

CHARLES DICKENS' GHOST STORIES

by

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Based on the stories by Charles Dickens

DESCRIPTION OF CHARACTERS

ACTOR ONE - FEMALE		
Ghost One	Young Woman Servant	Patricia
Lucy	Mrs. Derrick	Defense Counsel
Young Lady Passenger		Young Lady
ACTOR TWO - MALE		
Ghost Two	Jinkens	Brothers
Anderson	Naval Officer	Painter
Young Gentleman Passenger		
ACTOR THREE - MALE		
Ghost Three	Queer Chair	Signalman
Widow	Mr. Kirkbeck	Richard's Ghost
Reporter	Defense Counsel	Baillie
Ill-looking Male Passenger		Porter
Jury One	Valet	
ACTOR FOUR - MALE		
Lawyer	Dobson	Miller
Ghost Four	Mr. Luke	Mr. Jacobs
Bagman	Neighbor	Henry
ACTOR FIVE - MALE		
Figure/Jones	Tom Smart	Jack Martin
Ghost Five	Bardell	Waiter
Servant		
ACTOR SIX - FEMALE		
Old Horse	Mrs. Kirkbeck	Judith
Ghost Six	Judge	Officer
Baillie's Wife	Housekeeper	Guard
Woman Witness		

The Set and Staging: Black stage with minimal scenery, and black Victorian period costumes. Furniture and props are mostly mimed. Setting and atmosphere are created through lights, sound and movement. The play has been written to be performed by a company of six actors, four male and two female. The actors will play a variety of roles. 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/story tellers 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.

(Music is heard as the lights dim out
comes over Dobson and Bardell and then
up to reveal the BAGMAN.)

BAGMAN
My uncle, Jack Martin, was one of the merriest,
pleasantest, cleverest fellows, that ever lived.

(MARTIN enters.)

BAGMAN

(continuing)

He would travel each fall, at which time he collected debts, and took orders, in the north; going from London to Edinburgh, from Edinburgh to Glasgow, from Glasgow back to Edinburgh, and thence to London.

MARTIN

My second visit to Edinburgh was for my own pleasure. I'd go back for a week, just to look up my old friends; and what with breakfasting with this one, lunching with that, dining with the third, and supping with another, a pretty tight week I'd make of it. I don't know whether any of you ever partook of a real substantial hospitable Scottish breakfast, and then went out to a slight lunch of a bushel of oysters, a dozen or so of bottled ale, and a noggin or two of whiskey to close up with. If you ever did, you will agree with me that it requires a pretty strong head to go out to dinner and supper afterwards.

BAGMAN

On one such trip, within four-and-twenty hours of the time when he had settled to take leave for London, my uncle supped at the house of a very old friend of his, Baillie Mac...Mac...something, who lived in the old town of Edinburgh.

(BAILLIE and his family are seen, eating, drinking, and being merry.)

MARTIN

At the meal were Baillie...

BAILLIE

(Introduces his wife)

My wife...

BAILLIE'S WIFE

(Introduces family and friends)

Our two daughters and grown-up son, as well as three or four stout, bushy eye-browed, canny, old Scottish fellows...

BAILLIE

That I had gotten together to do honor to my friend, Jack Martin and help us to make merry.

ALL

It was a glorious supper.

BAILLIE'S WIFE

There was kippered salmon, and Finnan haddocks, and a lamb's head, and a haggis.

MARTIN

And a great many other things besides, that I forget the names of, but very good things, notwithstanding.

(Beat)

Baillie's wife was one of the best creatures that ever lived.

BAILLIE'S WIFE

Why thank you, sir.

(Beat)

I don't quite recollect how many tumblers of whiskey-toddy each man drank after supper. But this I know, that about one o'clock in the morning, my husband, the only man --besides Jack Martin -- still visible above the mahogany, became insensible while attempting the first verse of "Willie brewed a peck o' maut."

MARTIN

It occurred to me that it was almost time to think about going, in order that I might get home at a decent hour.

BAILLIE'S WIFE

But, thinking it might not be quite polite to go just then, Jack Martin mixed another glass...

MARTIN

Rose to propose his own health...

BAILIE'S WIFE

Addressed himself in a neat and complimentary speech...

MARTIN

And drank the toast with great enthusiasm.

