

FOUR IN A HALLWAY

a short play originally conceived as a part of Annexus Theatre Company's TWENTY (20) for 2020 - A Playwriting Challenge aka "The QuarantENS" during the COVID-19 quarantine in the United States.

by Solomon HaileSelassie using primary sources from the Library of Congress digital read.gov collection

Based on characters created by Charles Dickens in "A Christmas Carol" (1911).

## Cast of Characters

PRESENT: Innocent. ANY RACE and GENDER

PAST: Frantic like parent. ANY RACE and GENDER

FUTURE: Too cool. ANY RACE and GENDER

MARLEY: Older white male. Or someone putting on the costume of older white male... that could be interesting.

SCROOGE: off-stage

FOUR IN A HALLWAYScene 1

*In the hallway outside of Ebenezer Scrooge's bedroom. There in the hallway is the Ghost of Christmas Present. The spirit is pacing... muttering to itself. The wood floor does NOT creak.*

**Note to costume and props designers:** *This play is all yours. The spirits can wear clothing as described in A Christmas Carol as Dickens would have seen it in his head... or use your imagination and have fun. They are hard-physical, so they can pick up/use props.*

PRESENT

I am the Spirit... spirit? no...

I AM the GHOST of... mmm...

*Present takes out a little notebook, scratches out Spirit and writes Ghost.*

Ghost. Yes... Ghost is good. It should be spooky, right? Spooky is good. I mean, that's the point right.

*Present takes out a pocket watch. Checks the time. Resumes pacing*

I...

*clearing the throat*

I am the Ghost of Christmas Present. ... the Ghost of... "present" like a gift? Present like now? What's the difference... in the way to say it. This is the present. This is a present. Present. Present. Or is it like "present" like "here"? Present...

*arrests with purpose.*

I am the Ghost of Christmas Present. Oooh that's nice. I am the Ghost of Christmas Present... uh... I am here. mmmm. See me! hmmmmm... spooky.

*resumes pacing*

Spooky. What's spooky. I'm supposed to spook him, but

not frighten him. Is there a difference? Well, those were the instructions, so there's got to be a difference. Spook, not frighten. Spook. I got it.

I am the Ghost of Christmas Present, Look Upon me. yeah... spooky.

*Present scribbles some in the notebook. There's a sound, almost frantic, rushing. Past appears*

PAST

Shit. Am i late? Did it happen?

PRESENT

Shhh... no not yet. He's still in there.

PAST

Who? Fuck. I'm late. Again. I'm so going to get in trouble.

PRESENT

No. Marley. He just started not too long ago. You're okay.

PAST

FuuuuuuuuuuUUUck

**I don't know where to put this note to the actor and director so I'll just say:** *the text may not capture it but this is the sort of "fuck" that you shout when: you got into an argument with your mom which made you late for the train, and ending up having to hoof it on foot, you rushed, and ran, and almost had a heart attack, dropped your phone on the way but couldn't stop, got splashed from a street puddle by a city bus, and ended up actually being early and maybe you didn't have to run, maybe you could have tried to find your phone, maybe you could have said sorry to your mom and to make it on time to your appointment ... but you didn't sort of "fuck"*

PRESENT

What? Shhhhh! Whaaaat?

PAST

Nothing man. Nothing. I'm just going thru some shit, and fuuuuck! Fuck fuck fuckity fuck fuck fuck.

PRESENT

Jesus Christ.

PAST

Nah, it's cool man. It's cool. Just take a breath, do the thing, -- the spooky thing.

PRESENT

Yes, I know...

PAST

And then we're done. Right? We're done right?

PRESENT

Yeah, we're done. Easy peasy lemon squeezy. Are you okay?

PAST

Fine. I'm fine. I just need a second.

*Present puts his ear to the door*

PRESENT

You're fine he's at the crumbs of cheese and potato part. You're fine.

*beat*

PRESENT

Where's Future?

PAST

I don't fucking know. Why would I fucking know? Did you just ask me where the fuck is future? Why the fuck would you ask me?

PRESENT

Jesuuuus. Okay fine. I'm just asking is all... just say'n... he's not here. He's late.

