

The Chimes
by
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based on the story by
Charles Dickens

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FADE IN:

EXT. CHURCH -- NIGHT

Far above the lights of the city, and far below the flying clouds that shadow it, sits the dark silhouette of a church against the horizon.

SUPER: London -- December 31, 1844

The towering, steepled church grows closer as the night grows darker.

Weak flashes of lightning are followed by distant RUMBLINGS OF LOW THUNDER.

Our narrator is an Englishman.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

There are not many people -- and I beg it to be noticed that I extend this observation to all conditions of people: those growing up, as well as those growing down again -- there are not many people, I say, who would care to sleep in a church.

INT. CHURCH -- DAY

A heavy MAN is nodding off during a crowded church service.

A minister's VOICE IS DRONING ON in the distance.

The dozing man, his head bowed slightly, eyes closed as if in prayer, suddenly SNORES LOUDLY.

All CHURCHGOERS turn to look.

The man awakens with a SNORT, shocked to see everyone staring at him. A CHILD GIGGLES.

NARRATOR (V.O., CONT'D)

I don't mean at sermon time in warm weather, when the thing has actually been done, once or twice...

EXT. CHURCH -- NIGHT

There is a bright flash of lightning.

NARRATOR (V.O., CONT'D)
...but in the night...

The lightning is followed by a mighty CRASH OF THUNDER.

NARRATOR (V.O., CONT'D)
...and alone.

EXT. CHURCHYARD -- NIGHT

The wind blows through the old churchyard, over and around ancient, crumbling gravestones, toward the church and up to the old door.

The wind does not stop there, but pushes the door open, and moves fluidly as a ghost through the doorway and into the church.

INT. CHURCH -- CONTINUOUS

The wind blows past windows and doors, MOANING as it goes.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
For the night wind has a dismal
trick of wandering 'round and
'round a building of that sort, and
moaning as it goes.

Stalking through the church aisles, the wind WAILS.

Gliding around pillars and moving up past a great pipe organ, the wind MUTTERS.

Soaring up to the roof, the HOWLING wind tries to rend the rafters, then flings itself upon the stones far below.

The wind WHISPERS as it creeps along the church walls.

At times it breaks out shrilly as with LAUGHTER, and later it MOANS and CRIES as if lamenting.

INT. AT THE ALTAR -- CONTINUOUS

As if reading at lightning speed, the wind ruffles through the pages of a huge open Bible.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

Heaven preserve us, sitting snugly
'round the fire -- it has an awful
voice, that wind at midnight,
singing in a church! The wind seems
to LAUGH, or CRY, or both.

A great gust finishes the Bible and SLAMS it shut.

For a moment, there is SILENCE.

Then, a single TOLL OF A FARAWAY BELL is heard.

EXT. CHURCH STEEPLE -- NIGHT

Suddenly a blast of air ROARS and WHISTLES past, and the great CHIMES RING as if to wake the dead.

The wind twirls a GROANING weathercock.

The very tower seems to shake and shiver.

The belfry CRACKLES and heaves.

The huge BELLS CHIME in the gale.

INT. BELL TOWER -- CONTINUOUS

Shabby bird nest stuffing is blown out of cracks and corners of old oaken joists.

A fat spider swings wildly to and fro in its web from the wind and vibration of the bells.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

High up in the steeple of an old
church is a wild and dreary place
at night...

There are flashes of lightning and CRASHES OF THUNDER.

NARRATOR (V.O., CONT'D)

...and high up in the steeple of an
old church dwell the chimes I tell
of. Far and wide they may be heard
upon the wind. They pour their

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

NARRATOR (V.O., CONT'D) (cont'd)
notes into a listening ear right
royally, and are bent on being
heard on stormy nights.

EXT. ROAD IN LONDON -- NIGHT

TROTTY VECK is trotting down the road on a stormy night.
Trotty is 60 years old, with a head of white, windblown
hair.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
The bells have been known to beat a
blustering Nor'wester "all to
fits," as Trotty Veck would say.

Trotty turns and speaks directly to us.

TROTTY
Aye, all to fits!

He turns away and continues trotting down the road.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
And Trotty Veck should know. He
stands all day long, and into the
night, just outside the church
door, as he is a porter, and waits
there for jobs.

EXT. CHURCH DOOR -- DAY

On a blustery winter day, Trotty stands waiting beside the
church door.

The wind tears around the corner as if it has sallied forth
just to have a blow at him.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
And a goose-skinned, blue-nosed,
red-eyed, stony-toed,
tooth-chattering place it is to
wait in the winter time.

Somehow the wind catches Trotty's apron up over his head,
and he wrestles with it, his feeble little cane waving in
his hand.

Finally Trotty wins the battle with the apron and smoothes
it back in place.

Then, Trotty's feet begin a little dance.

(CONTINUED)

He starts an even trot up and down in front of the church to warm himself.

NARRATOR (V.O., CONT'D)
They call him "Trotty" because of his pace. He could walk faster perhaps, or slower, but rob him of his trot, and Trotty would take to his bed and die.

Trotty blows on his chilly hands and rubs them against each other.

Poorly defended from the cold by threadbare mittens, Trotty continues to trot, with his knees bent and his cane beneath his arm.

Suddenly, the CHIMES BEGIN TO RING again.

Trotty trots out into the road to look up at the belfry where the chimes hang. He stares with his mouth open at the steeple.

The BELLS FINISH RINGING, and Trotty slowly comes out of his trance.

He trots back to his nook beside the church door.

NARRATOR (V.O., CONT'D)
Being but a simple man, Trotty invests the chimes with a strange and solemn character.

Trotty blows on his hands and rubs them together.

From time to time he makes an excursion out to trot up and back in front of the church to warm himself.

NARRATOR (V.O., CONT'D)
They seem to him so mysterious, so high up, so far off, so full of such a deep and strong melody, that Trotty regards the chimes with a kind of awe.

Trotty looks up toward the bells, staring at the dark, arched windows in the tower.

NARRATOR (V.O., CONT'D)
And sometimes when he looks up, he half expects to be beckoned by something which is not a bell, and yet is what he has heard so often sounding in the chimes.

EXT. STREET IN FRONT OF THE CHURCH -- DAY

At midday, Trotty is trotting back and forth in the cold.

His friend, CHILL, a man around Trotty's age but bald as an egg, sits on the steps of a house beside the church. Occasionally Chill takes a large drink from a small flask.

The BELLS BEGIN TO TOLL THE NOON HOUR, and Trotty stops to watch the tower.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

In short, the chimes are often in Trotty's ears, and often in his thoughts, and always in his good opinion.

The last STRIKE OF TWELVE SOUNDS.

TROTTY

Dinner time, eh?

Trotty's nose and eyelids are red. His shoulders are very near his ears, and his legs seem stiff.

He uses his mittened hand like a boxing glove, and punishes his chest for being cold.

Chill, who is dressed no more warmly than Trotty, has a rosy glow, warmed by the fire in his little bottle.

TROTTY (CONT'D)

There's nothing more regular in its coming 'round than dinnertime, and nothing less regular in its coming 'round than dinner. It's took me a long time to find that out.

CHILL

I wonder whether it would be worth any gentleman's while to buy that observation for the papers?

Trotty gravely shakes his head and takes a dirty newspaper from his pocket, holding it at arm's length.

TROTTY

Why, Lord, the papers is full of observations as it is! Here's last week's paper now, full of observations. I like to know the news as well as any man...
(folding the paper and putting it back in his pocket)

(CONTINUED)

...but it almost goes against the grain with me to read a paper these days. It frightens me almost. I don't know what we poor people are coming to.

CHILL

One way or other, we fill the papers.

Trotty continues to trot backward and forward, musing as he goes.

TROTTY

It seems as if we can't go right, or do right, or be righted. I can't make out whether we have any business on the earth or not. Sometimes I think we must have -- a little, and sometimes I think we must be intruding. I am not even able to make up my mind whether there is any good at all in us, or whether we are born bad.

(sighing and shaking his head)

We seem to give a good deal of trouble.

CHILL

Lord will that we come to something better in the New Year nigh upon us. Which reminds me, I've got to find a meal soon, or I'll miss the New Year altogether! Good day to ye, Trotty. And if I don't see you before the morrow, a happy New Year to you and your dear little Meg!

Chill rises with some difficulty.

Trotty answers, but he is not smiling.

TROTTY

A happy New Year, Chill, to you as well.

Chill slowly hobbles away.

Trotty speaks to himself mournfully, his sight directed a long way off.

(CONTINUED)

TROTTY (CONT'D)

Talk of a New Year! Supposing it should really be that we have no right to a New Year...supposing we really ARE intruding --

His thoughts are interrupted by the voice of a young lady.

MEG (O.S.)

Why, Father!

Trotty is startled out of his dark musing to find himself face to face with his daughter, MEG, looking close into her bright eyes.

Despite the 20 years of work and poverty on which they have looked, Meg's eyes bear a calm radiance and beam with hope.

Trotty squeezes Meg's face between his hands and kisses her lips.

TROTTY

Why, pet, what's to do? I didn't expect you today, Meg.

Meg nods and smiles.

MEG

Neither did I expect to come, Father, but here I am. And not alone, not alone!

Trotty looks curiously at a covered basket Meg is carrying.

TROTTY

Why, you don't mean to say that you --

MEG

Smell it, Father -- only smell it!

Trotty lifts up the cover in a great hurry. Putting a hand on each knee, he bends down his nose to the basket and inhales slowly. The grin on Trotty's face expands in the process.

TROTTY

It's tripe!

MEG

And you'll say in half a minute it's the best tripe ever stewed!

(CONTINUED)

She starts setting up the meal for Trotty on the steps of the house beside the church.

MEG (CONT'D)

And so I'll lay the cloth at once.
There's no law to prevent me, is
there, Father?

TROTTY

Not that I know of, my dear. But
they're always a-bringing up some
new law or other.

MEG

And we poor people are supposed to
know them all. My goodness me, how
clever they think us!

She finishes the food preparations.

MEG (CONT'D)

Make haste, for there's a hot
potato besides. Then here it is,
all ready. And beautiful it looks!
Come, Father.

He trots to her side. As Trotty is stooping to sit on the steps, the CHIMES RING.

Trotty pulls off his hat and looks up toward the bells.

TROTTY

Amen!

MEG

Amen to the bells, Father?

Trotty takes his seat on the steps.

TROTTY

They broke in like a grace, my
dear. They'd say a good one, I am
sure, if they could. Many's the
kind thing they say to me.

Meg laughs as she sets a knife and fork beside Trotty.

He begins eating with great vigor.

MEG

The bells speak to you, Father?
Well!

(CONTINUED)

TROTTY

Seem to, my pet. And where's the difference? If I hear 'em, what does it matter whether they speak or not?

He points at the tower with his fork and is becoming more animated under the influence of dinner.

TROTTY (CONT'D)

Why bless you, my dear, how often have I heard them bells say, "Trotty Veck, Trotty Veck, keep a good heart, Trotty Veck!"

MEG

Well, I never!

TROTTY

And when things is very bad indeed, I mean, at the worst, then it's, "Trotty Veck, Trotty Veck, job coming soon, Trotty Veck." That way.

MEG

(with a touch of sadness)
And a job comes -- at last, Father.

TROTTY

Always. Never fails.

Busy eating, he looks up and notices Meg sitting opposite him.

Her arms are folded, and she watches Trotty's progress with a smile of happiness.

Suddenly Trotty drops his knife and fork.

TROTTY (CONT'D)

Why, Lord forgive me! My dove! Meg! Why didn't you tell me what a beast I am!

MEG

Father?

TROTTY

Sitting here, cramming and stuffing, and gorging myself, and you before me there, never so much as breaking your precious fast, nor wanting to, when --

(CONTINUED)

Meg interrupts him, laughing.

MEG

But I have broken it, Father, all to bits. I have had my dinner.

TROTTY

Nonsense. Two dinners in one day? It ain't possible! You might as well tell me that two New Year's Days will come together.

MEG

I have had my dinner, Father, for all that. And if you'll go on with yours, I'll tell you how and where, and how your dinner came to be brought, and -- and something else besides.

Trotty still appears incredulous, but Meg looks into his eyes, and, laying her hand on his shoulder, motions him to go on.

Trotty takes up his knife and fork again and goes to work, but more slowly than before, and shaking his head as if he is not at all pleased with himself.

Meg speaks after a little hesitation.

MEG (CONT'D)

I had my dinner, Father, with -- with Richard. His dinner time was early, and as he brought his dinner with him when he came to see me, we -- we had dinner together.

She waits for Trotty to say something.

After a moment, Trotty realizes what Meg is waiting for, and he speaks, because she waited.

TROTTY

Oh!

MEG

And Richard says, Father...

She stops.

TROTTY

What does Richard say, Meg?

MEG

Richard says, Father...

She stops again.

TROTTY

Richard's a long time saying it.

Meg continues, lifting up her eyes and speaking with a tremble in her voice.

MEG

Richard says, another year is nearly gone, and...

FLASHBACK BEGINS:

EXT. STEP OUTSIDE TROTTY AND MEG'S DOOR -- DAY

Earlier that day, RICHARD is sitting on the step beside Meg.

Richard is a powerful, handsome young man with eyes that sparkle and black hair that curls around his temples. He is in the midst of a serious conversation with Meg.