BAILIE'S WIFE

Still nobody woke. So he took a little drop more -- neat this time, to prevent the toddy from disagreeing with him -- and, laying violent hands on his hat, sallied forth into the street.

(To Martin)

Will you be all right, Jack Martin?

MARTIN

Of course.

BAILLIE'S WIFE

Then good night to you.

MARTIN

And you, too.

family.

(The lights dim on Baillie's

Sounds of a cold wind are heard as
Martin leaves the house.)

BAGMAN

It was a wild, gusty night.

MARTIN

Really, this won't do. This is not at all the kind
of thing for my voyage. It will not do at any price.

BAGMAN

Baillie's house was in the Canongate, rather better
than a mile's journey. He came across a large,
isolated piece of waste ground and past an enclosure
belonging to some worn-out postal coaches.

MARTIN

Since I'm very fond of postal coaches, old, young,
or middle-aged, I decided to step out of the road
for no other purpose than to peep between the
palings at these coaches--about a dozen of which I
remembered to have seen, crowded together inside.

BAGMAN

Finding that he could not obtain a good peep between
the palings, my uncle got over them, and sitting
himself quietly down on an old axle-tree, began to
contemplate the decaying skeletons of departed
coaches with a great deal of gravity.

MARTIN

The doors had been torn from their hinges, the lamps
were gone, the ironwork was rusty, the paint was
worn away. The rain, which had collected on the
roofs, fell, drop by drop, into the insides with a
hollow and melancholy sound.

BAGMAN

As my uncle rested his head upon his hands, he
pondered all those who'd looked forward to the
arrival of the old coaches -- the merchant, the
lover, the wife, the widow, the mother, the very
child who tottered to the door at the postman's
knock...

MARTIN

Where are they all now?

BAGMAN

He fell into a kind of doze.

(Beat)

Suddenly, a deep church bell struck the hour of two.

are
(Sounds of a distant church bell
heard.)

MARTIN

I woke with a start to find myself surrounded by a scene of most extraordinary life and animation.

enter.) (GUARDS, PORTERS, and PASSENGERS

MARTIN

(continuing)

The coach doors were on their hinges, the lamps were alight, the ironwork was as good as new, the paint was restored...

PORTER

Porters were thrusting parcels into every boot...

GUARD

Guards were stowing away letter-bags...

PORTER

Portmanteaus were handed up...

GUARD

Horses were put to.

MARTIN

In short, it was perfectly clear to me that every coach there was to be off directly.

GUARD

(Puts his hand on Martin's shoulder)

Now then! You're booked for one inside. You'd better get in.

MARTIN

(Turns around)

I?! Booked?!

GUARD

Yes, certainly.

MARTIN

I...I...

BAGMAN

My uncle could say nothing, he was so very much astonished.

MARTIN

There was such a crowd of persons, fresh faces pouring in at every moment, yet there was no telling where they came from.

BAGMAN

They seemed to start up, in some strange manner, from the ground, or the air, and disappear in the same way.

MARTIN

When a porter had put my luggage in the coach, and received my fare, I turned round and he was gone and there were half a dozen fresh ones started up, and staggered along under the weight of parcels, big enough to crush them.

GUARD

Now, are you going to get in, Jack Martin?

MARTIN

Hollo!
(Steps back)
That's familiar!

GUARD

It's so on the way-bill.

MARTIN

Isn't there a 'Mister' before it?

GUARD

No, there is not.

MARTIN

I don't think it's right for a guard I don't know, to call me Jack Martin. It's a liberty which the Post Office wouldn't have sanctioned if they had known it.

(Beat)
Is the fare paid?

GUARD

Of course it is.

MARTIN

It is, is it? Then here goes! Which coach?

GUARD

This one.

(Beat)

Stop! Let the other passengers get in first.

(The YOUNG GENTLEMAN PASSENGER enter.)

BAGMAN

A young gentleman stalked gravely to the coach door...

YOUNG GENTLEMAN

Pulled off his hat, and held it above his head at arm's length, cocking his little finger in the air at the same time...

MARTIN

As some affected people do, when they take a cup of tea.

BAGMAN

Then he drew his feet together, and made a low, grave bow, and put out his right hand.

MARTIN

I was going to step forward, and shake it heartily, when I perceived that these attentions were directed, not towards me...

YOUNG LADY

But to a young lady who just then appeared at the foot of the steps, muffled in a large hood.

(The YOUNG LADY PASSENGER enters.)