PAST

And it's not like a Future to be late?

PRESENT

I mean, I don't know... no?

PAST

...

PRESENT

...

PAST

Jesus christ.

PRESENT

...

PAST

Jesus christ.

PRESENT

What?

PAST

This is your first one isn't it?

PRESENT

...

PAST

Isn't it?

PRESENT

What? No! No. It's not.

PAST

Jesus christ, it is. Fuck me. Fuck!

PRESENT

It's not. It's NOT!

PAST

...

PRESENT

It's like my third. Where's Future?

PAST

Of course... of course! Of course, I get stuck with a n00b.

PRESENT

Why does it matter so much? It's not me you need to worry about it, it's Future. Where is future? Shouldn't you be more concerned with him?

*Future enters... casually walking on. Maybe eating something. Whatever it is, it does not match the importance expressed by Past or Present.*

FUTURE

What's up losers?

*There's the sickest electric guitar riff and the*

*sound effect of entrance applause and cheers.*

PRESENT

About time.

FUTURE

It's fine. He just got done with the bit about cheese right?

PAST

That's not the point

PRESENT

(grateful for the pivot)  
Yeah that's not the point.

FUTURE

(mockingly)  
That's not the point.

*Future laughs. The audience laughs.*

PAST

You futures are always such dicks.

FUTURE

It's fine. Chill out. Y'all are wound tighter than Marley's chains.

PRESENT

That's because you are late.

*beat*

FUTURE

(to Past)  
Let me guess, it's his first time.

PRESENT

No. No it's not.

FUTURE

...

PRESENT

It's not!

PAST

It's not. It's like his third time.

FUTURE

[a funny sex joke probably... write this later]

*beat*

PRESENT

How did you know?

PAST

What?

PRESENT

Not you. How did you know?

FUTURE

How did I know what?

PRESENT

That he was going to start late?

FUTURE

How did I know? they want's to know how I knew.

PAST

they do.

FUTURE

You want to know how I knew?

PRESENT

Well yeah...

FUTURE

[maybe insert "grasshopper" or "paduwan" joke]

Well, I'll share a little secret with you. I'm  
fucking Future, bro.

*A sick guitar riff and audience cheers and  
applause*

PRESENT

Yeah, but... how... how did you KNOW?

FUTURE

I saw the future. Just a little dip into the pool of  
infinity. Stuck my toe in, got a whiff.

PAST

Just the tip?

FUTURE

Just the tip.

PAST/FUTURE

(signing in the style of Seth Rogan and  
Kristin Wig)

JUST THE TIP

*They stick their index fingers close to each other, almost touching with a sick guitar diddle (a Bill and Ted reference, if you care). It's very sexually suggestive. There's audience laughter, woots, hoots, and whistles.*

*beat*

PRESENT

But seriously, how.

FUTURE

But seriously, I looked into the future.

PRESENT

Oh.

PAST

I think they get it.

PRESENT

(defensively)

I get it.

PAST

Third time.

*clicks tongue*

*beat.*

*Here's a note to the director: what are they doing while they wait? This is up to you. Maybe future uses a smart phone or something even more future... or primps himself in a wallway mirror. Maybe Past widdles something. IDK... it should be character based. Whatever it is, PRESENT doesn't get anything. The Present must pace, rehearse, listen out for the cues... they don't get a thing. Speaking off.*

*Present goes to the door to listen in.*

PAST

How far?

PRESENT

Not too long now.

FUTURE

Always in such a rush.

PAST

Always slacking off.

FUTURE

That's his thing. Rushing. Always rushing. Always so busy running from.

PRESENT

What do you mean? What do you mean by that?

FUTURE

It's just his thing. You'll see. Tragic it must be to always be trying to escape the past when it's your literal job to relive it.

PAST

Yeah but not my past. Not my past. I don't have to, thankfully, relive my past. Far too much of you in it.

FUTURE

sick burn bro

*there's a little bit o laughter from the audience.*

PRESENT

What do they mean? What do you mean by that?

PAST

Nothing. Nothing. Never mind.

*beat*

FUTURE

Plus, I go last anyway.

