Acting Edition

A Christmas Carol

by Charles Ludlam

Adapted from the novel by
Charles Dickens

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SAMUEL FRENCH

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A CHRISTMAS CAROL was first produced by the Ridiculous Theatrical Company at the Charles Ludlam Theatre in the December of 1979. The performance was directed by Charles Ludlam, with sets by Bobjack Callejo, and costumes by Gabriel Berry. The main cast was as follows:

EBENEZER SCROOGE . . . . . Charles Ludlam

BOB CRATCHIT . . . . . Bill Vehr

MARLEY'S GHOST . . . . . Everett Quinton

CHRISTMAS PAST . . . . . Lola Pashalinski

CHRISTMAS PRESENT . . . . . John D. Brockmeyer

TINY TIM . . . . . Renée Pearl

CHARACTERS

SCROOGE
BOB CRATCHIT
NEPHEW
GENTLEMAN #1
GENTLEMAN #2
BOY
MARLEY
CHRISTMAS PAST
LITTLE SCROOGE
FAN
FEZZIWIG
MRS FEZZIWIG
DICK
GUESTS AT THE FEZZIWIGS'
(dancers)
GIRL
SCROOGE-THE-MAN
MOTHER (Girl married)
FATHER
CHRISTMAS PRESENT
MRS CRATCHIT
MISS BELINDA
LITTLE BOY
LITTLE GIRL
MARTHA
TINY TIM
MINERS
NIECE
TOPPER
PLUMP BEAUTY
WANT
IGNORANCE
CHRISTMAS FUTURE
BUSINESSMAN #1
BUSINESSMAN #2
BUSINESSMAN #3
MAN A
MAN B
BAG LADY
OLD JOE
MRS DILBER
HE
SHE
PETER
BOY

Scene One
Scrooge and Marley's Christmas Eve

*(***SCROOGE** *counting money.* **CRATCHIT** *working on books, shivering with cold.* **CRATCHIT** *rises from his work and, looking at the pitiful little fire in his cell, picks up the coal scuttle and attempts to tiptoe past* **SCROOGE** *to the coal box.)*

SCROOGE. *(speaking without looking up, a habit which gives the distinct impression of his having eyes in the back of his head)* If you waste my coal I shall have to ask you to seek employment elsewhere.

CRATCHIT. But, Mr. Scrooge, it's cold and my fire has nearly gone out.

SCROOGE. Warm yourself at the candle.

*(***CRATCHIT** *puts on a muffler and attempts to warm his hands at his candle. Enter Scrooge's* **NEPHEW**.*)*

NEPHEW. *(cheerily)* Merry Christmas, Uncle! God save you!

SCROOGE. Bah! Humbug!

NEPHEW. Christmas a humbug, Uncle! You don't mean that, I am sure.

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

NEPHEW. Come then, what right have you to be dismal? What reason have you to be morose? You're rich enough.

SCROOGE. *(after a brief reflection pause in which he fails to come up with a better rejoinder)* Bah! Humbug!

NEPHEW. Don't be cross, Uncle.

SCROOGE. What else can I be when I live in such a world of fools as this? Merry Christmas! Out upon Merry Christmas! What's Christmastime to you but a time for paying bills without money, a time for finding yourself a year older, and not an hour richer, a time for balancing your books and having every item in 'em through a round dozen of months presented dead against you? 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 burled with a stake of holly through his heart. He should!

NEPHEW. Uncle!

SCROOGE. Nephew! Keep Christmas in your own way and let me keep it in mine.

NEPHEW Keep it! But you don't keep it.

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

NEPHEW. There are many things from which I might have derived good, by which I have not profited, I dare say, Christmas among the rest. But I am sure I have always thought of Christmastime, from when it has come round – apart from the veneration due to its sacred name and origin, if anything belonging to it can be apart from that – as a good time. A kind, forgiving, charitable, pleasant time, the only time I know of, in the long calendar of the year, when men and women seem by one consent to open their shut-up hearts freely, and to 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!

*(***CRATCHIT** *momentarily applauds and, upon catching himself, pokes the fire, extinguishing the last coal.)*

SCROOGE. *(to* **CRATCHIT***)* Let me hear another sound from *you* and you'll keep your Christmas by losing your situation. *(to his* **NEPHEW***)* You're quite a powerful speaker, sir. I wonder you don't go into Parliament.