RICHARD

...and where is the use of waiting on from year to year when it is unlikely we shall ever be better off than we are now? We are poor now, and we shall be poor later, but we are young now, and years will make us old before we know it. And how hard, to grow old and die and think we might have cheered and helped each other. How hard in all our lives to love each other, to see each other working, changing, growing old and gray, and grieving apart.

FLASHBACK ENDS

EXT. STEPS OF THE HOUSE BY THE CHURCH -- DAY

Meg continues relating Richard's words to Trotty. She speaks sometimes with a LAUGH, and sometimes with a SOB, and sometimes with a LAUGH AND SOB together.

(CONTINUED)

MEG

Even if I got the better of it and forgot him, which I never could, oh Father, how hard to have a heart so full as mine is now, and live to have it slowly drained of every drop, without the recollection of one happy moment of a woman's life, to stay behind and comfort me and make me better!

Trotty is sitting quite still, his tripe dinner forgotten.

Meg dries her eyes and continues.

MEG (CONT'D)

So Richard says, Father...

FLASHBACK BEGINS:

EXT. STEP OUTSIDE TROTTY AND MEG'S DOOR -- DAY

Richard continues his proposal.

RICHARD

...As my work was yesterday made certain for some time to come, and as I love you and have loved you full three years -- ah! longer than that, if you knew it -- on New Year's Day, the best and happiest day in the whole year, and one that is almost sure to bring good fortune with it...will you...become my wife?

FLASHBACK ENDS

EXT. STEPS OF THE HOUSE BY THE CHURCH -- DAY

Meg looks shyly at her father.

MEG

It's a short notice, Father -- isn't it? -- but I haven't my fortune to be settled, or my wedding dress to be made like the great ladies, Father, have I?

Trotty shakes his head lightly.

(CONTINUED)

MEG (CONT'D)

Richard said so much, and said it in his way, so strong and earnest, and all the time so kind and gentle, that I said I'd come and talk to you, Father. And as they paid the money for that work of mine this morning, and as I couldn't help wishing there should be something to make this day a sort of holiday to you, as well as a dear and happy day to me, Father, I made a little meal and brought it to surprise you.

Suddenly the voice of a young man breaks in.

RICHARD (O.S.)

And see how he leaves it getting cold on the step!

A surprised Trotty and a delighted Meg look up to see Richard, wearing a broad smile.

RICHARD (CONT'D)

Meg don't know what he likes, not she!

Trotty immediately reaches up his hand to Richard and is about to address him, when the door of the house behind them opens suddenly, and a FOOTMAN nearly puts his foot into Trotty's tripe.

FOOTMAN

Out of the way, here! Must you always go and be a-sitting on our step?

Trotty, Meg, and Richard at once clear the way.

FOOTMAN (CONT'D)

Can't you go and give a turn to none of the neighbors never?

ALDERMAN CUTE, the gentleman for whom the door was opened, comes out of the house.

He is a man on the smooth downhill of life, well-dressed, with an expression of having important and wealthy engagements elsewhere.

(CONTINUED)

ALDERMAN CUTE

What's the matter here, what's the matter?

FOOTMAN

(to Trotty)

Why can't you let our doorsteps be?

ALDERMAN CUTE

(to the footman)

There! That'll do.

(to Trotty)

Hallo there! Porter, come here.

What's that? Your dinner?

Trotty has left it behind him on the step.

TROTTY

Yes, sir.

ALDERMAN CUTE

Don't leave it there. Bring it here.

Trotty does as he is told. He looks with a fixed eye and a watering mouth at the piece of tripe he has reserved as a delicious last tidbit.

Alderman Cute turns the tripe over and over on the end of the fork.

Another gentleman, MR. FILER, comes out of the house.

Filer is a low-spirited man of middle age, with a red face, as if an undue proportion of the blood in his body is squeezed up into his head.

ALDERMAN CUTE (CONT'D)

Mister Filer, come here and tell me what this is.

Filer, being exceedingly nearsighted, must move so close to the remnant of Trotty's dinner, that Trotty's heart seems to leap.

But Mr. Filer is not interested in eating the meat. He makes little punches in it with a pencil case.

FILER

This is an animal product, Alderman Cute, commonly known to the laboring population by the name of "tripe." It is, without exception,

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

FILER (cont'd)
 the least economical, the most wasteful article of consumption the markets can possibly produce. If boiled, the loss upon a pound of tripe is seven-eighths of a fifth more than the loss upon a pound of any other meat. Taking into account the number of animals slaughtered yearly, and forming a low estimate of the quantity of tripe which those animals yield, I find that the waste on that amount of tripe would feed a garrison of 500 men for five months of 31 days each, and a February over. The waste, the waste!

He looks around accusingly.

FILER (CONT'D)
 Who was eating this tripe?

Trotty stands aghast, as he seems to have starved a garrison of men with this one small meal. He makes a miserable little bow.

FILER (CONT'D)
 You were, were you? Then I'll tell you something -- you snatch your tripe, my friend, out of the mouths of widows and orphans!

TROTTY
 I hope not, sir. I'd sooner starve to death!

FILER
 Divide the amount of tripe before mentioned by the estimated number of existing widows and orphans, and the result will be one serving of tripe to each. Not a piece is left for you, sir. Consequently, you're a robber.

Trotty is so shocked that it gives him no concern to see the alderman finish the tripe himself. In fact, Trotty looks as though it is a relief to be rid of it.

ALDERMAN CUTE
 Now, you porter! Don't you ever tell me, or anybody else, that you
 (MORE)

(CONTINUED)

ALDERMAN CUTE (cont'd)
 haven't always enough to eat, and
 of the best, because I know better.
 I have tasted your tripe, and you
 can't fool me. You see, my friend,
 there's a great deal of nonsense
 talk in vogue about starvation and
 want -- "hard up," that's the
 phrase, isn't it? And I intend to
 put an end to it.

(turning to Filer)

You may put an end to anything
 among this sort of people, if you
 only know the way to go about it.

Trotty protectively takes Meg's hand and draws it through
 his arm.

The alderman notices the movement.

ALDERMAN CUTE (CONT'D)
 Your daughter, eh?

The alderman chucks Meg familiarly under the chin.

ALDERMAN CUTE (CONT'D)
 Where's her mother?

TROTTY
 Called to Heaven when Meg was born.

The alderman turns to Richard.

ALDERMAN CUTE
 And you're in love with her, are
 you?

RICHARD
 Yes. And we are going to be married
 on New Year's Day.

FILER
 What? Married!

RICHARD
 (with ridicule)
 Why, yes, we're rather in a hurry,
 you see, in case Parliament should
 "put an end" to the institution of
 marriage before the New Year.

Filer misses the ridicule in Richard's voice.

FILER

Ah! Put an end to THAT, indeed, Alderman, and you'll do something. Married! The ignorance of the first principles of political economy on the part of these people, their improvidence, their wickedness, is -- by heavens! -- enough to...Now look at that couple, will you!

Meg looks utterly confused, but Richard is simply irritated.

FILER (CONT'D)

A man may live to be as old as Methuselah, and may labor all his life for the benefit of such people as these, and may heap up facts on figures, and he can no more hope to persuade 'em that they have no right or business to be married, than he can hope to persuade 'em that they have no earthly right or business to be born. And THAT we know they haven't. We reduced it to a mathematical certainty long ago.

ALDERMAN CUTE

Come here, my girl!

Richard's irritation has been mounting wrathfully. He comes forward with a stride and stands by Meg as she approaches the alderman.

Trotty looks from face to face as wildly as a sleeper in a bad dream.

ALDERMAN CUTE (CONT'D)

Now, I'm going to give you a word or two of good advice, my girl. It's my place to give advice, you know, because I'm a justice. You know I'm a justice, don't you?

MEG

(timidly)

Yes.

ALDERMAN CUTE

You are going to be married, you say. Very unbecoming and indelicate in one of your sex. But never mind that. After you are married, you'll have children -- boys. These boys

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

ALDERMAN CUTE (cont'd)
 will grow up bad, of course, and
 run wild in the streets, without
 shoes and stockings. I'll convict
 'em summarily, every one, for I am
 determined to put an end to boys
 without shoes and stockings. Your
 husband will die young, most
 likely, and leave you with a baby.
 Then you'll be kicked out of your
 house when you can't pay, and
 you'll wander up and down the
 streets. Now don't wander near me,
 for I am resolved to put an end to
 all wandering mothers. And if you
 attempt, desperately, ungratefully,
 and impiously attempt, to hang
 yourself, or drown yourself, I'll
 have no pity for you. If there is
 one thing of which I have made up
 my mind, it is to put an end to
 suicide. So don't try it!

Meg has turned white.

Alderman Cute turns to Richard and speaks with increased
 cheerfulness.

ALDERMAN CUTE (CONT'D)
 And as for you, you bulldog, what
 are you thinking? If I were a fine,
 young, strapping chap like you, I
 should be ashamed of being milksop
 enough to pin myself to a woman's
 apron strings! Why, she'll be an
 old woman before you're a
 middle-aged man, you silly fellow!
 And a pretty figure you'll cut
 then, with a draggle-tailed wife
 and a crowd of squalling children
 crying after you wherever you go.
 Don't make such a fool of yourself
 as to get married on New Year's
 Day. You'll think very differently
 of it long before the next New
 Year, a young fellow like you, with
 all the girls running after you.
 There! Go along with you and
 repent!

Richard and Meg go along, not arm in arm, or exchanging
 glances, but she in tears, and he, gloomy and downtrodden.

The alderman now turns to Trotty.

(CONTINUED)

ALDERMAN CUTE (CONT'D)

As you happen to be here, you shall carry a letter for me. Can you be quick? You're an old man.

Trotty is distracted, looking from Meg back to the alderman.

TROTTY

I am very quick, sir, and very strong.

ALDERMAN CUTE

How old are you?

TROTTY

I'm over 60, sir.

Mr. Filer breaks in as if his patience could bear some trying, but this really is carrying matters too far.

FILER

Oh! This man's a great deal past the average age, you know.

The alderman takes the letter from his pocket and gives it to Trotty.

ALDERMAN CUTE

Never mind that. Here's the letter. Mister Filer, pay our old friend, please.

FILER

Very well.

He turns to Trotty.

FILER (CONT'D)

I'd give you a shilling, sir, but in that case you would be robbing four persons of ninepence-halfpenny apiece, so here's sixpence, and think yourself very well off to get that.

Trotty takes the payment.

TROTTY

Yes, sir. Thank you, sirs.

The alderman gives an arm to his friend and walks off in high feather. He immediately comes hurrying back alone, as if he has forgotten something.

(CONTINUED)

ALDERMAN CUTE

Porter!

TROTTY

Sir?

ALDERMAN CUTE

Take care of that daughter of yours. She's much too handsome.

The alderman turns and hurries off again toward Mr. Filer.

Trotty speaks to himself, looking at the sixpence in his hand.

TROTTY

Even her good looks are stolen from somebody or other, I suppose. She's been and robbed 500 ladies of a bloom apiece, I shouldn't wonder.

ALDERMAN CUTE

(calling back again)

She's much too handsome, my man! Take care of her. Chances are, she'll come to no good!

Trotty MUTTERS to himself, clasping his hands.

TROTTY

No good! Wrong every way. Born bad!

The CHIMES COME CLASHING IN UPON HIM, full and loud. But the tone is somehow different.

The bells seem to be ringing in a minor chord, not melodiously, but discordantly.

Trotty listens.

TROTTY (CONT'D)

The tune's changed. There's not a note of encouragement in it. Why should there be? I have no business with the New Year nor with the old one neither. Let me die.

The BELLS CONTINUE TO PEEL FORTH LOUDLY until Trotty's brain seems to reel. He presses his bewildered head between his hands as if to keep it from splitting.

As he does, he finds the letter in one hand, and is reminded of his business. He looks at the letter, which is sealed with a very large coat of arms. He reads the address.

(CONTINUED)

TROTTY (CONT'D)

The greatest district of town. How different from us!

A mist rises before his eyes.

TROTTY (CONT'D)

His daughters -- gentlemen may win their hearts and marry them --

Choked by emotion, he can't finish.

TROTTY (CONT'D)

Never mind. I know what I mean. That's more than enough for me.

EXT. ANOTHER STREET IN LONDON -- DAY

The street is full of motion, and the shops are decked out gaily. There are books and toys, glittering trinkets, new dresses, and foods everywhere.

Trotty's pace is a melancholy one. All he seems to see are things that he and Meg cannot have.

EXT. STREET IN FRONT OF A MANSION -- DAY

Trotty's trot brings him to the end of his journey.

He approaches the door of a great mansion, wipes his hands on his apron, and KNOCKS at the door.

INT. MANSION -- CONTINUOUS

At the SOUND OF THE KNOCK, TUGBY, a fat butler who sits reading, jumps out of his chair faster than he intended.

He drops his book and has a great deal of trouble trying to pick it up, because his too-tight suit is holding in quite a load of meat.

Tugby finally recovers the book, lays it on a table, and goes to answer the door.

EXT. AT THE DOOR OF THE MANSION -- CONTINUOUS

Trotty stands holding out the letter.

Tugby opens the door and undergoes some hard PANTING. When he finally finds his voice, he speaks in a fat whisper.

