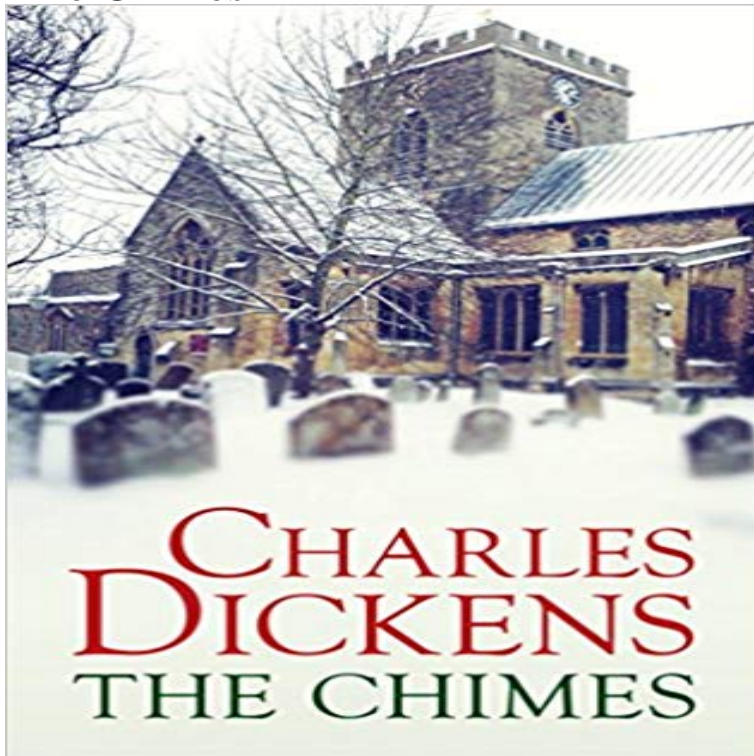


The Chimes



The second in Dickens Christmas novels, *The Chimes* is the story of a poor ticket porter, whose outlook is changed from despair to hope by the spirits of the chimes on New Years Eve. In the second of his series of Christmas books, Charles Dickens wrote *The Chimes* one year after *A Christmas Carol*. Tackling familiar themes of redemption, social injustice and family, it is a story of hope and contemplation and is a moving festive read well worth discovering. As Trotty's working day as a lowly messenger draws to a close, his daughter, Meg, arrives with her fiancé Richard in tow, and they proudly announce their wedding for the following day. This is cause for celebration of course, although their happiness is tempered by the comments of an alderman and other well-off citizens on the rights of the poor to marry. During the night, Trotty hears the chimes of a church bell and ventures out to climb the belltower. At the top he is greeted by goblins that tell him that he died during the climb and must now spend his time watching his friends and family live out their lives. What he witnesses makes for grim viewing: Richard turns to drink and dies penniless, leaving a widowed Meg to cope with bringing up their child; Trotty's friend Will is in and out of prison, and Will's daughter Lilian ends up falling into prostitution. But the worst is yet to come. Destitute and desperate, Meg contemplates drowning herself and her young child. Wild with fear, Trotty cries out that he has learnt his lesson and suddenly his daughter is able to see him. At the last second, he rescues her from the brink of destruction. Trotty wakes as if from a dream to the bells chiming out the beginning of a new year, and finds that no time has passed and it is New Years Day. But as he sees his daughter cheerfully preparing for her wedding day, he is baffled as to whether this is just a dream within a dream.

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