

The Chimes, Side 1

Toby trotting

If you've never trotted through London at Christmastime, well what can I say but, it is glorious? Not that I noticed any of it, hardly looking up from the pavement as I jogged. I brooded right past the tea carts serving up hot cider. I didn't stop to take in the garlands or the wreaths. What Councilman Cute hadn't realized - or maybe he had - is that one word of unkindness can block your ears to every merry and generous thing.

Ding-dong-ding. World is hard. Toby Veck...when suddenly I trotted right into something soft and squishy which sent me sprawling.

Collision! HE tumbles backward, his hat flying off his head, and lands on his backside with a thud. HE looks to see what he's run into.

Mrs. Chickenstalker! She owns the shop just next door to my home, and here she is with a bushel of holly to brighten up her hearth.

Becoming MRS. CHICKENSTALKER. She is rotund and thoroughly good natured.

Why, Toby Veck! What on earth has you in such a hurry on Christmas Eve?! Come on, let's get you put right.

SHE helps Toby off the ground.

What a Christmas, eh, Toby? Did you ever know the streets so cheerful? True, folks is very hard up this year, but it seems to me that the harder up folks are, the more merry they make on special days! (*Secretively*) Why, I was even a bit frivolous myself... (*she pulls something from her pocket*). See here, Toby. Roasted chestnuts! (*SHE smells the bag of goodies*) Mhhhhmmmm! Now *that's* a Happy Christmas, that is. And you, Toby? How will you be making merry? I suppose that lovely daughter of yours has got the house all neat and has scrounged up something nice for your supper. Lord, how I wish I had a child of me own. How blessed you are, Toby! (*Tearful*) How very, very blessed!

SHE retrieves his hat and dusts it off.

There now. You're good as new. Except, where is your holly? (*Hands him a sprig*) Here you are, Toby. Put that in your collar and you won't forget it's Christmas - time for being happy and grateful, whatever you've got or not got!

Happy Christmas, Toby! And to Meg! The happiest of Christmases to you both!

Becomes TOBY.

Good ol' Mrs. Chickenstalker. The holly berries were so bright and her words so kind that for a moment I thought: perhaps there is some love in the world. Perhaps Councilman Cute ain't all correct. Perhaps there is good people still to soften the blows of a hard world.

(Deliberately) So my thoughts were wrestling back and forth in my mind between how blessed we are, and also how bad off...and how happy my Meg had been, and then how crestfallen...and how perhaps if I were a better father...

But I've still got a letter to deliver. So off I trot, my mind going in circles, making for the home of Sir Joseph.

HE trots and chants, puzzling.
Ding-dong-ding. Not so bad. Maybe not. Maybe so. Ding-dong-ding.