TUGBY
Who's it from?

TROTTY
From Alderman Cute, sir.

Tugby points to a room at the end of a long passage opening from the hall.

TUGBY
You're to take it in yourself.

INT. MANSION -- CONTINUOUS

Tugby steps back to allow Trotty to enter.

Trotty wipes his feet with great care and enters the house. He takes the way pointed out to him.

Tugby closes the door.

INT. HALLWAY -- CONTINUOUS

Trotty walks quickly down the long hall and KNOCKS at the door at the end.

SIR JOSEPH (O.S.)
Enter!

INT. SPACIOUS LIBRARY -- CONTINUOUS

At a table strewn with files and papers, a very stately woman, LADY BOWLEY, sits across from MR. FISH, a gentleman in black, who writes inside a ledger.

SIR JOSEPH BOWLEY, an older and very stately gentleman, walks up and down with one hand in his breast, and looks complacently from time to time at his own full-length portrait hanging over the fireplace.

Trotty cautiously enters the room, and is addressed impatiently by Sir Joseph Bowley.

(CONTINUED)

SIR JOSEPH

What is it? Mister Fish, will you have the goodness to attend?

FISH

I beg your pardon.

He takes the letter from Trotty, looks at it, and hands it to Sir Joseph with great respect.

FISH (CONT'D)

From Alderman Cute, Sir Joseph.

Sir Joseph breaks the seal of the letter and speaks to Trotty.

SIR JOSEPH

Wait where you are a minute.

He opens the letter and reads it quickly to himself.

SIR JOSEPH (CONT'D)

My Lady Bowley, the alderman does me the favor to inquire whether it will be agreeable to have a man named Will Fern locked away.

Lady Bowley, who is much younger than the gentleman, BLOWS HER NOSE LOUDLY and replies.

LADY BOWLEY

MOST agreeable! The worst man among them! He has been committing robberies, I hope?

SIR JOSEPH

Why, no, not quite. Very near, though. He came up to London to look for employment, trying to better himself -- that's his story -- and being found at night asleep in a shed, was taken into custody and carried before the alderman. The alderman states, very properly, that he is determined to put an end to this sort of thing, and if it will be agreeable to me to have this Will Fern locked away, he will be happy to begin with him.

LADY BOWLEY

Let him be made an example of, by all means. Last winter, when I

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

LADY BOWLEY (cont'd)
tried to introduce needlepoint and
embroidery to the men in the
village as a nice evening
pastime...

FLASHBACK BEGINS:

INT. LARGE ROOM IN THE TOWN HALL -- NIGHT

The room is unfurnished except for several wood benches and
an old piano.

Rough-looking MEN and BOYS from the village are crowded onto
the benches, and each has on his lap a piece of cloth for
sewing, embroidery, or quilting.

The men look awkward and confused as they attempt their
stitch-work.

Two LADIES work their way uneasily through the rows of
benches, trying to guide and instruct the men in their new
pursuits.

Lady Bowley stands beside the piano and asks for the
attention of the crowd.

LADY BOWLEY
Gentlemen -- I mean, men -- if you
can leave off from your crafts for
just a moment, I'd like to teach
you a little song that will help
your work go by more enjoyably.
I've had a few short lines set to
music, and if you'd care to listen
and learn, we can all sing them
together while we stitch.

The men look at each other in disbelief.

Lady Bowley nods to the PIANO PLAYER.

LADY BOWLEY (CONT'D)
If you please...

The pianist begins to play, and Lady Bowley sings.

LADY BOWLEY (CONT'D)
"O let us love our occupations
Bless the squire and his relations
Live upon our daily rations And
always know our proper stations.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

LADY BOWLEY (CONT'D) (cont'd)
 Though far behind in human races
 May we always know our places And
 accept our highers' graces Grateful
 smiles upon our faces."
 (Her song is done.)
 There! Isn't that easy?

WILL FERN, a sun-browned man with grizzled hair and a rough beard, stands up, puts his stitch work down on the bench, touches his hat, and speaks respectfully to Lady Bowley.

WILL
 I humbly ask your pardon, my lady,
 but...ain't I something different
 from a oversized girl?

All the men in the room burst into raucous LAUGHTER, as Lady Bowley, humiliated, stands silently before them.

FLASHBACK ENDS

INT. BOWLEY LIBRARY -- DAY

Lady Bowley finishes relating her story to Sir Joseph, with Mr. Fish and Trotty looking on.

LADY BOWLEY
 I expected it, of course. Who can expect anything but insolence and ingratitude from that class of people? That is not the point, however. Sir Joseph -- make an example of him!

SIR JOSEPH
 Mister Fish, if you'll have the goodness to attend.

Fish immediately seizes his pen and writes from Sir Joseph's dictation.

SIR JOSEPH (CONT'D)
 Private. My Dear Sir, I am very much indebted to you for your courtesy in the matter of the man William Fern, of whom, I regret to add, I can say nothing favorable. I have considered myself his friend, but have been repaid with ingratitude and constant opposition to my plans. He is a turbulent and
 (MORE)

(CONTINUED)

SIR JOSEPH (CONT'D) (cont'd)
rebellious spirit. Nothing will persuade him to be happy when he might. Under these circumstances it appears to me that when he comes before you again tomorrow, his committal for some term as a vagabond would be a service to society, and would set an example in a country where examples are greatly needed. And so forth.

Mr. Fish makes some finishing scribbles, Sir Joseph signs the letter, and Fish seals it.

Trotty steps forward with a rueful face and takes the letter.

SIR JOSEPH (CONT'D)
With my compliments and thanks.

Mr. Fish motions Trotty to the door. Trotty makes his little bow and leaves the room.

EXT. STREET -- DAY

It is late afternoon.

Trotty pulls his old, worn hat down on his head. He does not even lift the hat to look up at the bell tower as he comes to the old church on his return.

The steeple rises above Trotty, indistinct and faint in the murky air.

Trotty hurries past the church, trying to get away before the chimes ring again.

EXT. HOUSE OF ALDERMAN CUTE -- NIGHT

As darkness descends, Trotty delivers the letter with all possible speed, and sets off trotting homeward.

EXT. ANOTHER STREET -- NIGHT

With the approaching gloom, Trotty's quick pace, and his hat pulled down nearly over his eyes, it is only a matter of time until he trots into someone and bounces out into the road like a shuttlecock.

Trotty pulls up his hat in great confusion.

(CONTINUED)

TROTTY

I beg your pardon, I'm sure! I hope
I haven't hurt you.

The man against whom Trotty has run is none other than Will Fern.

Will stares at Trotty for a moment as if he suspects him of being in jest, because Trotty is so small that he is much more likely to be hurt himself.

Trotty asks again.

TROTTY (CONT'D)

I haven't hurt you?

Will sees that Trotty is in real concern for him.

WILL

No, friend. You have not hurt me.

Will carries a small child, LITTLE LILLIAN, asleep in his arms, and shades her face with the handkerchief he wears around his throat.

TROTTY

Nor the child, I hope?

Will glances down at the little girl and sees that she is still sleeping.

WILL

Nor the child. I thank you kindly.

Will is forlorn, tired, and soiled with travel. He walks on slowly.

Trotty stands gazing after him as Will plods wearily away, with the child's arm clinging around his neck.

Just before Will merges into the shadows at the corner, he stops walking and looks back around. He sees that Trotty is still standing there, but Will seems undecided whether to return or go on.

Finally Will starts back, and Trotty trots halfway to meet him.

WILL (CONT'D)

You can tell me, perhaps, where
Alderman Cute lives?

(CONTINUED)

TROTTY

Close at hand. I'll show you his house with pleasure.

Will follows Trotty.

WILL

I was to have gone to him tomorrow, but I'm uneasy under suspicion, and want to clear myself and be free to go and seek my bread, though I don't know where. So maybe he'll forgive my going to his house tonight.

Trotty stops.

TROTTY

It's impossible that your name's Fern?

Will turns to Trotty in astonishment.

WILL

Eh?

TROTTY

Fern. Will Fern?

WILL

That's my name.

Trotty seizes him by the arm and looks cautiously around.

TROTTY

Why then for heaven's sake don't go to see the alderman! He'll lock you away as sure as ever you were born. Here, come up this alley, and I'll tell you what I mean.

Will looks at Trotty as if he thinks him mad, but he follows nevertheless.

INT. TROTTY AND MEG'S HOME -- NIGHT

The small room, formerly a stable, has a fireplace, a ladder that leads up to a loft, and a few basic pieces of furniture. The place is poor, but tidy and clean.

Meg, alone in the humble dwelling, sits by the fire and works on her sewing. She begins to cry, and puts the cloth up to her face.

EXT. ALLEY -- NIGHT

Trotty finishes explaining to Will why he must not go to see the alderman.

TROTTY

...and that's when I ran into you in the street there. So you see, you can't go to the alderman. He'll lock you away, Lord knows how long.

WILL

It's all true enough, for the most part. I have gone against his plans, to my misfortune. For myself, I never took what wasn't my own, and never held back from work, however hard or poorly paid. But when work won't maintain me like a human creature . . . when my living is so bad, that I am hungry -- when I see a whole working life begin and end that way, without a chance or change -- then I say to the gentlefolks, "Keep away from me! My doors are dark enough without your darkening of 'em more!"

The child in Will's arms opens her eyes and looks around in wonder.

Will says a word or two in little Lillian's ear and stands her on the ground beside him. He slowly winds one of her long, blonde tresses around his finger like a ring.

WILL (CONT'D)

I'm not a cross man by nature, and easily satisfied. I bear no ill will against none of 'em. I only want to live like a man. But I can't, and so there's a pit dug between me and them that can. There's others like me. You might count 'em off by hundreds and by thousands, sooner than by ones.

Trotty nods in understanding.

WILL (CONT'D)

But I've got a bad reputation this way, and I'm afraid I'm not likely to get a better one. It ain't lawful to be low-spirited, and I AM

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

WILL (CONT'D) (cont'd)
low. Though God knows I'd sooner
bear a cheerful spirit if I could.
I don't know if this alderman could
hurt ME much by sending me to jail,
but you see -- !

He nods down toward the little girl.

TROTTY
She has a beautiful face.

Will replies in a low voice as he gently turns little
Lillian's face up toward his own.

WILL
Why, yes! I've thought so many
times. I've thought so when my
hearth was very cold, and my
cupboard very bare.

TROTTY
Is your wife living?

WILL
I never had one. Lillian's my
brother's child, an orphan. Seven
years old, though you'd hardly
think it, but she's tired and worn
out now. They'd have taken care of
her at the Union, 28 miles away
from where I live -- as they took
care of my old father when he
couldn't work no more, though he
didn't trouble 'em long. But I took
her instead, and she's lived with
me ever since. Her mother had a
friend once, in London here. We are
trying to find her, and to find
work too, but it's a large place.
But never mind. More room for us to
walk about in, Lillian.

He meets the child's eyes with a smile and then shakes
Trotsky's hand.

WILL (CONT'D)
I don't so much as know your name,
but I've opened my heart to you
because I'm thankful to you, with
good reason. I'll take your advice
and keep clear of this...

(CONTINUED)

TROTTY

Justice.

WILL

If that's what they call him. Good night. And a happy New Year.

Trotty takes Will by the arm.

TROTTY

Stay! The New Year can never be happy to me if we part like this, if I see the child and you go wandering away, you don't know where, without a shelter for your heads. Come home with me! I'm a poor man living in a poor place, but I can give you lodging for one night and never miss it. Here! I'll take her.

(lifting up the little girl)

A pretty one! I could carry 20 times her weight and never know I carried it. Tell me if I go too quick for you. I'm very fast. I always was!

Despite his boast, Trotty's thin legs quiver beneath the load he carries. He quivers in his speech as well as in his walk.

TROTTY (CONT'D)

Why, she's lighter than a peacock's feather. Here we are and here we go, Uncle Will!

He trots off toward home with the little girl and Will.

EXT. ANOTHER ALLEY -- NIGHT

Trotty, Will, and the child make their way to Trotty's room.

The little man's name and occupation are written on the door in chalk.

TROTTY

Here we are and here we go, down the alley here, Uncle Will, and stop at the black door with "T. Veck, Ticket Porter," wrote upon it.

He opens the door.

INT. TROTTY AND MEG'S HOME -- CONTINUOUS

Trotty enters the room.

TROTTY

And here we are indeed, my precious
Meg, surprising you!

He does surprise Meg. She is still in tears, sitting by the fire.

Trotty sees the tears and pauses briefly, as he decides to pretend, for the moment, that he has not seen Meg crying.

In a breathless state, Trotty sets down the little girl before his daughter in the middle of the floor.

Little Lillian looks once at Meg, and trusting everything she sees in Meg's face, runs into Meg's arms.

TROTTY (CONT'D)

Here we are and here we go!

He runs around the room, COUGHING LOUDLY.

TROTTY (CONT'D)

Here, Uncle Will, here's a fire for
you. Why don't you come over here
and sit. Meg, my precious girl,
where's the kettle?

Will walks over to the seat by the fire, and Trotty picks up the kettle somewhere in his wild course, and puts it on the fire.

TROTTY (CONT'D)

Here it is and here it goes, and
it'll boil in no time!

Meg can't help but LAUGH at her father.

Trotty looks relieved to hear her laugh.

