him in.

BOB: *(Eagerly)* That would be all right, wouldn't it, Mother?

MRS. C: *(Putting arm around his neck)* You do hate to go off without talking to Tim, don't you?

BOB: It's a long time before I get home at night.

MRS. C: Bless you. Of course it is. And Tim will be sorry all day if he doesn't see you. *(Peter dashes out. Mrs. C. calls.)* Peter, bring the blanket from my bed.

BOB: Well, tomorrow's Christmas.

MRS. C: Doesn't seem any time since last Christmas, does it?

BOB: I haven't bought anything for the children.

MRS. C: Mercy. They don't want a lot of things. Not when we have each other. And don't forget that Martha's coming.

BOB: It will be nice to have our Martha home.

MRS. C: She might even come tonight.

BOB: Mother, do you have enough money to buy what you need for dinner tomorrow?

MRS. C: I'll manage.

BOB: I'm sure you haven't much money left.

MRS. C: Now you just leave everything to me, Bob Cratchit. What we have for dinner is going to be a surprise.

BOB: I'm a mighty poor husband to you, I am.

MRS. C: Shame on you. Nobody ever had a better husband.

BOB: Fifteen bob a week! It's not enough to support a family decently.

MRS. C: And whose fault is that? You ought to be getting thirty for the work you do. Bob, why don't you ask Mr. Scrooge for a raise?

BOB: Ask Scrooge? He'd sooner see me dead than give me a shilling more. I'll be fortunate if he lets me take tomorrow off without taking something off my salary.

MRS. C: He couldn't be so mean. Bob, couldn't you tell him about Tiny Tim?

BOB: He wouldn't listen.

MRS. C: If he could only see him once.

BOB: I wouldn't let him lay eyes on the child. We'll manage.

MRS. C: And yet—we must get Tim to the doctor again. And he ought to be having special food. Bob, if he doesn't—if he doesn't—we may not have him. *(She starts to cry.)*

BOB: There now, don't cry. Tears aren't going to help matters. Here. *(Hands her his handkerchief)* Quick.

EDWARD and ELIZABETH: *(Off)* Make way. Make way for his highness. *(They come marching on.)* Make way. Make way for his highness.

BELINDA: *(Entering)* Make way for Tiny Tim.

(There are shouts of laughter as Peter follows, carrying Tiny Tim. Bob leaps up and bows low.)

BOB: Where does it please his highness to sit this morning?

TIM: *(Pointing majestically)* There. On the golden throne.

BOB: Spread out the fur robes for his highness.

(The younger children spread out the blankets in the chair. Peter deposits Tim. They all wrap him up.)

TIM: *(Grandly, still playing the game)* Thank you one and all.

BOB: Comfortable now? *(He gives Tim a hug.)*

MRS. C: Be sure the blanket's wrapped around his feet. He mustn't catch cold.

BOB: All warm?

TIM: Yes, thank you.

MRS. C: All right, children. Sit down in your places.

BELINDA: I'll carry the porridge bowls, Mother.

TIM: *(Leaning toward Bob and whispering in a voice he intends to have overheard)* You must have known just the right words to say to her. I was afraid she wouldn't let me come down. *(They look at Mrs. C and grin.)*

BOB: *(Archly)* If you speak to her kindly, she's a very reasonable woman.

MRS. C: Get along with you both. You'd think I was first cousin to Scrooge to hear you talk.

PETER: Mother, how can you say such a thing?

BELINDA: I don't even like to hear his name.

EDWARD and ELIZABETH: Neither do I.

BOB: (*Cheerfully*) What if you had to look at him every day the way I do?

BELINDA: Poor Father.

BOB: Well, if I don't hurry I won't have a chance to see him any more. (*Bob leaves the table.*)

TIM: Tomorrow you won't have to see him at all.

BOB: I hope not.

BELINDA: Hope not?

PETER: Father, you're going to stay at home tomorrow!

TIM: It's Christmas Day.

BOB: I know it... I know it.

TIM: You said you would play with me all day tomorrow.

BOB: I want to. I want to.

PETER: We're all going to slide on Cornhill Road.

BELINDA: And we're going to play Blindman's Buff and Forfeits.

EDWARD: Martha's going to be here.

TIM: And you promised to take me to church with you.

BELINDA: It won't be like Christmas at all if you don't stay at home.

BOB: Now, now. I'm going to do the very best I can. If old Scrooge isn't in too sour a mood.

MRS. C: Darling, tell Mr. Scrooge that you're going to stay at home.

BELINDA: I hope something terrible happens to him if he doesn't let you.

PETER: He can't refuse. He can't do it.

TIM: Please, Father. Tell him you have to stay at home.

BOB: I'll tell him all right... but I must hurry now. Who's going to meet me at the corner tonight?

TIM: I am. If somebody will take me.

ALL: I'll take you.

BOB: Good. I'll be watching for you.

TIM: Will you carry me on your back?

BOB: I'm the most spirited blood horse in town. Watch me prance. *(He prances and shouts good-bye.)*

CHILDREN: Good-bye. Good-bye.

MRS. C: Bob Cratchit, you've forgotten your scarf. Come back here.

BELINDA: I'll get it for you, Father. *(Takes it from a chair and puts it around his neck.)*

BOB: I could keep warm just thinking about my fine family.

MRS. C: Just the same, this scarf will come in handy.

BOB: I'm off. Good-bye.

MRS. C: Be sure to keep the fire going in your work room.

BOB: *(Off)* Good-bye.

TIM: He must stay at home tomorrow.