NEPHEW.' Don't be angry, Uncle. Come! Dine with us tomorrow.

SCROOGE. I'll see you hanged first.

NEPHEW. *(crying out)* But why? Why?

SCROOGE. Why did you get married?

NEPHEW. Because I fell in love.

SCROOGE. *(mockingly)* Because you fell in love! Good Afternoon!

NEPHEW. Nay, Uncle, but you never came to see me before that happened. Why give it as a reason for not coming now?

SCROOGE. Good afternoon.

NEPHEW. I want nothing from you, I ask nothing of you, why cannot we be friends?

SCROOGE. Good afternoon.

NEPHEW. I am sorry, with all my heart, to find you so resolute. We have never had any quarrel to which I have been a party. But I have made the trial in homage to Christmas, and I'll keep my Christmas humor to the last. So, a merry Christmas, Uncle!

SCROOGE. Good afternoon!

NEPHEW. And a happy New Year!

SCROOGE. Good afternoon.

NEPHEW. *(to* **CRATCHIT** *in the anteroom as he leaves)* And a very merry Christmas to you.

CRATCHIT. *(warmly)* Merry Christmas, Fred.

SCROOGE. *(muttering)* 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.

*(***CRATCHIT** *lets Scrooge's* **NEPHEW** *out and two other* **GENTLEMEN** *in.)*

FIRST GENTLEMAN. Scrooge and Marley's I believe. Have I the pleasure of addressing Mr. Scrooge or Mr. Marley?

SCROOGE. Mr. Marley has been dead these seven years. He died seven years ago this very night.

FIRST GENTLEMAN. We have no doubt his liberality is well represented by his surviving partner.

(Presents his credentials. At the ominous word "liberality" **SCROOGE** *frowns, shakes his head, and hands his credentials back.)*

At this festive season of the year, Mr. Scrooge, it is more than usually desirable that we should make some slight provision for the poor and destitute, who suffer greatly at the present time. Many thousands are in want of common necessaries, hundreds of thousands are in want of common comforts, sir.

SCROOGE. Are there no prisons?

FIRST GENTLEMAN. Plenty of prisons.

SCROOGE.' And the union workhouses? Are they still in operation?

FIRST GENTLEMAN. They are. I wish I could say they were not.

SCROOGE. The treadmill and the poor law are in full vigor, then?

FIRST GENTLEMAN. Both very busy, sir.

SCROOGE. 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.

FIRST GENTLEMAN. Under the impression that they scarcely furnish Christian cheer of mind or body to the multitude, a few of us are endeavoring to raise a fund to buy the Poor some meat and drink, and means of warmth. We choose this time, because it is a time, of all others, when Want is keenly felt, and abundance rejoices. What shall I put you down for?

SCROOGE. Nothing.

FIRST GENTLEMAN. You wish to remain anonymous?

SCROOGE. I wish to be left alone. Since you ask me what I wish, Gentlemen, that is my answer. I don't make merry myself at Christmas, and I can't afford to make idle people merry. I help to support the establishments

I have mentioned – they cost enough – and those who are badly off must go there.

FIRST GENTLEMAN. 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 – excuse me – I don't know that.

FIRST GENTLEMAN. But you might know it.

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

(The **GENTLEMEN** *exist.* **SCROOGE** *resumes his work with a chuckle. Fog obscures the clock in the church tower usually visible from Scrooge's Gothic window. Voices of carolers in the street below.* **BOY** *at keyhole sings, "God rest ye merry gentlemen, let nothing you dismay."* **SCROOGE** *throws a ruler at him. Rising with ill-will and crossing to the window)*

Quiet down there! Quiet, imbeciles! How's a man to work with that racket'?

CRATCHIT. It's closing time anyway, Mr. Scrooge.

SCROOGE. So it is. You'll want all day tomorrow, I suppose?

CRATCHIT. If quite convenient, sir.

SCROOGE. 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, I'll be bound? And yet you don't think *me* ill-used when I pay a day's wages for no work.

CRATCHIT. *(smiling faintly)* It's only once a year, sir.

SCROOGE. A poor excuse for picking a man's pocket every twenty-fifth of December! *(buttons up his greatcoat to the chin)* But I suppose you must have the whole day. Be here all the earlier next morning!

CRATCHIT. I will, Mr. Scrooge.

SCROOGE. *(growls and exits)*

WAIT, THERE'S MORE!

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