MEG

Why, Father! You're crazy tonight,
I think. You've put the dear
child's bonnet on the kettle, and
hung the kettle lid behind the
door. I don't know what the chimes
would say to that!

(CONTINUED)

TROTTY

I didn't do it on purpose, my love.

Trotty hastily repairs his mistake.

He stations himself behind the chair in which Will is sitting, and with many mysterious gestures, he holds up the sixpence he earned earlier in the day.

TROTTY (CONT'D)

Meg, my dear, I saw, as I was coming in, half an ounce of tea lying somewhere on the stairs, and I'm pretty sure there was a loaf of bread, too. As I don't remember where it was exactly, I'll go myself and try to find 'em.

Meg seems to understand what Trotty is about to do.

MEG

Go along then, Father. We'll do well enough here 'til you get back.

Trotty quickly withdraws from the room.

EXT. TROTTY'S BUILDING -- CONTINUOUS

Trotty rushes around the corner and bangs loudly on a different door of the same building.

It is the door of a shop with a sign hanging above that reads, "Mrs. Chickenstalker's."

The stout old MRS. CHICKENSTALKER answers the door.

MRS. CHICKENSTALKER

Goodness, what's the matter?

TROTTY

Unexpected company, Mrs. Chickenstalker.

(holding up the sixpence)

I need to make a small purchase, if you please.

MRS. CHICKENSTALKER

Of course, come in, Mr. Veck.

INT. TROTTY AND MEG'S HOME -- NIGHT

At the same time, Meg is seating little Lillian in a warm corner.

Meg kneels down in front of Lillian, pulls off the child's shoes, and dries her feet with a cloth.

MEG

Poor little feet. How cold they are!

LITTLE LILLIAN

Oh, they're warmer now. They're quite warm now!

MEG

No, we haven't rubbed 'em half enough. And when they're done, we'll brush out the damp hair, and when that's done, we'll bring some color to the poor pale face with fresh water, and when that's done, we'll be so brisk and happy!

Little Lillian bursts out SOBBING, and clasps Meg around the neck.

LITTLE LILLIAN

Oh, dear Meg!

Trotty reenters the room, out of breath.

TROTTY

I had not been able to find them at first in the dark, but here they are at last, all correct.

(setting out the tea cups)

I was pretty sure it was tea and a loaf of bread, and so it was. Meg, my pet, if you'll just check to see if the water is boiling, while your unworthy father breaks the bread, we shall be ready in no time.

Meg does as she is asked.

Trotty speaks very loudly, to impress the following upon his guests.

TROTTY (CONT'D)

It's a curious circumstance, but well known to my friends, that I

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

TROTTY (CONT'D) (cont'd)
 never care myself for bread, nor
 for tea. I like to see other people
 enjoy 'em, but to me, as food,
 they're disagreeable.

Yet Trotty seems to savor the aroma of the freshly baked bread as if he likes it very much.

When he pours the boiling water into the teapot, he looks lovingly down into its depths and allows the fragrant steam to wreath his face in a thick cloud.

TROTTY (CONT'D)
 Here we are and here we go, all
 done! Come to the table, Lillian.
 Come to the table, Uncle Will,
 before Lillian beats you to it and
 eats every bite herself!

The two make their way to the table and sit to eat.

Trotty gives each of his guests a thick slice of bread.

Trotty and Meg do not eat any of the bread or drink a drop of the tea. Their occupation is to watch Will and little Lillian, who eat as if they have not had a bite in days.

Trotty and Meg find high delight in looking on. Meg smiles at Trotty, and Trotty LAUGHS at Meg, who shakes her head in response.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. TROTTY AND MEG'S HOME -- NIGHT

A little while later, Trotty sits in a corner by himself, watching Meg's face as she plays with little Lillian.

Meg tries to act happy for the guests and her father, but Trotty sees the sadness in her eyes. He speaks sorrowfully to himself.

TROTTY
 (sorrowfully, to himself)
 Poor Meg and Richard have broken
 off, I see.
 (loudly and cheerfully)
 Now, I'll tell you what. The little
 one, she sleeps with Meg, I know.

Little Lillian caresses Meg.

(CONTINUED)

LITTLE LILLIAN
With good Meg!

TROTTY
That's right! And I shouldn't
wonder if little Lillian kiss Meg's
father, won't she? I'm Meg's
father!

Little Lillian walks timidly toward Trotty, kisses him on the cheek, then falls back into Meg's arms again.

Trotty is delighted.

TROTTY (CONT'D)
She's as sensible as Solomon. I --
what was I saying, Meg?

Meg motions with her head toward Will, who is half asleep, leaning back in his chair.

TROTTY (CONT'D)
To be sure. I don't know what I'm
rambling on about tonight. My wits
are wool-gathering, I think. Will
Fern, you come along with me.
You're tired to death and broken
down for want of rest. Meg, take
Lillian with you. Get her to bed.

Meg takes little Lillian by the hand and leads her off.

TROTTY (CONT'D)
Now, Will, I'll show you where
you'll sleep. It's not much of a
place, only a loft, but having a
loft, I always say, is one of the
great conveniences of living in a
stable. There's plenty of sweet hay
up there, and it's clean as hands.
Cheer up! Don't give way. A new
heart for a New Year, always!

Trotty takes Will's trembling hand and leads him out as gently as he would lead a child.

Will follows Trotty up the ladder to the loft.

INT. MEG'S ROOM -- CONTINUOUS

At the same time, Meg is tucking little Lillian into a small bed in the tiny adjoining room.

LITTLE LILLIAN
Time to say my prayers?

MEG
(gently)
Yes, it's time.

Little Lillian clasps her small hands and closes her eyes tightly.

LITTLE LILLIAN
Dear Lord, thank you for our food,
and thank you for our warm beds.
God bless Uncle Will, and please
bless Meg, dearly, dearly! And --

She opens her eyes and looks at Meg.

LITTLE LILLIAN (CONT'D)
-- what is the name of your little
father?

MEG
They call him "Trotty."

Little Lillian closes her eyes and finishes her prayer.

LITTLE LILLIAN
And please, God, bless dear old
Trotty as well. Amen.

She slides down deep into the soft bed.

Meg pulls the covers up around little Lillian, and softly sings a lullaby.

MEG
"When worries grow, and hopes are
few And you don't know what you
should do Sometimes it's best to
let things rest To end the day, and
sleep and pray."

INT. TROTTY AND MEG'S HOME -- CONTINUOUS

At the same time, Trotty climbs back down the ladder, and stops outside Meg's room to listen to the end of the song.

MEG (O.S.)

"Pray and sleep, sleep and dream
Tonight all things aren't what they
seem Tomorrow will show us the way
Tonight we'll sleep, and dream, and
pray."

Trotty is moved by the song. He walks over to the hearth, and must work to compose himself as he begins to mend the fire.

He pulls his chair up to a little table with a lamp by the hearth. He sits, takes the newspaper from his pocket, and begins to read.

With an earnest and sad attention, Trotty skims up and down the newspaper columns and speaks quietly to himself.

TROTTY

Crimes and violence!

He stops at a story that catches his interest.

The story has a headline that reads, "DESPERATE MOTHER KILLS CHILD AND SELF."

Trotty reads a little further, then drops the paper and falls back in his chair, appalled.

TROTTY (CONT'D)

Unnatural and cruel! None but
people who are bad at heart, born
bad, who have no business on the
earth, could do such deeds. It's
too true, all I've heard today.
We're evil!

He lays the newspaper on the table and stares with worry into the fire.

Slowly, Trotty nods off to a disturbed sleep.

Suddenly, the CHIMES BURST OUT so loudly and clearly that they seem to strike Trotty in his chair. He jumps up and listens.

Most strangely, the Chimes are not only ringing, they seem to be speaking to Trotty.

(CONTINUED)

THE CHIMES (O.S.)
 Trotty Veck, Trotty Veck, Break
 your slumbers, Trotty Veck! Trotty
 Veck, Trotty Veck, Here in numbers,
 Trotty Veck!

Trotty listens, very disturbed. He speaks back to the bells.

TROTTY
 I'm sorry I ran away from you this
 afternoon!

THE CHIMES (O.S.)
 Trotty Veck, Trotty Veck, Haunt and
 hunt you, Trotty Veck! Trotty Veck,
 Trotty Veck, Waiting for you,
 Trotty Veck!

Trotty runs over to Meg's door. He TAPS SOFTLY and looks in.

INT. MEG'S ROOM -- CONTINUOUS

Meg is still kneeling by the bed, little Lillian holding
 onto her hand.

TROTTY
 Meg, do you hear anything?

MEG
 I hear the bells, Father. They're
 very loud tonight.

Trotty makes an excuse for peeping in.

TROTTY
 Is she asleep?

MEG
 So peacefully and happily. I can't
 leave her yet though, Father. Look
 how she holds my hand.

The CHIMES CONTINUE TO RING.

Trotty whispers loudly to Meg.

TROTTY
 Meg, listen to the bells!

THE CHIMES (O.S.)
 Trotty Veck, Trotty Veck, Waiting
 for you, Trotty Veck!

(CONTINUED)

Meg listens, with her face toward Trotty's, but her expression undergoes no change. She seems to hear nothing unusual, and, frowning, shakes her head.

Trotty forces a little smile and withdraws from the room.

INT. TROTTY AND MEG'S HOME -- CONTINUOUS

Trotty resumes his seat by the fire and listens to the chimes. They speak to him again.

THE CHIMES (O.S.)

Trotty Veck, Trotty Veck, Come and
see us, Trotty Veck! Trotty Veck,
Trotty Veck, Door is open, Trotty
Veck!

Trotty jumps up and hastily throws on his shawl as he speaks to himself.

TROTTY

If the tower door really is open,
what's to hinder me from going up
into the steeple and seeing for
myself? If it's shut, I don't need
any other satisfaction. That's
enough.

He slips out quietly into the street.

EXT. DOOR TO THE CHURCH TOWER -- NIGHT

A few minutes later, Trotty approaches the tower.

The door is low and arched, and stands in a dark nook. It has such great iron hinges and such a monstrous lock that there appears to be more hinge and lock than door.

Trotty approaches the door slowly, and speaks to himself to bolster his courage.

TROTTY

I'm pretty certain it should be
shut and locked, for I know this
door well, and I have rarely seen
it open.

He hesitatingly puts his hand into the dark nook as if expecting that it might be seized.

Trotty is astonished when the door opens inward with a loud squeak.

(CONTINUED)

Trotty steps back and turns to leave, but courage comes to his aid immediately.

TROTTY (CONT'D)

What have I to fear? It's a church!
Besides, the bell ringers may be
there, and have forgotten to shut
the door.

With that thought, he enters.

INT. FOOT OF THE STAIRS -- CONTINUOUS

It is very dark and quiet.

Trotty enters, feeling his way like a blind man as he goes.

Dust from the street that has blown into the recess lies heaped up at the foot of the stairs, which is so close to the door that Trotty stumbles at the very first, and strikes the door with his foot.

The door SLAMS HEAVILY SHUT.

Try as he may, Trotty cannot get the door back open.

TROTTY

Well! This is another reason for
going up.

The staircase is low and narrow.

Trotty feels his way up and around.

INT. STAIRCASE -- CONTINUOUS

Trotty slowly makes his way higher and higher.

Suddenly, his groping hand touches something.

TROTTY

Wha -- ?! What -- who's there?

Receiving no answer, he feels again.

TROTTY (CONT'D)

Oh! A door! I thought you was a
man. Or a ghost.

He tries opening the door, but it does not give.

(CONTINUED)

TROTTY (CONT'D)
Locked. So, higher up I go.

He climbs up and around.

INT. HIGHER ON THE STAIRS -- CONTINUOUS

As Trotty climbs, he begins to feel a wind.

INT. FARTHER UP THE STAIRS -- CONTINUOUS

The higher Trotty climbs, the harder the wind blows.

INT. HIGHER ON THE STAIRS -- CONTINUOUS

The wind is blowing so hard that Trotty has trouble staying on his feet.

He reaches a breast-high arched window in the tower.

Holding tightly to the wall, Trotty looks out the window.

EXT. CITY -- TROTTY'S P.O.V. -- CONTINUOUS -- NIGHT

Trotty looks down on the housetops, the smoking chimneys, and the blur of lights all mixed in mist and darkness.

INT. BACK ON THE STAIRS -- CONTINUOUS -- NIGHT

Trotty leaves the window and resumes his climb upward.

Suddenly, his hand catches in a wild mass of something that looks like hair.

Trotty SCREAMS.

But then, at his second terrified glance, Trotty sees that the stuff is a frayed rope that hangs down through an aperture in the oaken roof.

Trotty turns and quickly runs up the stairs to get away from the site of his scare.

INT. TOP OF THE STAIRS -- CONTINUOUS

Trotty, still shaken, reaches the top.

He sees the ladder that leads up to the bells, and after a moment's hesitation, he clambers up.

INT. BELFRY -- NIGHT

Ascending through the floor and pausing with his head raised just above its beams, Trotty comes among the chimes.

It is barely possible to make out their great shapes in the gloom, but there the bells hang, shadowy, dark, and silent.

Trotty climbs a little farther, and steps from the ladder to sit on the wooden floor. He listens, but hears only the WIND.

Suddenly, Trotty calls out.

TROTTY

Hallo!