MRS. C: Now, we won't think about it any more. We'll just pray that the good Lord will soften Mr. Scrooge's heart.

TIM: Maybe we could do more than that.

BELINDA: What could we do?

TIM: (*Motions to others to gather around—all except his mother*)
You go away, Mother.

MRS. C: Indeed, you'll have no secrets from me. Out with it.

TIM: Well, maybe Mr. Scrooge has forgotten that it's Christmas.
And Father doesn't like to mention things to him.

BELINDA: Do you mean we ought to tell him?

TIM: We could go and sing carols to him.

MRS. C: Tim!

TIM: I'm not afraid to go.

MRS. C: You'll not set foot in that counting house. My, but your
father would be angry.

PETER: I think Tim's right, Mother. Mr. Scrooge might listen to us.

MRS. C: He never would. Not in the whole wide world.

PETER: We can try, can't we, Tim? I'll carry you all the way on my
shoulder.

EDWARD: I'll carry your crutch.

BELINDA: Well, I don't exactly like to go—but if one of us goes
we'd better all go.

MRS. C: Oh, children. I oughtn't to let you do it.

TIM: If it helps father to stay at home, you'll like it, won't you?

MRS. C: Yes, darling.

BELINDA: What are we going to sing, Tim?

TIM: (*Sings*) GOD REST YOU MERRY GENTLEMEN

ALL: (*Join singing*) LET NOTHING YOU DISMAY

(The singing continues after the scene is out of sight, and while the unit set is put into position.)

ACT ONE SCENE TWO

(Scrooge's office. Scrooge is sitting at a high desk. There is a coal box beside him and one extra chair. Bob works in another room. As the scene opens, he enters with a shovel in his hand. Scrooge has just closed the door tightly to shut out the sound of carols.)

BOB: *(Self-consciously)* Weather seems to be getting colder.

SCROOGE: *(Without looking up)* Cold? Humbug. It doesn't feel cold to me. *(Suddenly sees Bob taking coal)* What are you doing with that shovel?

BOB: I thought I'd put another coal on my fire... if it's quite all right.

SCROOGE: It isn't all right. What do you expect me to do? Buy enough coal to heat the whole outdoors?

BOB: No, sir. But my fire's almost out. My hand's so cold I can hardly write.

SCROOGE: Blow on it.

(Bob tries to blow on his frozen hands. The sound of carols grows louder. Scrooge opens the door.)

SCROOGE: Keep quiet out there. *(The music stops. Scrooge returns to desk.)* Police ought to shut those people up. Singing around in the streets as if they had no proper business. *(Sees Bob still standing)* Well, what are you standing there for? It isn't closing time by half an hour.

BOB: About tomorrow, sir.

SCROOGE: What about tomorrow?

BOB: It's Christmas time, sir.

SCROOGE: A clerk with fifteen shillings a week and a wife and family talking about Christmas.

BOB: But my children are counting on –

SCROOGE: I'm not interested in hearing about your children. And if you stand about talking much longer, we'll be obliged to part company.

BOB: Yes, sir. (*Hurries off.*)

(*There is a loud knocking on the door.*)

SCROOGE: Answer that door. I don't want to see anybody!

(*Bob opens the door. A man is there.*)

MAN: Scrooge and Marley's, I believe? (*He sees Scrooge and brushes past Bob with a nod.*) Oh... thank you. Have I the pleasure of addressing Mr. Scrooge or Mr. Marley?

SCROOGE: Mr. Marley has been dead these seven years.

MAN: Indeed!

SCROOGE: He died seven years ago this very night.

MAN: Very sad. Very sad. Well, I have no doubt his generosity is well represented in his surviving partner. My credentials, sir. (*Hands papers to Scrooge who hands them right back.*) At this festive season of the year, Mr. Scrooge, we all want to make some slight provision for the poor and destitute. (*He picks up a pen and holds it toward Scrooge.*) Many thousands are in want of common necessities; hundreds of thousands are in want of common comforts.

SCROOGE: Are there no prisons?

MAN: Plenty of prisons. (*Lays down pen.*)

SCROOGE: What about the Union workhouses? Are they still in operation?

MAN: They are. I wish I could say they were not.

SCROOGE: The treadmill and the Poor Law. Are they still effective?

MAN: I'm sorry to say they are.

SCROOGE: Oh. I was afraid from what you said at first that something had stopped them in their useful work.

MAN: They scarcely furnish Christian cheer for mind and body. (*He makes a fresh start.*) Now, Mr. Scrooge, a few of us are trying to raise a fund to buy meat and drink for the poor. We choose this time because it is the time when want is felt most keenly. What shall I put you down for?

SCROOGE: Nothing.

MAN: I see. You wish to give money but to keep your name hidden.

SCROOGE: I wish to be left alone. I don't make myself merry at Christmas and I can't afford to make a lot of idle people merry. I pay taxes to support the prisons and poor houses. They cost enough. Those who are badly off must go there.

MAN: Many would rather die than go there.

SCROOGE: If they would rather die, they had better do it and decrease the surplus population. Besides, this has nothing to do with my business.

MAN: You ought to make it your business. You ought to help your fellow man.

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

MAN: If Mr. Marley felt as you do, I fear his ghost is not resting in peace. Good afternoon. (*As he opens the door, Scrooge's nephew, Fred, enters in high spirits.*)

FRED: Merry Christmas, sir.

MAN: Merry Christmas to you, sir. (*He leaves.*)

SCROOGE: (*Turns on his stool in fury*) What's all this shouting about? (*He sees Fred and turns back to his desk, pretending to be very busy.*)