PAST

I've been meaning to talk to you about that.

FUTURE

About what?

PAST  
The order. I always go first.

FUTURE  
You always go first.

PRESENT  
they always go first?

PAST  
I always go first. And I don't wanna.

FUTURE  
Too bad. Roster set. No change in batting order once the game has started.

PAST  
That's bullshit.

FUTURE  
That may be... but I always go last. You always go first.

PRESENT  
You always go last?

FUTURE  
That's the order.

PAST  
But... but it could be fun... if changed it up.

FUTURE  
Fun? I always have fun. I'm the fucking future!

*sick guitar riff*

Plus... what do you suggest. The future goes first, and the past goes last. Naw, brah... that's how it's done. You set 'em up... i knock 'em down. It doesn't work the other way. I knock 'em down and then you set 'em up? What sense does that make?

PAST  
What if I knocked 'em down once.

FUTURE  
You...

*they start laughing... trying to repeat what Past just said, but can't get it out... much*

*comic effect. The audience laughs.*

PAST

You know what?

FUTURE

What?

PAST

Fuck you.

FUTURE

Yes... fuck me... that may be, but... i think you've forgotten something...

PAST/PRESENT

You're the fucking future --

*sick riff. audience applause*

FUTURE

Hell yeah!

*more applause*

*beat*

PRESENT

Can I ask you a question?

PAST

Me?

FUTURE

Obviously not.

PRESENT

Well... no. I mean, you don't have to say it like that. But no... yes, you.

FUTURE

Sure.

*beat*

PRESENT

What's it like?

FUTURE

What?

PRESENT

The future. What's it like?

FUTURE

It's the fucking future, man.

*There's a sick guitar riff, this time also mimed  
by Future. The audience enjoys this!*

PRESENT

Yeah but what it's like?

FUTURE

Don't worry about it. It's the future. You'll get there eventually.

PRESENT

I will?

FUTURE

Eventually.

PAST

But then it won't be the future, it'll be the present. He's fucking with you.

PRESENT

they are? You are?

PAST

they are.

FUTURE

I am. I am also telling you the truth. You'll see it for yourself.

PRESENT

I think about it sometimes. What it's like. I imagine it. Do you do that?

PAST

No.

PRESENT

Really? Not even a little? You don't imagine it?

PAST

Nope. Don't need to. Can't be that much different than the past.

FUTURE

Now who's fucking with whom?

PAST

Who?

FUTURE

Whom. Whom? right?

PRESENT

Are you asking me?

PAST/FUTURE

Yes. Obviously.

PRESENT

I don't know.

FUTURE

Hmmm... when don't worry about it.

*beat*

PRESENT

So how's it work? Really? I mean... i know how it works for me... but it's gotta be different... gotta work different.

FUTURE

It doesn't. Don't worry about it.

*There's a slight exasperation in future's voice.  
But it's slight.*

PRESENT

So you just...

FUTURE

We just touch and his future unlocks. Passes through me. In an instance... the whole thing. And then we go to his future that has the most impact, and then we go to the end.

PRESENT

The end?

FUTURE

The end of his future.

PRESENT

That sounds like a rush. All of that future, all at

once.

FUTURE

A rush. Yes. Sure.

PRESENT

I don't get that at all. We just go to another now.  
There's no rush.

*beat*

PRESENT

How many futures have you seen?

FUTURE

Enough.

PRESENT

But...

FUTURE

Look. Why can't you just chill? Let's just do this  
job, and go home. You gonna stand there and ask me a  
million fucking questions? Fuck I hate n00bs

PAST

Told ya.

N00b.

PRESENT

I'm just curious. Aren't you curious?

PAST

Don't need to be. It can't be no different than the  
past. I'm good.

FUTURE

You're curious? Okay. Fine! It hurts.

PRESENT

Hurts?