MARTIN

She looked round for an instant as she prepared to get into the coach, and such a beautiful face as she disclosed, I had never seen -- not even in a picture.

BAGMAN

In this one glimpse, my uncle saw that she appeared terrified and distressed.

(The Young Gentleman helps the Young Lady on the Coach into the coach.)

MARTIN

He noticed, too, that the young fellow, notwithstanding his show of gallantry, clasped her tight by the wrist when she got in, and followed himself immediately afterwards.

(The ILL-LOOKING MALE PASSENGER enters and climbs on the coach.)

ILL-LOOKING GENTLEMAN

Next, an uncommonly ill-looking fellow sat himself down next to the young lady, who shrank into a corner at his approach.

MARTIN

I knew that something dark and mysterious was going forward. There was a screw loose somewhere.

BAGMAN

He quickly made up his mind to help the lady at any peril.

(Martin climbs into the coach.)

YOUNG GENTLEMAN

(Lays his hand on his sword)
Death and lightning!

ILL-LOOKING GENTLEMAN

Blood and thunder!

(The Ill-Looking Man whips his sword out and make a lunge at Martin. Martin grabs the ill-looking man's sword from his grasp, and flings it out of the coach window.)

YOUNG GENTLEMAN

(Lays his hand on sword)
Death and lightning!

ILL-LOOKING GENTLEMAN

Blood and thunder!

MARTIN

(Takes his seat in the coach)
Now, gentlemen, I don't want to have any death, with or without lightning, in a lady's presence, and we have had quite blood and thundering enough for one journey; so, if you please, we'll sit in our places like quiet insides. Here, guard, pick up that gentleman's carving-knife.

BAGMAN

As quickly as my uncle said the words, the guard appeared at the coach window, with the gentleman's sword in his hand.

MARTIN

(Hands the sword to the ill-looking gentleman)
I believe this belongs to you...

(The Ill-looking Man sneezes.)

MARTIN

(continuing)
God bless you.

ILL-LOOKING GENTLEMAN

Thank you.

GUARD

All right!

(Mounting into his seat)

Away we go.

(The coach begins to move.)

BAGMAN

My uncle peeped out of the coach window as they emerged from the yard, and observed that the other coaches were driving round and round in circles, at a slow trot of about five miles an hour. My uncle burned with indignation.

MARTIN

As a commercial man, I felt that the mail-bags were not to be trifled with.

BAGMAN

And he was resolved to notify the Post Office on the subject, the very instant he reached London.

MARTIN

And I will, too!

BAGMAN

Soon, his thoughts became occupied with the young lady who sat in the farthest corner of the coach, with both of her guardians watching her intently. If she so much as rustled the folds of her hood...

MARTIN

This roused me more and more, and I was resolved, come what may, to see the end of it, for I have always had a great admiration for bright eyes, and sweet faces...

BAGMAN

And pretty legs and feet. In short, he was fond of the whole sex.

MARTIN

Many were the devices which I practiced to attract the lady's attention, or at all events, to engage the mysterious gentlemen in conversation.

BAGMAN

They were all in vain -- the gentlemen wouldn't talk, and the lady didn't dare.

(Martin thrusts his head out of the coach window at intervals, and shouts to the Guard.)

MARTIN

Why can't you go faster?

BAGMAN

Nobody paid the least attention to him. He leaned back in the coach, and thought of the beautiful face...

MARTIN

And the feet and legs.

BAGMAN

All of a sudden, the coach stopped.

MARTIN

(To the Guard)

Hollo! What's in the wind now?

GUARD

(Stepping down from the coach)

Alight here.

MARTIN

We're stopping here?!

GUARD

Here!

MARTIN

I'll do nothing of the sort.

GUARD

Very well, then stop where you are.

MARTIN

I will.

GUARD

Do.

BAGMAN

The passengers had regarded this colloquy with great attention, and, finding that my uncle was determined not to alight, the younger man squeezed past him, to hand the lady out. As the young lady brushed past, she dropped one of her gloves into my uncle's hand.

YOUNG LADY

(Softly whispers)

Help! Please help me.

(Martin leaps out of the coach and follows the young lady.)

GUARD

Oh! You've thought better of it, have you?

(As the Bagman tells the story, Martin and the passengers reenact the scene.)