Immediately Trotty's VOICE IS ECHOED BACK to him, but distorted and protracted.

Confused, out of breath, and frightened, Trotty glances around wildly, and sinks to the floor in a swoon.

EXT. CHURCH -- NIGHT

The steeple stands against black, brooding, blowing clouds.

The WIND HOWLS.

Suddenly, the BELLS BEGIN TO CHIME the midnight hour.

INT. BELFRY -- NIGHT

Trotty is awake and standing on his feet. He stares in disbelief at the chimes as they RING.

Trotty is staring incredulously because, leaping, flying, dropping, and pouring from the bells without a pause, are tiny, elfin PHANTOMS.

(CONTINUED)

The spirit-like dwarf creatures swarm around Trotty on the boards, float above him in the air, look down on him from the beams, peep in on him through knotholes in the walls, and spread away from him in enlarging circles, like water rippling away from a stone that has splashed into it.

The creatures come in all shapes and sizes.

Some are handsome, some are ugly, some exquisitely-formed, others crippled.

Some are young, some old, some cruel, some kind.

Others are merry or grim, dancing or SINGING, peaceful or tearing their hair.

Some of the creatures have wings, while others wear chains and weights.

EXT. BELFRY -- CONTINUOUS

The air is thick with the little phantoms, all restless, all violently active.

Some of the creatures fly out the tower windows, riding downward on vibrations from the chimes.

EXT. VARIOUS HOUSES -- CONTINUOUS

The spirits fly into houses, squeezing through windowsills and cracks in doors.

INT. VARIOUS HOUSES -- NIGHT -- MONTAGE

The tiny creatures become busy at sleepers' beds.

Some of the spirits try soothing people by gently smoothing the lines from frowning foreheads.

Other goblins beat people with small, knotted whips.

Some of the phantoms yell in sleepers' ears, while others play soft music with tiny instruments on sleepers' pillows.

Some of the creatures cheer with songs of birds and perfume of flowers, but other goblins flash awful faces while holding open sleeping eyelids.

Some of the little spirits move the hands of clocks forward, while others move the hands backward.

INT. BELFRY -- NIGHT

Bewildered by the restless and untiring motion of these extraordinary creatures, as well as the uproar of the STILL-RINGING BELLS, Trotty clings to a wooden pillar for support.

He turns his white face from side to side in stunned astonishment.

As Trotty gazes, the CHIMES STOP RINGING.

In an instantaneous change, the whole swarm of goblins becomes faint.

Many collapse as their speed deserts them.

They try to fly, but fall dead and melt into the air.

One STRAGGLER leaps down briskly from the surface of a bell and lights on his feet, but he disappears before he can turn around.

Some of the phantoms spin a little longer, but with every turn, become more faint and feeble and few, and soon they disappear completely.

One small HUNCHBACK has gotten into an echoing corner. He twirls and floats until at last he dwindles to a leg and then to a foot, before he finally vanishes, and the tower is silent.

Trotty watches the last spirit disappear, then he notices the chimes.

In every bell is a bearded FIGURE, gigantic, grave, and darkly watchful of Trotty.

The mysterious figures rest on nothing, poised in the air of the tower, with their draped and hooded heads merging in the shadowy roof.

A blast of cold, shrill air comes MOANING through the tower, and the figures of the bells speak, low and deep, sounding in all the bells -- the voices Trotty heard earlier from his home.

THE CHIMES

What visitor is this?

Trotty raises his hands in supplication.

(CONTINUED)

TROTTY

I thought my name was called by the chimes! I hardly know why I am here or how I came.

He pauses as he waits for the bells to reply, but they say nothing.

TROTTY (CONT'D)

I have listened to the chimes for many years. They have cheered me often.

THE CHIMES

And you have thanked them?

TROTTY

A thousand times!

THE CHIMES

How?

TROTTY

I am a poor man and could only thank them in words.

THE CHIMES

And always so? Have you never done us wrong in words?

TROTTY

Never!

THE CHIMES

Never spoken foul and false and wicked wrong of us?

TROTTY

Nev --!

He stops, and looks confused.

THE CHIMES

The voice of time cries for mankind's advancement and improvement, for man's greater worth, greater happiness, his better life. Ages of wickedness and violence have come and gone. Millions uncountable have lived, suffered, and died -- to point the way after them. He who seeks to turn mankind back, or stop him on

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

THE CHIMES (cont'd)
 his course, holds back a mighty
 engine which will strike the
 meddler dead, and be the fiercer
 and the wilder ever after, for its
 momentary stop!

TROTTY
 I never did so to my knowledge,
 sirs. It was quite by accident if I
 did. I wouldn't deliberately do it,
 I'm sure.

THE CHIMES
 He who laments for those who have
 struggles, and cries for their
 eventual loss, instead of rejoicing
 in the strength of their fight --
 he who does this, does a wrong. And
 you have done that wrong to us, the
 chimes.

Trotty clasps his hands earnestly.

TROTTY
 If you knew how often you have kept
 me company, how often you have
 cheered me when I've been low, you
 wouldn't bear malice for a hasty
 word.

THE CHIMES
 He who hears in us one note of
 disregard for any hope or joy, or
 pain or sorrow, does us wrong. That
 wrong you have done us!

TROTTY
 In my ignorance. Not meaning it!

THE CHIMES
 He who hears us echo the dull
 vermin of the earth, those who put
 down the unfortunate with broken
 spirits, does us wrong. And you
 have done that wrong.

TROTTY
 I have. Forgive me!
 (falling to his knees)
 Spare me, for mercy's sake!

THE CHIMES
Spare YOU? Look down and see what
you call yourself!

A shuttered window in the tower blows open. Trotty looks down through it.

EXT. BOTTOM OF THE TOWER -- TROTTY'S P.O.V. -- CONTINUOUS -- NIGHT

Trotty's body, crushed and motionless, lies below on the ground.

INT. BACK IN THE TOWER -- CONTINUOUS -- NIGHT

Trotty reacts to seeing his own lifeless body.

TROTTY
No more a living man!

THE CHIMES
Dead!

TROTTY
I'm dead! Gracious heaven! I missed my way in the dark tonight and fell down?

THE CHIMES
Not tonight. Ten years ago tonight.

TROTTY
What?

He looks down again.

EXT. BOTTOM OF THE TOWER -- TROTTY'S P.O.V. -- CONTINUOUS -- NIGHT

Only a shadow remains where Trotty's body had lain, and even the shadow fades as swirling leaves blow through it in the gale at the tower's base.

INT. BACK IN THE TOWER -- CONTINUOUS -- NIGHT

Trotty shudders.

(CONTINUED)

TROTTY

Ten years since I died -- how time
flies!

The voices interrupt, commanding.

THE CHIMES

Quiet! Listen.

An ORGAN SOUNDS FAINTLY in the church below.

Swelling by degrees, the MELODY ASCENDS to the roof.

Expanding more and more, the SONG RISES until the tower
walls are insufficient to contain it, and it soars into the
sky.

Trotty bursts into tears and puts his hands over his face.

The voices of the bells are more insistent.

THE CHIMES (CONT'D)

Listen!

A solemn STRAIN OF BLENDED VOICES RISES into the tower.

It is a very low and mournful song -- a dirge.

SINGERS

"We live to work, and work to live
It seems that's all life has to
give The endless toil, the dark,
the cold The hunger turns the young
to old There is no joy, all hope is
gone But always, always, life goes
on Always, always, life goes on."

As Trotty listens, he seems to recognize a voice in the
song.

TROTTY

She is dead! Meg is dead! Her
spirit calls to me. I hear her
voice among the singers!

THE CHIMES

The spirit of your child bewails
the dead, and mingles with the dead
-- dead hopes, dead dreams, dead
imaginings of youth -- but she is
living. Learn from her life, a
living truth. Learn how bad the bad
are born, from the creature dearest

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

THE CHIMES (cont'd)
to your heart. Follow her. To
desperation!

Each of the bell-figures stretches out an arm and points.

THE CHIMES (CONT'D)
A spirit of the chimes is your
companion. It stands behind you.
Go!

Trotty turns to find little Lillian, the little girl whom
Will Fern had carried in the street.

The bell-figures draw back their outstretched hands, and
dissolve into bells again. The BELLS BEGIN TO CHIME.

Once again, vast multitudes of goblins spring from the bells
into existence.

And once more, the phantoms are frantically busy with their
fantastic duties.

Trotty turns and calls out to the child through the NOISE.

TROTTY
If I am not mad, what are these?

LITTLE LILLIAN
Spirits of the Chimes. Their sound
upon the air. They take the shapes
that the thoughts and hopes of
mortals give them.

The BELLS STOP RINGING, and again the little spirits weaken
and fade, dwindling into nothing on the ending of the sound.

TROTTY
And you, what are you?

LITTLE LILLIAN
Hush! Look here.

INT. TROTTY AND MEG'S HOME -- NIGHT

Suddenly Trotty finds himself back at his home with the
child.

But the room is different -- poorer and meaner than before.

Meg sits working at embroidery, but she is changed as well.
The light in her eyes has dimmed. The bloom has faded from
her cheeks.

(CONTINUED)

Ten years older, Meg is still beautiful, but her hopes and dreams seem to have died within her, and it shows in her face.

Trotty starts to embrace Meg, but his arms pass through her as if he is no more substantial than the wind.

Trotty realizes that such efforts are useless. He trembles and brushes away a tear.

Meg looks up from her work to see a very pretty young woman, the ADULT LILLIAN, with familiar curls in her blonde hair.

Trotty recognizes her at a glance, but he looks confusedly from the young woman to the child, and back to the young woman again.

TROTTY

Little Lillian! All grown up!

Trotty looks with awe into the spirit child's face, where he sees something lofty, undefined, and indistinct, something that makes the face seem only a fading remembrance of the little girl.

TROTTY (CONT'D)

Then, who -- what are YOU?

LITTLE LILLIAN

Hardly more than a memory. Listen!
They speak.

ADULT LILLIAN

Meg...

(hesitating)

...how often you raise your head
from your work to look at me.

Meg smiles.

MEG

Are my looks so altered that they
frighten you, Lillian?

ADULT LILLIAN

No, of course not. But you never
smile when you look at me.

MEG

I do so. Do I not?

(CONTINUED)

ADULT LILLIAN

Now you do, but not usually. When you think I'm busy and don't see you, you look so anxious and so doubtful that I hardly like to raise my eyes. There is little cause for smiling in this hard and toilsome life, but you were once so cheerful.

MEG

Am I not now?

Smiling, she rises to embrace Lillian.

MEG (CONT'D)

Do I make our weary life even more weary to you, Lillian?

ADULT LILLIAN

You have been the only thing that made it LIFE, sometimes the only thing that made me care to live at all. Such work! So many long nights of hopeless, cheerless, never-ending work! And not to heap up riches, not to live grandly, mind you, but to earn bare bread, to scrape together just enough to keep us alive in the consciousness of our hard fate!

ADULT LILLIAN (CONT'D)

(twining her arms around herself as if in pain)

Oh, Meg, how can the cruel world go 'round and bear to look upon such lives?

Meg soothes her, brushing Lillian's hair back from her face.

MEG

Why, Lillian! You! So pretty and so young --

Lillian interrupts, holding Meg at arm's length and looking into her face imploringly.

ADULT LILLIAN

That's the worst part of all! I wish I were old, Meg! Withered, and shriveled, and free from the dreadful thoughts that tempt me in my youth!

(CONTINUED)

Trotty tries to question the spirit child.

TROTTY
But why can't she --

He turns to look at the little girl, but she is gone.

TROTTY (CONT'D)
Where are you?

He turns back to see Meg and Lillian, but then his face shows a look of sudden surprise.

TROTTY (CONT'D)
Where am I?

INT. BOWLEY HALL -- NIGHT

Two large banners hang in the great hall. One wishes a "Happy New Year" and the other, "Happy Birthday, Lady Bowley."

Trotty's ghost is there, wandering around drearily.

The hall is full of other VISITORS as well, including Alderman Cute and Mr. Filer, both a decade older since last seen.

The alderman is speaking to Filer.

ALDERMAN CUTE
...and after dinner in the great hall, Sir Joseph Bowley, friend and father to the poor, will make his speech. Plum puddings are to be eaten by the invited poor and their poor children -- in another room, of course...

FILER
Of course.

ALDERMAN CUTE
...and at a given signal, the invited poor will flock in amongst the rest of us, forming a family-like assemblage, where not one eye will be unmoistened by emotion! But even more than this, Sir Joseph Bowley, Baronet and Member of Parliament, is to play a match of skittles with his tenants!

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

ALDERMAN CUTE (cont'd)

Which quite reminds me of the days
of old. Of stout, bluff King Henry.
Ah! Fine character.

FILER

Very. For marrying women and
murdering 'em.

The alderman turns and speaks to a BOY, age 9, standing
beside him.

ALDERMAN CUTE

You'll marry the beautiful ladies,
and NOT murder 'em, eh, young Sir
Bowley? We shall have this little
gentleman in Parliament before we
know where we are.

Trotty wanders up to them.

Alderman Cute holds the boy by his shoulders and looks as
reflective as is possible for him.

ALDERMAN CUTE (CONT'D)

We shall hear of his successes at
the poll, his speeches in the
House, his overtures from
governments, his brilliant
achievements of all kinds, I'll be
bound, before we have time to look
about us!

