

GOD REST YE MERRY BUSINESSMEN

CHARACTERS

ANTONIA EBENEZER a young and successful business woman who owns a loan company on Canary Wharf
MARLEY JACOB Antonia's former business partner - could be male or female
CATHY CRATCHIT her underpaid secretary
OFFICE WORKERS 1 & 2 - could be male or female
OLD MOTHER Cathy's parent, who she supports along with the unseen father
GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PAST A clerk who has an account of all past business agreements - could be male or female
BULLIES 1 & 2 Characters from Antonia's past - could be male or female
YOUNG WOMAN
SECRETARY
GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PRESENT A jolly lady with a shopping bag - representing prosperity
GHOST OF CHRISTMAS YET TO COME A non-speaking ghost, a Managing Director, who represents the sterner side of business
HANNAH A young girl who has left home
LAURA her sister
CENTREPOINT CHARITY WORKER
AUNT MAUD
NARRATOR or NARRATORS

A versatile script which could be played by either an all female cast or mixed. At a pinch, it could be all-male too.
It could be played by any number between 6 to 18 people.

If you want a smaller cast, the Narrators can be dealt with by dividing each section amongst the cast not directly involved in a particular scene.
The Office Workers, Bullies and Hannah and Laura can be played by the same two members of the cast. One of these could also play the Secretary.
The Young Woman, Centrepoint Charity Worker and Aunt Maud could double. The same person could even play Marley Jacob - as a female!
The Ghosts of Christmas Past and Christmas Yet To Come could also double.
The above would be for a cast of 9.

Because of the episodic nature of the script, even a smaller group than 9 could manage it. They'd be very busy. But 5 or 6 could just about manage it, with clear costume changes and changes in acting presentation.

This play is suitable as a Christmas production for an older age-group, from Years 10 upwards.

The running time is about 45 minutes.

extract 1

NARRATOR It was a cold dark night on Canary Wharf; only six o'clock but pitch black already. But then again, it was December - Christmas Eve as a matter of fact - so I guess it was to be expected. The Managing Director and owner of the Scrooge Loan Company, Miss Antonia Ebenezer, was working late - as usual. She had some particularly pleasing debts to call in.

SCENE 1

The scene is an office with a Canary Wharf sky-line. The scene will later change to Antonia's flat and Cathy's house, so appropriate pieces of furniture can be onstage ready for use. Alternatively, the set can be changed during narration.

EBENEZER *to her secretary, Cathy Cratchit* Cathy, send an e-mail to all the people on this list. I'm calling in all debts, to be paid as of tomorrow or ... I can think of a few companies which might be closing down.

CATHY Tomorrow? But ma'am, tomorrow is Christmas Day. They won't be able to settle any debts then because...

EBENEZER Cathy. Do you like working here?

CATHY Well. I ... er ...

EBENEZER OK. Let me rephrase that. Do you want to continue working here, or do you have another job in mind?

CATHY No, ma'am, I don't have another job. I ... er ... I want to stay here, Miss Ebenezer.

EBENEZER In which case, I suggest you send the e-mails. Immediately!

NARRATOR Which she did. Immediately. Because jobs on Canary Wharf had better prospects than the tills in Tesco and she had aged parents to support. She hoped that if she worked hard and pleased her employers, she would soon get a promotion. But it hadn't happened yet and she had been trying for over seven years. Of course she knew that by

sending the e-mails she was doing a terrible thing, but she simply didn't have any choice. That happens sometimes, doesn't it? Meanwhile, Antonia was scrolling through her online accounts. She liked to do that before returning to her penthouse flat. A long time passed as manager and secretary worked silently together, though it has to be said that the secretary could occasionally be seen glancing furtively at her watch.

EBENEZER *scrutinising the computer* Mmm. Good interest rate on that investment. Not so good on the market shares. Note to self: sell Amtrack Trading.

A buzzer sounds and in walk two Office Workers.

EBENEZER *with an aggressive stare* Yes. What do you want?

The two exchange glances.

People like you only ever come to my office when they want something, so spit it out!

OFFICE WORKER 1 At this time of year, we think it is right to consider those people less fortunate than ourselves, and to ...

EBENEZER ... put money into the pockets of idlers and scroungers?

OFFICE WORKER 2 To supply aid for those people who have no means to enjoy

the season as we do.

EBENEZER As you do, you mean. I shall spend tomorrow sorting out the finer points of my bank account.

OFFICE WORKER 1 *seizing the opportunity* So I hope you might consider making a standing order to Centrepont and ...

EBENEZER *sharply* Where?

OFFICE WORKER 2 Centrepont.

EBENEZER Centrepont.

OFFICE WORKERS 1&2 Yes.