BAGMAN

For a few seconds, my uncle considered wrenching the guard's blunderbuss from him, firing it in the face of the man with the big sword, knocking the rest of the company over the head with the stock, snatching up the young lady, and going off in the smoke.

MARTIN

On second thoughts, however, I abandoned this plan as being a shade too melodramatic in the execution.

(Martin and the other passengers return to their original places and resume.)

BAGMAN

My uncle followed the two mysterious men, who kept the lady between them, as they entered an old, desolate house.

MARTIN

There was no fire in the fireplace, all was dark and gloomy.

(Beat)

Well, a coach traveling at the rate of six miles an hour, and stopping for an indefinite time at such a hole as this, is rather an irregular sort of proceeding, I fancy. This shall be made known. I'll write to the papers.

BAGMAN

My uncle said this with the view of engaging the two strangers in conversation if he could. But, neither of them took any more notice of him than whispering to each other, and scowling at him as they did so. At that moment, the lady ventured to wave her hand, as if beseeching my uncle's assistance.

YOUNG GENTLEMAN

You don't know this is a private room, I suppose, fellow?

MARTIN

No, I do not, fellow. If this is a private room specially ordered for the occasion, I should think the public room must be a very comfortable one.

(Martin sits down.)

YOUNG GENTLEMAN

(Grasping his sword)
Quit this room.

MARTIN

Eh? I don't understand.

ILL-LOOKING GENTLEMAN

(Drawing his sword and flourishing it in the air)

Quit the room, or you are a dead man.

YOUNG GENTLEMAN

(Drawing his sword and stepping back)

Down with him! Down with him!

(The lady screams.)

BAGMAN

Now, my uncle was always remarkable for great boldness, and great presence of mind. All the time that he had appeared so indifferent to what was going on, he had been looking about for some missile or weapon of defense.

MARTIN

(To the young lady)

Keep out of the way.

(Martin and the two men begin to fight and then freeze in place.)

BAGMAN

There is an old story--none the worse for being true--regarding a fine young Irish gentleman, who being asked if he could play the fiddle, replied he had no doubt he could, but he couldn't exactly say, for certain, because he had never tried.

(Martin steps out.)

MARTIN

This is not inapplicable to myself and my fencing. I had never had a sword in my hand before, except once when I played Richard the Third at a private theatre, upon which occasion it was arranged with Richmond that I was to be run through, from behind, without showing fight at all.

(Beat)

So much for experience.

(The other passengers resume their sword fighting against Martin.)

BAGMAN

But here he was, cutting and slashing with two experienced swordsman --

MARTIN

Thrusting, and guarding --

BAGMAN

And poking, and slicing --

MARTIN

And acquitting himself in the most manful and dexterous manner possible.

(As he's dueling away)

It only shows how true the old saying is, that a man never knows what he can do till he tries.

BAGMAN

When it was at its very height, the lady withdrew her hood entirely from her face, and disclosed a countenance of dazzling beauty.

YOUNG LADY

I thought he needed some encouragement.

MARTIN

And with that, I would have fought against fifty men, to win one smile from her.

(Martin fights away like a raving mad giant. At that moment, the Young Gentleman turns round, sees the Young Lady with her face uncovered, and vents an exclamation of rage and jealousy. The Young Gentleman then turns his weapon against the Young Lady and points a thrust at her heart. Martin utters a cry of apprehension that makes the building ring. As the Young Lady steps lightly aside, Martin snatches the Young Gentleman's sword from his hand, before he recovers his balance, drives him to the wall, and runs it through him. With a loud shout of triumph, and a strength that's irresistible, Martin makes his other adversary retreat in the same direction, and plunges the old rapier into the Ill-Looking man. The Young Gentleman and Ill-Looking man fall to floor and die. The Young Lady runs to Martin.)

YOUNG LADY

The coach, the coach! We may yet escape.

MARTIN

May?! Why, my dear, there's nobody else to kill, is there?

(Beat)

I must say that I was rather disappointed for I thought a little quiet bit of love-making would be agreeable after the slaughtering, if it were only to change the subject.

YOUNG LADY

We have not an instant to lose here. He is the only son of the powerful Marquess of Bunburry.

MARTIN

He'll never come to the title now.

YOUNG LADY

I have been torn from my home and my friends by these villains. That wretch would have married me by violence in another hour.

MARTIN

Confound his impudence!