Trotty looks down at young Bowley's feet.

TROTTY

It's a good thing he's wearing
shoes and stockings, eh, Alderman?
If he was barefoot, you'd have to
lock him away!

Trotty turns from them and roams among the company, looking
for his spirit-guide.

As Trotty wanders, he encounters Mr. Fish, Sir Joseph's
confidential secretary, who is in great agitation.

FISH

Bless my heart and soul! Where's
Alderman Cute?
(calling out)
Has anybody seen the alderman?

The alderman is very near.

(CONTINUED)

ALDERMAN CUTE
I'm here, I'm here, what's all
this?

Mr. Fish takes the alderman into a near window.

Trotty joins the two there, as if by accident in his wanderings.

FISH
My dear Alderman Cute...

He glances around, and seems to feel they do not have enough privacy.

FISH (CONT'D)
A little more this way.

He motions the alderman deeper into the window. Alderman Cute follows.

FISH (CONT'D)
The most dreadful circumstance has occurred. I have this moment received the intelligence. I think it will be best not to acquaint Sir Joseph with it 'til the day is over. You understand him, and will give me your opinion.

Fish shakes his head and repeats an earlier thought to himself.

FISH (CONT'D)
The most frightful and deplorable event!

ALDERMAN CUTE
Fish! My good fellow, what is the matter? Nothing revolutionary, I hope! No attempted interference with the magistrates?

Mr. Fish shakes his head.

FISH
Deedles, the banker -- who was to have been here tonight --

ALDERMAN CUTE
Not dead! It can't be!

(CONTINUED)

FISH

Shot himself.

ALDERMAN CUTE

Good God!

Trotty is startled as well.

FISH

Put a double-barreled pistol to his mouth, in his own countinghouse, and blew his brains out. No motive.

ALDERMAN CUTE

A man of noble fortune. One of the most respectable of men. Suicide, Mister Fish! By his own hand!

FISH

This very morning.

ALDERMAN CUTE

Oh, the brain, the nerves, the mysteries of this machine called Man! Oh, the little thing that unhinges it, poor creatures that we are. Perhaps it was caused by a bad dinner, Mister Fish. Perhaps by a bad fish dinner. Or maybe it was the conduct of his son, who, I have heard, ran very wild. Deedles was one of the most respectable men I ever knew. A lamentable instance, Mister Fish. A public calamity. I'll be in the deepest mourning. I shall make a point of wearing black. At least 'til Saturday. If I think of it.

(shaking his head)

Only the Almighty above knows all the answers. We must submit, Mister Fish. We must submit.

Trotty is indignant.

TROTTY

What, Alderman? No mention of "putting an end" to suicide? Remember, sir, your high moral boast and pride. Come, Justice, balance those scales! If it had been some poor woman, dried by starving misery and rendered mad by

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

TROTTY (cont'd)
 claims that her offspring has no
 authority even to be on the planet,
 would your words of sympathy have
 been the same?

But the alderman cannot hear Trotty, and Cute finishes his
 conversation with Mr. Fish.

ALDERMAN CUTE
 I'll assist you in breaking the
 melancholy catastrophe to Sir
 Joseph when the day is over.

He shakes Mr. Fish's hand.

ALDERMAN CUTE (CONT'D)
 The most respectable of men. I
 hardly know why such afflictions
 are allowed on earth.

INT. GREAT HALL -- NIGHT

Later in the evening, Sir Joseph is finishing his speech to
 all the guests with a toast.

SIR JOSEPH
 ...and after drinking to Lady
 Bowley's health, what is left? My
 friends, and others -- to the
 dignity of labor!

Suddenly there is a disturbance at the bottom of the hall.

After some confusion, NOISE, and opposition, one man breaks
 through the rest, and stands by himself.

The man is worn, old, bent, and miserably dressed. But with
 the blaze of lamps on the man's gray head, Trotty recognizes
 him.

TROTTY
 Will Fern!

SIR JOSEPH
 What is this? Who gave this man
 admittance? This is a criminal from
 prison! Mister Fish, WILL you have
 the goodness --

(CONTINUED)

WILL

A minute!

He turns his head and addresses Lady Bowley.

WILL (CONT'D)

My Lady, you was born on this day
along with the New Year. Give me a
minute's leave to speak.

Lady Bowley waves her hand as if she is slightly disgusted.

LADY BOWLEY

Let him, and be done with it.

Sir Joseph is unsure, but takes his seat.

Will makes a humble bow.

WILL

Gentlefolks, you've just drank to
the laborer. Look at me.

FISH

Just come from jail.

WILL

Just come from jail, and neither
for the first time, nor the second,
nor the third, nor even the fourth.

FILER

Four times is quite over the
average. He ought to be ashamed of
himself.

WILL

Gentlefolks. Look at me! You see
I'm at the worst. Beyond all hurt
or harm, beyond your help, for the
time when your kind words or kind
actions could have done ME good --
 (striking his chest and
 shaking his head)
-- is gone. But let me say a word
for others, and while you're all
together, hear the real truth spoke
out for once.

SIR JOSEPH

There's not a man here who would
have you for a spokesman.

Will's voice has a trembling in it now and then.

(CONTINUED)

WILL

Likely enough, Sir Joseph. But not the less true, perhaps, is what I say. Gentlefolks, I've lived many a year in this place. How hard, how bitter hard I've lived here, I won't say. 'Tis harder than you think, gentlefolks, to grow up decent in such a place. That I grewed up a man and not an animal, says something for me. As I am now, there's nothing can be said for me. I'm past it.

SIR JOSEPH

(quietly to those close by)
I'm glad this man has entered. Don't disturb him. He is a living example. I hope that it will not be lost upon anyone here.

Will continues speaking to the crowd.

WILL

I dragged on, somehow, so heavy, that I couldn't put on a cheerful face, or make believe that I was anything but what I was. Now, you gentlemen that sits at Sessions, when you see a man with discontent on his face, you says to one another, "He's suspicious. Watch that fellow!" I don't say it ain't understandable, I'm just saying it's true. And from that hour, whatever the man says, or does, or doesn't do, it goes against him.

Alderman Cute sticks his thumbs in his waistcoat pockets, leans back in his chair, and smiles.

ALDERMAN CUTE

The common cry. Excuses, excuses!

WILL

Now, gentlemen, see how your laws are made to trap and hunt us when we're brought to this. I tries to live elsewhere, and I'm a vagabond. To jail with him! I comes back here, goes hunting for nuts in your woods, and I'm a trespasser. To jail with him! I has a natural

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

WILL (cont'd)
angry word with that man when I'm
free again. To jail with him! I
cuts a stick. To jail with him! I
eats a rotten turnip. To jail with
him! It's 20 miles away, and coming
back I begs a trifle on the road.
To jail with him! At last, anybody
finds me anywhere, doing anything,
and it's to jail with him, for he's
a vagrant, and a known jailbird,
and jail's the only home he's got!

ALDERMAN CUTE
A very good home, too.

Will hears this and loses his temper.

WILL
Do I say this to serve MY cause?
Who can give me back my liberty,
who can give me back my good name,
who can give me back my innocent
niece? Not all the lords and ladies
in wide England! But gentlemen,
dealing with other men like me,
begin at the right end. Give us, in
mercy, better homes when we're
lying in our cradles. Give us
better food when we're working for
our lives. Give us kinder laws to
bring us back when we've gone
wrong. And don't set jail, jail,
jail before us, everywhere we turn.
If you'll do these things, there
ain't a condescension you can show
the laborer that he won't take, as
ready and as grateful as a man can
be, for he has a patient, peaceful,
and willing heart. But you must put
the rightful spirit in him first,
or the day will come when even the
Bible changes in his altered mind,
and the words seem to him to read,
as they have sometimes read in my
own eyes: "Whither thou goest, I
CANNOT go; where thou lodgest, I do
NOT lodge; thy people are NOT my
people, nor thy God, MY God!"

Trotty is greatly moved by Will's words.

He shakes his head, then looks puzzled as he glances around.

(CONTINUED)

TROTTY

What now?

INT. TROTTY AND MEG'S HOME -- NIGHT

Meg is again before Trotty, seated at her work.

But now, their garret is poorer and meaner than ever before, and Meg sits alone, straining her eyes until it is too dark to see the threads.

She lights a candle and works on.

Trotty looks down at Meg's grief-worn face.

He starts to speak to her, but then realizes the effort is futile. He begins crying quietly.

There is a KNOCK at the door, and Meg rises and opens it.

On the threshold is a slouching, drunken man with matted hair and an unshaven face, but with traces of having been a man of good features in his youth.

Meg steps back a pace or two from the open door, silently and sorrowfully looking upon the man.

RICHARD

May I come in, Meg?

MEG

Yes. Come inside, Richard.

Trotty's mouth opens in shock.

TROTTY

Richard?!

Meg gives Richard her chair. She stands close by, waiting to hear what he has to say.

Richard sits, however, just staring vacantly at the floor with an empty smile.

He is a spectacle of such a miserable downfall, that Meg puts her hands before her face and turns away.

Roused by the rustling of Meg's dress, Richard lifts his head and begins to speak as if there has been no pause since he entered.

(CONTINUED)

RICHARD

Still at work, Meg? You work late.

MEG

I generally do.

RICHARD

And early?

MEG

And early.

RICHARD

So she said. She said you never tire, or never admitted that you tire. Not all the time you lived together. Not even when you fainted, between working and fasting. But I told you that, the last time I came.

MEG

You did. And I implored you to tell me nothing more, and you made me a solemn promise, Richard, that you never would.

RICHARD

A solemn promise. To be sure. But how can I help it, Meg? What am I to do? She has been to see me again.

MEG

Again? Oh, does she think of me so often? Has she been again?

RICHARD

Twenty times again. Meg, she haunts me. She comes behind me in the street and thrusts money in my hand. Before I can turn my head, her voice is in my ear, saying, "Richard, don't look around. For heaven's love, give Meg this!" She brings it where I live, she sends it in letters, she taps at the window and lays it on the sill. What can I do? Look at it!

He holds out a money bag, and pours the coins into his hand until they spill over onto the floor.

(CONTINUED)

MEG

Hide it! When she comes again, tell her, Richard, that I love her in my soul. Tell her I never lie down to sleep but that I bless her, and pray for her. That in my solitary work, I never cease to have her in my thoughts. Tell her she is with me night and day, and if I die tomorrow, I will remember her with my last breath. But I cannot look upon that money!

Richard slowly pulls back his hands, pouring the coins back into the bag.

RICHARD

(with drowsy thoughtfulness)
I told her so, as plain as words could speak. I've taken it back and left it at her door a dozen times since then. But when she came at last and stood before me face to face, what could I do?

MEG

Oh, Richard...

RICHARD

There she stood, trembling. She had so many questions. "How does Meg look, Richard? Does she ever speak of me? Is she thinner? What's in my old place at the table?" There she was. I heard her ask.

Meg leans close to Richard to listen. Tears stream from her eyes.

With his arms resting on his knees and stooping forward in his chair, Richard continues.

RICHARD (CONT'D)

Then she said --

FLASHBACK BEGINS:

EXT. RICHARD'S DOOR -- NIGHT

Lillian, her face in heavy makeup and her attire immodest, stands in the cold outside Richard's door, pulling a shawl tightly around her and holding the purse out in front of her.

Richard stands at his door, listening to Lillian.

ADULT LILLIAN

Richard, I have fallen very low,
and you may guess how much I have
suffered in having this money sent
back, when it is all I can bear to
bring it to you. But you loved Meg
once dearly, even in my memory.
Others stepped in between you,
fears and jealousies, and doubts,
and vanities estranged you from
her, but you did love her.

FLASHBACK ENDS

INT. MEG'S ROOM -- NIGHT

Richard continues.

RICHARD

...but you did love her, she said.
I suppose I did.

(a pause)

I know I did. But that's neither
here nor there. Then Lillian said

--

FLASHBACK BEGINS:

EXT. RICHARD'S DOOR -- NIGHT

Lillian continues speaking to Richard.

ADULT LILLIAN

Oh, Richard, if you ever did love
Meg, if you have any memory for
what is gone and lost, take this
money to her once more. Once more!

She takes Richard's hands.

(CONTINUED)

ADULT LILLIAN (CONT'D)

Tell Meg how I put your hands in my hands, where her own hands might have been, and was so humble to you, Richard. Tell her that you looked into my face, and saw that the beauty which she used to praise is all gone, and in its place, a poor hollow cheek that she would weep to see. Tell Meg everything, and take the money back, and she will not refuse again. She will not have the heart.

FLASHBACK ENDS

INT. MEG'S ROOM -- NIGHT

Richard finishes telling Meg of Lillian's visit.

RICHARD

"...she will not have the heart."
So won't you take the money, Meg?

Meg shakes her head and motions for Richard to leave.

After a pause, he rises.

MEG

Good night.

RICHARD

Good night, Meg.

He walks toward the door, then turns to look at Meg a last time.

For a moment, a flash of Richard's old bearing is seen.

Then the moment passes, and he leaves as he had come.

Meg sits back down to her work. She has a small fire, and she notices that it needs more coal.

She rises to mend the fire, and the chimes RING half-past the hour.

When the bells cease, Meg hears a GENTLE KNOCKING at her door.

