

CHARLES DICKENS' GHOST STORIES

By David John Preece

Performance Rights

It is an infringement of the federal copyright law to copy or reproduce this script in any manner or to perform this play without royalty payment. All rights are controlled by Eldridge Publishing, Co. Inc. Call the publisher for additional scripts and further licensing information. The author's name must appear on all programs and advertising with the notice: "Produced by special arrangement with Eldridge Publishing Co. Inc."

PUBLISHED BY

Eldridge Publishing Co. Inc.
HiStage.com

© 1999 by *David John Preece*

Download your complete script from Eldridge Publishing
<http://www.histage.com/playdetails.asp?PID=2027>

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

-3-

- (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

Charles Dickens' Ghost Stories

-4-

ACTOR THREE - MALE

- (Sc. 1) Ghost Three
- (Sc. 2) Signalman
- (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.)

“The Signal Man”

(In the distance, a red LIGHT can be seen near the mouth of a tunnel. BARBOX BROTHERS wanders on, looking around. He sees the SIGNALMAN standing by the railway tracks.)

BROTHERS: Halloo! Below there! *(Beat.)* Halloo! Below! *(Beat.)* Is there any path by which I can come down and speak to you? *(The SIGNALMAN looks up without replying.)* I say down there...Can I come down and speak to you? *(Just then, a TRAIN roars past. Brothers look down again, and sees the SIGNALMAN refurling the flag he had shown while the train went by.)* Can I come down and speak to you? *(The SIGNALMAN turns and stares at Brothers for a moment and then motions to him with his rolled-up flag.)* All right. *(Beat.)* I found a steep, rough descending path notched out, which I followed. When I came down low enough to see him again, he was standing between the rails with such expectation and watchfulness that I stopped a moment, wondering at it. His post was in as solitary and dismal a place as ever I saw surrounded by dripping wet walls of jagged stone, excluding all view but a strip of sky. So little sunlight ever found its way to this spot that it had an earthy, deadly smell, and so much cold wind rushed through it that it struck chill to me, as if I had left the natural world. *(As BROTHERS walks toward him, the SIGNALMAN watches him carefully and steps back one step and lifts his hand.)* Don't suppose you have very many visitors down here, do you? I do hope I'm not intruding.

SIGNALMAN: *(In a low voice.)* You know you are.

(The SIGNALMAN looks curiously toward the red light near the tunnel's mouth, and looks all about it, as if something were missing from it, and then looks back at BROTHERS.)

BROTHERS: *(Steps back.)* You look at me as if you had a dread of me.

End of Freeview

Download your complete script from Eldridge Publishing
<http://www.histage.com/playdetails.asp?PID=2027>

Eldridge Publishing, a leading drama play publisher since 1906, offers more than a thousand full-length plays, one-act plays, melodramas, holiday plays, religious plays, children's theatre plays and musicals of all kinds.

For more than a hundred years, our family-owned business has had the privilege of publishing some of the finest playwrights, allowing their work to come alive on stages worldwide.

We look forward to being a part of your next theatrical production.

Eldridge Publishing... for the start of your theatre experience!