EBENEZER Now, let me just get this straight. You want me to fund a happy Christmas for a load of idlers who can't be bothered to go out to work?

OFFICE WORKER 1 We prefer to think of it as ...

OFFICE WORKER 2 ... aid for people who cannot find work.

EBENEZER Have they tried?

OFFICE WORKER 1 Well ...

EBENEZER I do not spend elaborate sums of money on my own Christmas celebrations. I am content to remain in my loft apartment with a bottle of good brandy and my Snow-Leopard Macintosh computer. Consequently it is not my inclination to waste money on ...

The office phone rings and Cathy answers.

CATHY *after listening with a puzzled look* Miss Ebenezer, it's for you. A Mr Jacob, it sounded like - but it couldn't have been.

EBENEZER Stop babbling, woman. [*Picks up her extension.*] Hello, Antonia Ebenezer here. Scrooge Loan Company. [*She glares at the two Office Workers.*] Are you two still here?

OFFICE WORKERS No.

They exit.

JACOB *who can be seen in the background* Ebenezer, do you remember me?

EBENEZER Remember? I don't even know who you are! Jacob who?

JACOB Marley Jacob, your former partner.

EBENEZER Now look here. This might be your idea of a joke but I'm not having it. Poor old Marley died some years ago.

extract 2

A door flies open and the Ghost of Christmas Past enters. He/She wears white and carries a large ledger.

EBENEZER Who are you?

CHRISTMAS PAST I am the Ghost of Christmas Past.

EBENEZER Long past?

CHRISTMAS PAST No. Your past.

EBENEZER Well, you've come to the wrong place. I don't deal in the past. The present and the future will do for me. So you can see yourself out.

CHRISTMAS PAST The present and future will be dealt with directly, and I will not see myself out until I have had my say.

EBENEZER *sarcastically* Then I suggest you make it quick! Life is short and I have much to achieve before I get old.

CHRISTMAS PAST It all began when you were quite young, didn't it?

EBENEZER What's that you have? Oh, that looks like Nan's old photo album. The one she gave to Mum. I told Mum to throw it away after I scanned them all

into a digital display unit so that ...

Photographs could be projected here. They should be happy family snaps.

CHRISTMAS PAST But she didn't throw it away. She kept it because she likes to look at it.

EBENEZER Well, she can look at ...

CHRISTMAS PAST She prefers the album. She likes the feel of the pages, the smell of the parchment.

EBENEZER Typical. Funny ... [***But she hesitates.***]

CHRISTMAS PAST Funny?

EBENEZER What?

CHRISTMAS PAST What were you about to say?

EBENEZER ***a little uncomfortably*** Nothing really. It's just that I thought of going there this Christmas, but ...

CHRISTMAS PAST Going where?

EBENEZER To my mother's house. But it's in the wilds of Derbyshire. I can't even rely on the internet connection there. No broadband, so ...

CHRISTMAS PAST ...you decided not to go.

EBENEZER Something like that. [***She looks uncomfortable.***] I wouldn't have been able to stay long anyhow and it would have meant a lot of trouble for her.

CHRISTMAS PAST She wouldn't have minded.

EBENEZER Well, I know, but ...

CHRISTMAS PAST In fact she would have enjoyed seeing you. But look - do you remember this picture of you?

The picture, which flashes up on the screen behind them, shows a group of children. One of them is standing a little apart from the others and looks worried.

CHRISTMAS PAST You weren't happy that day, were you?

EBENEZER I don't know many children who enjoy going to school, do you?

CHRISTMAS PAST Yes.

EBENEZER Well, I didn't like it. The people there - they didn't understand me.

CHRISTMAS PAST ***as the scene begins*** Obviously not.

SAMPLE EXTRACT from PRODUCTION NOTES

PRODUCTION NOTES + TECHNICAL CUES, ETC.

INTRODUCTION: THEMES, THE PLAY'S INTENTIONS

The play mirrors the intentions of the original *Christmas Carol*, with its emphasis on generosity and goodwill. Like the original Scrooge, Antonia Ebenezer has to go through a process of self-discovery, led by the Ghosts, in which she, with reluctance, faces up to the circumstances that have made her what she is - being bullied at school, being a bit of a nerd and a loner. She is led to understand too what the effects of her own selfishness have had on other people: her secretary Cathy Cratchitt and the poor in general, represented by the homeless teenagers: Hannah and Laura. The message is as pertinent today as it ever was, maybe even more so, as big business becomes more separated from how it affects the world and ordinary people than ever. This is nothing short of an allegory for how business greed must be made to face up to its duty to others, not just subordinates in the workplace, but the larger society. The story of the two homeless teenagers widen the scope of this tale from its original source, which focuses on Scrooge's hard-done-by clerk and his own family. This version shows how we have a duty even to those outside our immediate circle.