FUTURE

That rush you're asking about... it hurts. Yes, it's  
a rush... but can you imagine a person's future  
flowing through you all at once. Imagine it. Imagine  
everything that happened today. Everything that's  
happening right now... through the middle of your  
soul... all at once. It fucking hurts. I don't just  
feel it... but I have to *feel* it. Everything. Every

heart break, every panic attack, every orgasm, until eventually feeling death. Can you imagine feeling death? No... you cant. Anything you imagine is wrong. Wrong! It takes a lot to stay focused. It takes a lot not to get lost. It takes a lot. A lot of out me. It's exhausting. Super natural. I'm the fucking future man

*a sick guitar riff... a half-hearted mime from Future. The audience is barely into it...*

FUTURE

So... fuck... I hate fucking new presents.

PRESENT

Fine. Fine! Beat me up for wanting to know. I just want to know. That's all. Can you ... can YOU imagine just knowing now. Not what happens later, not remembering what happened before... but just now. Now. What the fuck is even now. Once you realize you're in the present, it's the past, and by the time you think about the future, it's the present. I'm too early... to late... now. It's a little frustrating, and I just want to know.

PAST

You get used to it.

FUTURE

Yeah... we all have to adjust. You think Past and I started out not giving a shit about each other? Sure... i wanted to know about the past.

PAST

Speak for yourself. I never had any interest in the future. And he's an asshole.

FUTURE

I am. But he's right... you just... get used to it.

*All of a sudden Present lunges for Future, trying to touch him*

FUTURE

WHAT THE FUCK MAN?

PAST

WHAT THE FUCK ARE YOU DOING?

PRESENT

I just want to see it. Just a little.

*Present is still trying sneak a touch*

FUTURE

Back the fuck up off my bro. Stop that shit.

PAST

Do you have any clue what will happen?!

PRESENT

Happen? No... i have no idea what happen even is. But I want to.

*One more swipe*

FUTURE

NO! STOP! That shit is dangerous. This is what... this is what will happen: You, an immortal being, will have your future -- the unending future of everything in the universe -- thrust through me. We will go to your end. All the way. To your end... of which you have none... or at least the end of the infinite universe. I don't know, i've never been able to look that far.

But what I can tell you is that I've looked the farthest I can and it drained all of me. I couldn't materialize for days. Each time I look into the future it takes some amount of energy... some amount of effort. The further I look, the more effort. And if you touch me, ... if you touch me. I won't be able to control how far we go into the future.

I have no idea how far we'd get before my power is depleted but however far it is, it will literally drive you mad, and exhaust me so much I wont be able to take any form -- and I have no idea how long that will last. It will mean the death of us... as much as we can die. Do you have a fucking death wish?

And do you have any idea how important this Scrooge is? Do you know? Did you do the reading?

PRESENT

Yes, but...

PAST

But nothing...

FUTURE

So you get it. You get how important it is that we not fuck things up?

*beat*

PRESENT

I just wanted to know.

FUTURE

Okay. You want to know about the future? The future is chaos. It's dark and unpredictable. It takes turns and pivots that are unexpected. Things turn out but almost never in the way you expect... almost never in the way you want. Rich assholes like this rich asshole just get richer, the poor get poorer. People get sick... a lot. And die... a lot. People suffer a lot. Sometimes it comes out of no where... or at least it feels that way--

PAST

But it doesn't. If they'd asked me... if you'd ask me, I could have shown... all the signs that point to it. But that's the pleasure of the past.

FUTURE

And it's violent. It's so fucking violent. Endless wars. Wars of self, wars of man. Dark, violent, dirty, painful. Pain.

PAST

Pain

FUTURE

Pain... that's the future.

PAST

It's also the past.

FUTURE

But... buuuut... it's different. It's not like the pain of the past. It's not like you can process it, manage it, understand it, grow from it, and box it up to recall -- like an asshole -- at a later date. The future is ... the future is new. Every time. What we see is always different, but it feels the same. That's what you feel. That's all you feel. Pain. Disappointment. Sadness. Pain. That's ... okay? So you wanted to know. So there.

PRESENT

That sounds horrible.

FUTURE

Who you telling?

PAST

The past ain't much better.

FUTURE

The past ain't much better... apparently.

PRESENT

So what's the point? Of all... this.

FUTURE

This is the point. This night. This hallway. What and who's on the other-side of the door. Try and fix the future. Make it a little bit better. That's the job. That's the point.