Before she can respond, the door opens.

Meg recognizes the entering figure.

(CONTINUED)

MEG

Lillian!

Lillian walks to Meg as swiftly as she seems able, pain flashing across her face as she falls to her knees before Meg. Lillian clings to Meg's dress.

MEG (CONT'D)

Up, Lillian! My dear girl --

ADULT LILLIAN

Never again, Meg. Here, close to you, holding to you!

MEG

Yes, we're together! Lillian, in my heart you're my child, you know that. No mother's love can be more dear.

ADULT LILLIAN

When I first looked into your face, you knelt before me. On my knees before you, let me die. Let it be here.

MEG

You have come back! We will stay together, work together, hope together, die together!

ADULT LILLIAN

Oh Meg, fold your arms around me. Look kindly on me, but don't raise me. Let it be here. Let me see the last of your dear face here. Forgive me, Meg. Forgive me. I know you do, I see you do, but say so, Meg.

MEG

I forgive you, Lillian.

She kisses Lillian's cheek.

MEG (CONT'D)

Of course I forgive you.

She holds Lillian in her arms.

ADULT LILLIAN

His blessing on you, Meg. He suffered her to sit beside His

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

ADULT LILLIAN (cont'd)
 feet, and dry them with her hair.
 Oh, Meg, what mercy and compassion!

A look of dreadful pain passes over Lillian's face, and then she relaxes into an expression of final peace.

Trotty watches as Lillian dies.

The spirit of the child, innocent and radiant, returns to Trotty.

The child touches Trotty's hand, and he looks at her.

The chimes RING MIDNIGHT.

EXT. BELL TOWER -- NIGHT

The chimes TOLL the 12 o'clock hour in the black of the winter night.

INT. MEG'S ROOM -- NIGHT

The spirit of the child speaks to Trotty.

LITTLE LILLIAN
 More time has passed.

Richard is now in Meg's room. He looks desperate and panicked as he speaks to Meg.

Trotty and the child look on.

RICHARD
 I've sunk lower and lower, until no one will employ me. I believe I am incorrigible. There is only one person in the world who has a chance of reclaiming me, and it ever has been so. Please, Meg, I pray you, save me!

MEG
 What you were once to me, is buried in a grave beside what I was once to you.
 (after a thoughtful pause)
 But in the hope of saving you, for the love of the lighthearted girl, you remember her, who was to have been married on a New Year's Day,

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

MEG (cont'd)
and for the love of her Richard --
God help me, but I must make the
trial. Lillian trusted you, and I
could never forget that.

The child takes Trotty's hand.

TROTTY
Must we leave her again? Just as
she has a chance at happiness?

LITTLE LILLIAN
(nods)
Look, over here.

She points to the next scene.

INT. MRS. CHICKENSTALKER'S ROOM -- NIGHT

Mrs. Chickenstalker and a familiar-looking man sit before a bright fire. The two of them are fat, rosy-cheeked, and comfortable.

On the table between them is the remains of their recent fare of hot tea and muffins.

A fat, basking CAT PURRS and washes its whiskers near a half-empty bowl of milk near the fire.

Each half of the cozy couple nods off into a doze as the two watch the glowing sparks that drop into the grate.

The firelight gleams in the little room and on the panes of window glass in the door.

Half-drawn curtains across another door separate the chamber from the little shop beyond.

INT. SHOP -- NIGHT

The little room is choked with the abundance of its stock.

Loaves of bread, balls of thread, ropes of onions, wheels of cheese, oil lamps, candles, and jars of pickles crowd the tables and shelves of the store.

Trotty and the spirit child appear.

Trotty looks back at the couple by the fire.

(CONTINUED)

TROTTY

That's Mrs. Chickenstalker, but
who's that with her? Has she a
husband now?

The child nods.

TROTTY (CONT'D)

Who is he? I know his face.

FLASHBACK BEGINS:

EXT. DOOR OF SIR JOSEPH BOWLEY'S MANSION -- DAY

In his mind's eye, Trotty remembers the fat butler, Tugby,
opening the door for him.

Tugby undergoes some hard panting before finally finding his
voice and speaking in a fat whisper.

TUGBY

Who's it from?

FLASHBACK ENDS

INT. MRS. CHICKENSTALKER'S SHOP -- NIGHT

Trotty's frown vanishes as he remembers the man.

TROTTY

Why, it's the butler from Sir
Joseph's!

INT. MRS. CHICKENSTALKER'S ROOM -- NIGHT

The former butler stretches his fat legs before the fire and
rubs them.

TUGBY

What sort of a night is it, dearie?

His wife answers with enthusiasm.

MRS. CHICKENSTALKER

Blowing and sleeting hard, Tugby,
and threatening snow. Dark. And
very cold.

(CONTINUED)

TUGBY

I'm glad to think we have muffins.
It's a sort of night that's meant
for muffins. Likewise crumpets.

Still rubbing his legs, Tugby LAUGHS as if someone has tickled him.

MRS. CHICKENSTALKER

You're in spirits, Tugby my dear.

TUGBY

No, not particularly. I'm just a
little elevated. The muffins came
so timely!

With that, he LAUGHS until his fat legs rise into the air.

TUGBY (CONT'D)

I told you, I find myself a little
elevated. So, it's blowing and
sleeting and threatening snow, and
it's dark and very cold, is it, my
dear?

MRS. CHICKENSTALKER

Hard weather indeed.

TUGBY

Aye. Years are like Christians in
that respect. Some of 'em die hard,
some of 'em die easy. This one
hasn't many hours to run, and is
making a fight for it. I like it
all the better. Well, here I sit if
the weather's bad, and I'll not go
out if the weather's good.

The BELL RINGS on the outer door.

TUGBY (CONT'D)

There's a customer, my love.

Mrs. Chickenstalker (now Mrs. Tugby) rises and walks out into the shop.

INT. SHOP -- CONTINUOUS

Mrs. Chickenstalker enters the crowded little room.

(CONTINUED)

MRS. CHICKENSTALKER
Now then. What's wanted?

Suddenly she recognizes her customer.

MRS. CHICKENSTALKER (CONT'D)
Oh! I beg your pardon, sir, I'm
sure. I didn't know it was you.

She makes this apology to a DOCTOR in black who wears a hat
and carries a black medical bag.

The doctor sits on a beer barrel and nods in return.

DOCTOR
This is bad business upstairs, Mrs.
Chickenstalker -- I mean, Mrs.
Tugby. The man upstairs can't live.

Tugby comes out into the shop to join them. He speaks to his
wife.

TUGBY
He must go, you know, before he's
gone.

The doctor in black shakes his head.

DOCTOR
I don't think you can move him. I
wouldn't take the responsibility of
saying it could be done. You had
better leave him where he is. He
can't live long.

Tugby brings the butter scale down upon the counter with a
CRASH by weighing his fist on it.

TUGBY
It's the only subject that we've
ever had a word upon, she and me,
and look what it comes to! He's
going to die here after all. Going
to die in our house!

MRS. CHICKENSTALKER
And where should he have died,
Tugby?

TUGBY
In the workhouse. What are
workhouses for?

(CONTINUED)

MRS. CHICKENSTALKER

Not for that! Neither did I marry you for that. I won't allow it, Tugby. I'd be separated first, and never see your dear face again. When my widow's name stood over that door, as it did for many years, this house being known as "Mrs. Chickenstalker's," I knew him as a handsome, steady, independent youth. I knew her as the sweetest-looking, sweetest-tempered girl eyes ever saw. I knew her father, poor old creature, he fell down from the steeple walking in his sleep and killed himself. He was the simplest, hardest-working man that ever drew breath.

Trotty wipes his eyes as he listens.

Mrs. Chickenstalker dries her eyes and shakes her head and her handkerchief at Tugby with an expression of firmness.

MRS. CHICKENSTALKER (CONT'D)

And when I turn them out of house and home, may angels turn me out of heaven! As they would! And serve me right.

TROTTY

Bless her!

Tugby stands staring at his wife, without attempting to reply.

The doctor speaks to the kind woman.

DOCTOR

There's something interesting about the woman even now. How did she come to marry him?

Mrs. Chickenstalker takes a seat near the doctor.

MRS. CHICKENSTALKER

Why that is not the least cruel part of her story, sir. You see they kept company, she and Richard, many years ago. When they were a young and beautiful couple, everything was settled, and they were to have been married on a New

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

MRS. CHICKENSTALKER (cont'd)

Year's Day. But somehow, Richard got it into his head, through what an alderman told him, that he might do better, and that he'd soon regret the marriage, and that Meg wasn't good enough for him, and that a young man of spirit had no business to be married.

DOCTOR

Oh, no.

MRS. CHICKENSTALKER

True as my word. And the alderman frightened Meg, and made her fearful of Richard deserting her, and of her children coming to the gallows, and of its being wicked to be man and wife. In short, their trust in one another was broken, and so was the engagement. But the fault was Richard's. Meg would have married him, sir, joyfully. I've seen her heart swell many times afterward when Richard passed her in a proud and careless way, and never did a woman grieve more truly for a man than Meg did for Richard when he first went wrong.

DOCTOR

Oh, he went wrong, did he?

MRS. CHICKENSTALKER

Well, sir, I don't know that he rightly understood himself, you see. I think his mind was troubled by their having broke with one another, and if it weren't for being ashamed before the alderman, and perhaps for being uncertain too, how Meg might answer, he'd have gone through any suffering to have had Meg's hand again. That's my belief. But he never said so, more's the pity. He took to drinking, idling, bad companions, all the fine resources that were to have been so much better for him than the home he might have had with Meg. He lost his looks, his character, his health, his friends, his work, everything.

(CONTINUED)

DOCTOR

He didn't lose everything, Mrs. Mrs. Tugby, because he gained a wife.

MRS. CHICKENSTALKER

I'm coming to it, sir. This went on for years and years. Meg, poor thing, endured miseries enough to wear her life away. At last, Richard was so cast down, and cast out, that doors were shut upon him, go where he would. Finally one night he went to Meg and made a prayer to her to save him.

DOCTOR

Ah! Well, and she?

MRS. CHICKENSTALKER

She came to me that night to ask if they could live here. So they were married and when they came here I hoped that the prophesies that parted them when they were young, would not be fulfilled.

The doctor gets up from the cask and stretches himself.

DOCTOR

I suppose he used her ill as soon as they were married?

Mrs. Chickenstalker shakes her head and wipes her eyes.

MRS. CHICKENSTALKER

I don't think he ever did that. He got on better for a short time, but his habits were too old and strong to be gotten rid of. He soon fell back to the drink a little, and was falling back fast when his illness came upon him. There he has been lying now, these weeks and months. Between Richard and her baby --

TROTTY

Her baby!

MRS. CHICKENSTALKER

-- Meg has not been able to do her old work, and by not being able to be regular, she has lost the job,

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

MRS. CHICKENSTALKER (cont'd)
even if she could have done it. How
they have lived, I hardly know.

TUGBY
I know. By not paying what they
owe!

Suddenly there is a CRY OF LAMENTING from nearby.

The doctor moves hurriedly to the door. He looks back to
Mrs. Chickenstalker and Tugby.

DOCTOR
My friends, you needn't discuss
whether he shall be moved or not.
He has spared you that trouble, I
believe.

The doctor hurries upstairs, followed by Mrs.
Chickenstalker.

The voices of the chimes call out to Trotty.

THE CHIMES (O.S.)
Follow her! Follow her! Learn it
from the creature dearest to your
heart!

Trotty and the spirit child float out after Mrs.
Chickenstalker.

Tugby PANTS AND GRUMBLES after them at leisure.

INT. MEG AND RICHARD'S ROOM -- NIGHT

Moments later, Meg, now a haggard, wretched woman, is
WEEPING by the bed, pressing to her breast and hanging her
head over her tiny baby.

The doctor lays his hand upon Richard's heart and listens
for breath.

Slowly, the doctor rises.

DOCTOR
His pain is over.

Mrs. Chickenstalker moves to comfort Meg.

Tugby enters, sees what has happened, and speaks to Meg.

(CONTINUED)

TUGBY

Come, come! You mustn't give up,
you know. That won't do. You must
fight. What would have become of me
if I had given up when I was a
butler, and we had SIX runaway
carriages at our door in one night?
I fell back upon my strength of
character, that's what I did! And
you must do the same.

Mrs. Chickenstalker gives Tugby a look of exasperation.

Tugby sees the look, but does not understand.

TUGBY (CONT'D)

What?

Trotty again hears the voices of the unrelenting chimes
speaking to him.

THE CHIMES (O.S.)

Follow her!

Trotty turns toward the spirit child and sees her rising
from him, passing through the air.

LITTLE LILLIAN

Follow her!

The little girl vanishes.

Trotty hovers around Meg and looks into her face. He floats
around Meg's baby as it CRIES feebly.

Trotty puts his hands to his face and weeps.

TROTTY

Oh, God be thanked! She loves her
child!

When Trotty takes his hands from his face, only Meg and the
baby remain in the room. Everyone else has vanished.

TROTTY (CONT'D)

More time has passed...?

Meg, walking back and forth, holds her baby and SINGS
FAINTLY to it in its sleep.