CHARACTERS

The characters are very straight-forward, since they are mainly symbolic. Briefly:

ANTONIA EBENEZER is self-indulgent, mean, defensive, full of herself. I don't think accent matters. She would carry herself well, but perhaps show that she has lost the ability to relax. Her body holds itself stiffly, with tension. Her walk is firm, staccato. Her voice is crisp, authoritative. All of this should contrast with how she is by the end - softer, warmer, more relaxed and, above all, happy.

MARLEY JACOB - the voice of warning. Stern, regretful, trying to shock his former partner into sense. The voice and stance of a strict teacher would be suitable.

CATHY CRATCHITT Here the contrast is with Cathy at work - where she is diffident because driven by fear that in a hard job market she might lose this work - and home, where she is warm, caring and sure of herself. An audience must like her throughout. At the beginning it is through her eyes that we see the faults of Antonia. Being a truthful girl, her face and body language should lead the audience as to what they should think. Because she sees the good in people all the time, even when in the office, work on making her voice warm, and even if there is criticism of Antonia, don't overdo the facial expression or critical body language.

OLD MOTHER is dependent on her daughter, Cathy, and very similar to her in attitudes. Again, a likeable character, with the added ingredient of old age, to give the audience the pity factor.

AUNT MAUD - similar to Old Mother. She just stands for how much dependency Cathy has to carry on her own, plus emphasising what a kind and loving girl she is. Nonetheless, try to contrast the types of old age the Mother and Aunt show. Perhaps Aunt Maud is really quite infirm, whilst Cathy's Mother is a relatively sprightly old lady.

HANNAH is the elder of the two teenagers and is maternal and protective of her sister. The pair are very close.

LAURA is the younger of the two, but is in her own way as caring of Hannah as her elder sister is of her.

GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PAST - Though this ghost is billed as a clerk by the author, he is clearly quite sympathetic to the circumstances of Antonia's life. He tries to show her how bullying made her more reclusive. He makes her face up to Antonia's neglect of her own mother - in fact how disconnected from her own emotions Antonia has become. He gets sterner as things proceed. Antonia's cheating to get a job is unforgivable.

GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PRESENT - is giving the same message but her different voice adds interest to the idea. She is a bustling jolly woman. Work hard to contrast her way of speaking and her mannerisms with the previous ghost.

GHOST OF CHRISTMAS YET TO COME - is unspeaking but must be very frightening. Despite all warnings, Antonia has shown resistance to change. Think Horror figures of darkness - grim smiles, delight in destruction, etc. His face shows nothing but glee as he shows the disastrous future to Antonia. His body is rigid, dark, his face very stern and gestures pointing etc, very sure, perhaps done in slow motion for added fear value.

The rest of the cast are not developed enough in character to warrant separate notes.

SETTING

Setting could be a composite one, with areas already prepared. The writer suggests that there is a cut-out Canary Wharf skyline on the back wall or cyclorama. This could equally be a projection.

Otherwise areas could be delineated simply by furniture: smart and practical for the office, smart and comfortable for Antonia's flat and much scruffier and homelier looking for Cathy's house.

Furniture can be minimal, just suggesting the style of place. I would suggest that there is an emphasis on metal, chrome, glass, shiny and new-looking for Ebenezer's office and flat, which also serves to show the hardness of her character. Ebenezer's flat needs a free-standing working door, painted white and looking smart.

Cathy's home would perhaps be suggested simply by a saggy sofa with lots of comfy cushions heaped on it. It also needs a kitchen-style, perhaps formica topped or similar, table, on which Cathy prepares vegetables. No need for a separate kitchen area.

The huddling homeless pair could just be delineated by light on the bare forestage.

If these and other areas have furniture at the sides of the stage, they can be pulled into place for use quickly and easily. Or, if your staging area is big enough, they could be permanent settings.

If using a permanent staging, I suggest that the office is raised towards the back, perhaps even on two levels, so that Cathy and her desk is lower than Antonia. Or Cathy could be on the forestage with her desk.

Have fun, if you are able with the entrance of the ghosts 'through the walls. The stage could have two screens made up of vertical strips of white cloth fixed at top and bottom but allowing the ghosts to push through between the strips. The strips look like a solid wall but make for a fun surprise for the audience. Suggest these two are set at an angle on each side of the stage, across the back corners.

If you are using the same part of the stage for both the office and Ebenezer's flat, you might like to swap one of the screens for the free-standing door, painted white, and move the other screen to the back centre, where it can take the photo projections more easily....