PAST

That's point.

FUTURE

Stay in the present. Be the present. Enjoy the present. The future is filled with pain.

PAST

So is the past.

FUTURE

Just chill. You're the Present, man.

*A new guitar riff, not as sick as Future's...  
but still sick. There's mild audience applause*

PRESENT

Just chill. Got it. Okay. Sorry.

FUTURE

It's cool man.

PAST

But just don't do that shit again.

FUTURE

Seriously.

PAST

N00b...

FUTURE

N00b...

*There's a great clamour and the door opens. Marely's Ghost enters the hallway/exists the room... full of chains and money boxes. The door closes. Present arrests, but Past and Future don't really do anything.*

MARLEY

Fuck, it's so heavy. Why is it so heavy? I don't understand why I have it be so heavy.

*beat*

*Marley looks at Present, and looks at Past and Future.*

MARLEY

Who the fuck are you? What the fuck is wrong with them?

PRESENT

Present.

MARLEY

Right.

*he glares*

N00b?

PAST/FUTURE

N00b.

MARLEY

Well...

You did the reading? Right?

You get how important this is?

PRESENT

I did.

PAST/FUTURE

We do.

MARLEY

Fuck this is really fucking heavy. Well... don't just stare at me like i have 10 arms, help me get this shit off.

PRESENT

I can touch you?

MARLEY

You? Haha... of course you can. Where are you gonna take me? To now? Fucking n00b... here take this.

*He starts handing him the end of the chain...  
and while continuing to unwrap himself...*

So, he's tough... keep pulling... but I think i soften him up enough for you to start -- And this too -- It was good. I was good. "I am here to-night to warn you that you have yet a chance and hope of escaping my fate."

FUTURE

You think he bought it?

MARLEY

Of course he bought it. The fuck that's supposed to mean? Have they ever not bought it?

PAST

Don't mind them. You were saying... soft..

MARLEY

Oh yeah... did he buy it?...

(raspberry)

"You will be haunted but three spirits" --

PAST

Haunted? Did you say haunted? Fuck man, you were supposed to say "visited". Now i gotta haunt him... that's so much more effort. Why couldn't you have said "visited" like we rehearsed?

MARLEY

Because I didn't. Look, I'm not the villain here. I did my part. I'm just a messenger -- jesus, are you going to help me or not? Thank you -- I'm just the messenger. I did my job. Gave you an opening. I'm not sure how you want to handle it... if you want to let him stew in there...

PAST

Yeah... probably... and then sneak up on his ass.

MARLEY

He may not respond positively to that.

PAST

Whatever

*Past makes to open the door*

MARLEY

Oh, I did a fun thing with time in there. So shit might be weird--

PAST

That's okay. Apparently, I set'em up and they knock'em down. You can hit anything I set up, right?

MARLEY

What the fuck is going on? If you all can't handle it... I just don't need this sort of drama right now. A past and future that can't see eye to eye... If you all are not up to... you know what I can just get another crew. We don't need this sort of bullshit.

FUTURE

We got this.

MARLEY

Do you under stand how important this one is.

PAST/PRESENT/FUTURE

Yeeess!

PAST

We get it.

FUTURE

Chill man.

MARLEY

Well... then let's go. And, Fuck your chill. Do you know how long I was carrying that?

PRESENT

It's heavy.

MARLEY

Damn right it is.

*present falls over from the weight*

MARLEY/FUTURE/PAST

N00b

*There's uproarious audience laughter*

*beat*

MARLEY  
Go...

*Past goes through the door.*

*beat*

MARLEY  
(looking at Future)  
He's good?

*beat*

MARLEY  
(looking at Present)  
He's good??

*Scrooge yelps in shock*

PRESENT/FUTURE  
He's good

*audience laughter!*

*we hear this through the door*

SCROOGE  
Are you the spirit who's coming was foretold to me?

PAST  
(much grander/spookier/better than we expect... like a great actor who rehearses, does the work, and has "it" but isn't a show off in the green room)  
I am!

MARLEY  
Does anyone have any candy?

BLACK OUT

END OF PLAY