MEG

"Pray and sleep, sleep and dream
Tonight all things aren't what they

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

MEG (cont'd)
seem Tomorrow will show us the way
Tonight we'll sleep, and dream -- "

She looks up as her door is softly opened. Will Fern looks in.

WILL
For the last time.

MEG
Will!

He enters, closes the door softly, and listens like a hunted man. He speaks in whispers.

WILL
Meg, my race is nearly run. I
couldn't finish it without a
parting word with you. Without one
grateful word.

Meg looks suddenly frightened at Will's words.

MEG
What have you done?

Will makes a gesture as if to brush Meg's question aside.

WILL
It's long ago now, Meg, but that
night we first met is as fresh in
my memory as ever it was. We little
thought then, that we should ever
meet like this.

He looks at Meg's baby.

WILL (CONT'D)
Your child, Meg? Let me have it in
my arms. Let me hold your child.

He trembles as he takes the baby.

WILL (CONT'D)
Is it a girl?

MEG
Yes.

Will puts his hand in front of the baby's face.

WILL

See how weak I've grown, Meg, when I need courage to look at her. Let her be, a moment. I won't hurt her. It's been a long time, but -- what's her name?

MEG

Lillian.

Will is moved.

WILL

I'm glad of that. I'm glad of that!

He seems to breathe more freely, and after pausing for an instant, he takes away his hand and looks at the baby's face.

WILL (CONT'D)

Lillian!

He gives the baby back to Meg as quickly as he can.

WILL (CONT'D)

It's Lillian's face!

MEG

What?

WILL

MY Lillian's! I held the same face in my arms the night Lillian's mother died and left her.

Meg sits in a chair, pressing the baby to her breast, and weeping over it.

She releases the infant from her embrace, looks anxiously in its face, then presses it to her again.

Trotty begins to shrink back in fright.

THE CHIMES (O.S.)

Learn it from the creature dearest to your heart!

Will leans over and kisses Meg on the brow.

WILL

Meg, I thank you, for the last time. Put your hand in mine and tell me you'll forget me from this

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

WILL (cont'd)
hour and try to think the end of me
was here.

MEG
Please tell me, what have you done?

WILL
There'll be a fire tonight. When
you see the distant sky red, think
of me no more, or if you do,
remember what a hell was lighted up
inside of me, and imagine you see
its flames reflected in the clouds.
Good night, Meg. Good-bye.

He hurries out of the little room.

MEG
Will!

But he is gone.

Meg sits, stupefied.

After a moment, she is roused by the baby CRYING in her
arms.

She looks down at the baby's face.

MEG (CONT'D)
Like Lillian, when her mother died
and left her...

A strange, wild look comes into Meg's eyes.

TROTTY
But it is love! She'll never cease
to love her baby! My poor Meg.

There is a RUMBLING OF LOW THUNDER in the distance.

EXT. STREET -- NIGHT

It is a bleak, wet night.

Lightning flashes and THUNDER ROLLS.

A cutting wind blows rain and sleet against Meg, who is
carrying her baby and walking as if she is very tired and
faint. Meg speaks to the baby.

(CONTINUED)

MEG

No work tonight, but we'll find
some tomorrow I'm sure.

She presses the baby close to her to keep it warm and dry as she walks back to her room.

She is close to her door and about to enter, when she sees Mr. Tugby standing in her doorway, filling the entire entry.

TUGBY

Oh, you have come back. Don't you think you have lived here long enough without paying any rent? Don't you think, that without any money, you've been a pretty constant customer at our shop?

MEG

Please, sir --

TUGBY

Suppose you try and deal somewhere else. And suppose you provide yourself with another lodging. Come! Don't you think you could manage it?

Meg is exhausted. She speaks in a low voice.

MEG

It's very late. Tomorrow --

TUGBY

Now I see what you want. You know there are two parties in this house, and you delight in setting 'em against each other. I don't want any quarrels. I'm speaking softly to avoid a quarrel. But if you don't go away, I'll speak out loud and you shall cause words loud enough to please you. But you shan't come in. That I am determined.

Meg brushes her wet hair back with her hand, and looks in a sudden manner at the sky.

Red is reflected in the clouds on the horizon.

Meg looks down at her baby and speaks quietly to herself.

(CONTINUED)

MEG

Flames reflected in the clouds...

Tugby pays no attention.

TUGBY

This is the last night of an old year, and I won't carry ill blood and quarreling into a new one, to please you nor anybody else. I wonder you ain't ashamed of yourself to carry such practices into a new year. If you haven't any business in the world but to be always making disturbances between man and wife, you'd be better out of it. Go along with you.

Meg slowly turns and walks down the dark street.

Wringing his hands, Trotty watches Meg.

THE CHIMES (O.S.)

Follow her! To desperation!

TROTTY

She loves her baby, Chimes! She loves it still!

THE CHIMES (O.S.)

Follow her!

EXT. STREET -- CONTINUOUS

Meg hurries on through the rain. Trotty keeps close to her.

MEG

Like Lillian. To be changed like Lillian!

She walks faster and faster.

TROTTY

I was her father! Have mercy on her! Turn her back! Where is she going?

THE CHIMES (O.S.)

To desperation! Learn it from the creature dearest to your heart!

Meg hurries on. There is LOUD THUNDER, and the sky is brighter red.

(CONTINUED)

MEG
Like Lillian!

All at once, Meg stops.

She takes off her thin shawl and wraps the baby in it.

She kisses the baby's face tenderly, and holds it closely, steadily against her.

Then she speeds onward in the rain.

Trotty tries to grasp Meg as she passes, but she sweeps through him like the wind.

Trotty SCREAMS, tearing at his hair.

TROTTY
My child! Meg! Turn her back! Great
Father, turn her back!

EXT. RIVER BANK -- CONTINUOUS

Scattered lights along the river reflect a dull red in the swiftly flowing water.

Meg walks toward the dark level.

EXT. RIVER'S EDGE -- CONTINUOUS

Meg's desperate footsteps match the swiftness of the rapidly flowing waters.

She arrives at the edge of the river and pauses.

Trotty runs up beside Meg and reaches out to hold her back, but his hands pass through her again.

He falls to his knees and SHRIEKS to the bells.

TROTTY
I have learnt it! From the creature
dearest to my heart! Have mercy,
if, in my love for her, I slandered
nature in the form of mothers
rendered desperate. Pity my
ignorance and save her! This
dreadful crime has sprung from love
perverted, from the strongest,
deepest love we know. Think what
her misery must have been. There is
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

TROTTY (cont'd)
 no loving mother on earth who might
 not come to this if such a life had
 gone before. She means mercy and
 dies herself, to save the child
 from such a life!

(turning to Meg)

I see the spirits of the chimes
 within you! I know that our
 inheritance is held in store for us
 by Time. I know that one day, all
 who wrong us or oppress us will be
 swept away like leaves. I know that
 we must trust and hope, and we must
 not doubt ourselves, nor doubt the
 good in one another.

(to the Chimes)

Spirits, I take your lessons to my
 heart! O spirits, I am grateful!

Meg takes a step forward, the step that will carry her into
 the rushing river.

Trotty reflexively reaches out to pull Meg back.

This time, Trotty's fingers catch in Meg's dress. He can
 hold it.

He pulls Meg away from the river. His strength is like a
 giant's.

He takes Meg in his arms and holds her.

There is a sudden great gust of wind, and the rain begins to
 change to a gentle snowfall.

The great chimes begin to RING.

EXT. BELL TOWER -- NIGHT

It is midnight. Lustily, merrily, joyfully, the CHIMES RING
 the start of a new year through falling snow.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. TROTTY AND MEG'S HOME -- NIGHT

The CHIMES CONTINUE RINGING the 12 o'clock hour.

Trotty is having a difficult time waking in his chair beside
 the fire.

(CONTINUED)

Meg, blooming and youthful, stands beside Trotty, holding her needle and a simple, white gown she has been dressing with ribbons.

Meg gently shakes Trotty, who finally rouses from his deep sleep.

MEG

Whatever you do, Father, don't eat tripe again without asking a doctor whether it's likely to disagree with you, for how you HAVE been going on, good gracious!

Trotty utters a great CRY as if he is seeing a ghost in his house.

He rises to clasp Meg in his arms, but someone comes rushing in between the two.

RICHARD

No! Not even you. The first kiss of Meg in the New Year is mine. I've been waiting outside the house to hear the chimes and claim the first kiss. Meg, a happy New Year. A life of happy New Years!

He smothers Meg with kisses.

Trotty sits in his chair and LAUGHS and CRIES and BEATS HIS KNEES. He jumps up and hugs Meg, then Richard, then both at once. He squeezes Meg's face between his hands and kisses it.

TROTTY

And tomorrow's your wedding day, my pet. Your real, happy wedding day!

Richard shakes hands with Trotty.

RICHARD

Today! The chimes are ringing in the new day along with the New Year. Hear them!

The three listen to the happy PEALING of the chimes.

TROTTY

(to Meg)

But today, I mean yesterday, you and Richard had words.

(CONTINUED)

MEG

Because he's such a bad fellow,
Father. Aren't you, Richard? Such a
headstrong, violent man! He'd have
made no more of speaking his mind
to that great alderman, than he
would of --

RICHARD

(interrupting)
Of kissing Meg.

He does.

MEG

No, not a bit more. But I wouldn't
let him, Father. What would have
been the use?

TROTTY

But you were crying by the fire
tonight, my pet, when I came home.
Why did you cry?

MEG

I was thinking of the years we've
passed together, Father. And
thinking that you might miss me and
be lonely.

Awakened by the commotion, little Lillian runs into the
room.

TROTTY

Why, here she is!

He picks little Lillian up onto his back.

TROTTY (CONT'D)

Here we are and here we go! And
Uncle Will, too!

Will Fern has come down from the loft.

TROTTY (CONT'D)

Oh, Uncle Will, the vision that
I've had tonight through lodging
you!

Before Will can reply, a band of MUSICIANS bursts into the
room, accompanied by Trotty's old friend Chill, and several
NEIGHBORS.

(CONTINUED)

NEIGHBORS
Happy New Year!

CHILL
Many of 'em!
(to Meg and Richard)
And a happy wedding day!

Richard takes Meg into his arms and kisses her again.

The crowd is pleased.

Chill, carrying a portable collection of musical bells on a frame, is rather drunk already. He steps forward.

CHILL
Trotty Veck, my boy, it's got about
that your only daughter is going to
be married today.
(to Meg and Richard)
There ain't a soul that knows the
two of you that don't wish you both
all the happiness the New Year can
bring. So here we are, to play it
in and dance it in, accordingly.

His speech is received with a general SHOUT.

TROTTY
What a happiness it is, I'm sure,
to be so esteemed. How kind and
neighborly you are. It's all
account of my dear daughter Meg.
She deserves it!

Trotty sets Lillian down, and the musicians begin setting up.

Mrs. Chickenstalker rushes in, attended by a MAN carrying a large steaming pitcher.

TROTTY (CONT'D)
It's Mrs. Tugby -- er, I mean, Mrs.
Chickenstalker!

MRS. CHICKENSTALKER
Married, and not tell me, Meg?
Never! I couldn't sleep on the last
night of the year without coming to
wish you joy. So here I am, and
it's New Year's Eve, and the eve of
your wedding too, my dear.

She looks at Trotty and winks.

(CONTINUED)

MRS. CHICKENSTALKER (CONT'D)
I had a little punch made and
brought it with me.

The "little punch" in the pitcher smokes and reeks like a volcano, and the man carrying it looks faint.

TROTTY
Mrs. Chickenstalker, bless your
heart and soul! A happy New Year
and many of 'em!

He grabs Mrs. Chickenstalker and plants a big kiss on her lips.

Mrs. Chickenstalker's eyes widen with surprise and delight.

The crowd gives a CHEER and bursts into LAUGHTER and APPLAUSE.

Trotty motions for Will and little Lillian to come to him.

TROTTY (CONT'D)
Mrs. Chickenstalker, these are our
new friends, William Fern and his
niece Lillian Fern.

Mrs. Chickenstalker looks very surprised.

MRS. CHICKENSTALKER
Not the Lillian Fern whose mother
lived in Dorsetshire?

WILL
(curious)
Yes, that's right.

Mrs. Chickenstalker shakes him by both hands.

MRS. CHICKENSTALKER
I'm Anne Chickenstalker. I was a
friend of Lillian's mother!

TROTTY
Will Fern! Not the friend you was
hoping to find here in London?

WILL
Aye!

Mrs. Chickenstalker gives little Lillian a giant hug.

WILL (CONT'D)

And likely to prove as good a friend, if that's possible, as the ones I found earlier tonight!

Trotty turns to the musicians, who have finished setting up their instruments.

TROTTY

Oh, please play for us. Will you have the goodness?

To the MUSIC OF THE BAND, Trotty leads Mrs. Chickenstalker in the dance, making Meg and Richard the second couple.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. BELL TOWER -- DAY

The chimes happily ring in the bright first morning of the new year.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

Had Trotty dreamed? Or are his joys and sorrows but a dream, himself a dream, the teller of this tale a dream? If it be so, dear listeners, try to bear in mind the stern realities from which these shadows come. No one is too big or too small for such an end. So may the New Year be a happy one to you, and happy to many more whose happiness depends on you. May each year be better than the last. And may no one in our world be denied his or her rightful share in what our great Creator has formed us to enjoy!

FADE OUT