YOUNG LADY

They were prepared to murder me if I appealed to any one for assistance. If their accomplices find us here, we are lost. Two minutes hence may be too late. The coach!

(Beat)

With these words, overpowered by my feelings, and having witnessed the sticking of the young Marquess of Bunburry, I....I...

(The Young Lady faints in Martin's arms.)

BAGMAN

My uncle caught her up, and bore her to the house door.

MARTIN

What else could I do?

(Martin carries the Young Lady to the coach.)

BAGMAN

Although he was a bachelor, my uncle had held some ladies in his arms before this time. Indeed, he had rather a habit of kissing barmaids and I know, that in one or two instances, he had been seen by credible witnesses, to hug a landlady in a very perceptible manner. I mention the circumstance, to show what a very uncommon sort of person this beautiful young lady must have been, to have affected my uncle in the way she did. When she looked at him, he felt so strange and nervous that

his legs trembled beneath him.

YOUNG LADY

You will never leave me?

MARTIN

Never.

(Beat)

And I meant it too.

YOUNG LADY

My dear preserver! My dear, kind, brave preserver!

MARTIN

Don't.

YOUNG LADY

Why?

MARTIN

Because your mouth looks so beautiful when you speak that I'm afraid I shall be rude enough to kiss it.

BAGMAN

The young lady put up her hand as if to caution my uncle not to do so, and said-- No, she didn't say anything--she smiled.

MARTIN

When you see a pair of the most delicious lips in the world gently break into a roguish smile, you cannot better testify your admiration of their beautiful form and color than by kissing them at once.

BAGMAN

My uncle did so, and I honor him for it.

(Sounds of approaching coach are heard.)

YOUNG LADY

Hark! The noise of wheels and horses!

MARTIN

So it is.

BAGMAN

There appeared to be so many horses and carriages rattling towards them, that it was impossible to form a guess at their number. The sound was like that of fifty carriages, with six blood cattle leading each.

YOUNG LADY

We are pursued! We are pursued. I have no hope but in you!

BAGMAN

My uncle made up his mind at once and lifted her into the coach.

MARTIN

Don't be frightened.

(Kisses the Young Lady again)

Now draw up the window to keep the cold air out.

(He climbs up on the drivers seat.)

YOUNG LADY

Stay, love.

MARTIN

What's the matter?

YOUNG LADY

I want to speak to you, only a word. Only one word, dearest.

MARTIN

Must I get down?

(The lady says nothing, but she smiles at him again. Reluctantly, Martin climbs down again.)

MARTIN

What is it, my dear?

YOUNG LADY

Will you never love any one but me -- never marry any one beside?

MARTIN

I swear I will never love or marry anybody else.

BAGMAN

The young lady drew in her head, and pulled up the window. My uncle jumped upon the box, gave one flick of the whip to the off leader, and away went the four long-tailed, flowing-maned black horses, at fifteen good English miles an hour.

(Beat)

The noise behind grew louder. The faster the old coach went, the faster came the pursuers.

MARTIN

(Turns around)

I can't believe it. Where in God's name did they come from.

BAGMAN

Above the frightful noise rose the voice of the young lady, urging my uncle on.

YOUNG LADY

Faster! Faster!

BAGMAN

They whirled past the dark trees, as feathers would be swept before a hurricane. But still the noise of pursuit grew louder, and still my uncle could hear the young lady wildly screaming --

YOUNG LADY

Faster! Faster!

BAGMAN

My uncle plied whip and rein, and the horses flew onward till they were white with foam; and yet the noise behind increased; and yet the young lady cried --

YOUNG LADY

Faster! Faster!

BAGMAN

My uncle gave a loud stamp on the boot in the energy of the moment --

(The lights change.)

MARTIN

And found that it was gray morning, and I was shivering with the cold and wet and stamping my feet to warm them!

(Beat)

I got down, and looked eagerly inside for the beautiful young lady. Alas! The coach was a mere shell with neither door nor seat.

(Martin looks around sadly.)

BAGMAN

He never understood exactly what had happen. Yet, he remained staunch to the great oath he had sworn to the beautiful young lady, refusing several eligible landladies on her account, and dying a bachelor at last.

(Beat)

I've always wondered what those ghosts of coaches carried in their bags.

MARTIN

The dead letters, of course.

BAGMAN

Oh, ah! To be sure. I never thought of that.

(The lights fade on Martin and then on the Bagman as music is heard.)