

DICK WHITTINGTON

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ACT - Scene 1

Cheapside, London

A street scene: upstage, a shop frontage with practical door, the sign above it reads Fitzwarren's Stores. Opposite there is a stone trough and pump.

The curtains open on a near empty stage: a cluster of barefoot urchins is playing together centre, a few Londoners are lounging about, one woman is filling a bucket at the pump and street traders are beginning to gather. The time is early morning, and the stage is dimly lit, with streaks of light from the rising sun playing across the backcloth. The Bellman wanders across, ringing his bell.

Bellman: Six o'clock on a fine morning and all's well! Six o'clock on a fine London morning and all's well!

SONG A – Oranges and Lemons

(As the children begin to sing unaccompanied, other Londoners and street traders begin to drift on, ready for the full routine. The children's voices tail off, there is a peal of bells, and enter Dizzie Izzie down right. The chorus freezes in tableau.)

Dizzie: Listen, everybody, listen to the call of London bells! They ring in greeting for a lad who's due in town today. His name's – his name's – oh, silly me, what is his name? *(She giggles)* Hang on a minute – it's – it's Dick Whittington and he's entrusted to my special care. For I am Isabella – the fairy of Bow Bell. *(Enter King Rat, leaning heavily on his stick, and with one foot bandaged, with Itchy and Scratchy, in attendance, down left. Itchy and Scratchy keep close around King Rat, fawning, and, occasionally breaking off to scratch a flea.)*

King Rat: Better known as Dizzie Izzie aren't you though, my dear? For though you're pretty as a picture – there's not a single braincell in between your ears! *(He laughs)*.

Dizzie: At least I'm nice to look at – and not old and raddled and offensive to the eye, like you, King Rat! And though I'm quite a scatterbrain I know, I will keep Dick from your evil clutches and set him on the road to fame and fortune, you'll see!

King Rat: Ha, fat chance while I'm around, you feckless fay! My minnions here will help me win the day! Itchy! Scratchy! *(As he introduces them, each gets up and bows)* Pretty, aren't they?

Dizzie: Pretty awful, King Rat – but I have assistance too, you know!

King Rat: Oh, the bells, the bells! I wish you well of them, my dear! Come, Itchy, Scratchy – mischief beckons!

Itchy and Scratchy: Yes, Master. *(He sweeps out, left, Itchy and Scratchy following and pulling faces at Dizzie as they go.)*

Dizzie: Loathsome creatures. But they'll not get the better of me. Dick is safe within my care, don't fear – and we will triumph in the end, you'll see. *(She exits, right. The children continue singing, and chorus join in for full number, during which the lights gradually come up. After the number, the chorus break up into groups, and the Bellman crosses the stage again.)*

Bellman: Eight o'clock on a fine morning and all's well! *(As he exits, the door of Fitzwarren's Stores opens and Alice enters carrying a bucket.)*

1st chorus group: Good morning Alice!

Alice: Good morning everyone. (*Other chorus join in the greeting as she crosses to the pump.*)

Chorus: (*variously*) Oh, hello, Alice. ‘Morning! It’s a lovely day.

Alice: Oh yes. It’s a beautiful morning. And what’s this? (*Several of the urchins cluster round her and one holds out a bunch of flowers – swiped from a seller’s basket.*)

Kids: Happy birthday, Alice.

Alice: For me? (*She puts the bucket down by the pump and takes the flowers.*) Thank you – how lovely. You remembered! (*Other chorus gather round*)

1st chorus: Yes. Happy Birthday, Alice.

2nd chorus: And how old are you today?

Alice: Sixteen.

3rd chorus (*giving her a sly nudge*): Sweet sixteen – and never been kissed, eh?

Alice (*laughing a little, but embarrassed*): That’s right, I’m afraid. I’ve yet to meet the man of my dreams. (*A loud ringing noise is heard off. Enter Jack from the shop, arms stretched out in sleep-walking mode. The noise follows him, and as he circles the stage the chorus scatter, jumping out of his way and holding their hands over their ears. Jack reaches the trough, takes a large alarm clock from his apron pocket and drops it in the trough. There is a splash and the ringing stops. Jack sinks down beside the trough.*)

Alice (*shaking him*): Wake up Jack! (*no response, Alice shakes him more vigorously*) Oh, come on everyone. He’s so sound asleep you’ll all have to help me.

Alice and chorus: Wake up Jack! (*Jack comes to with a start and looks around, dazed.*)

Jack: Where -? What - ? Oh, heck, was I sleep walking again?

All: Yes!

Jack: Botheration! But where’s my alarm clock - when I go off, it’s supposed to go off!

Chorus (*laughing*): It did!

1st kid (*fishing it out of the trough and holding it up*): Here you are, Jack!

Jack (*holding it to his ear, dismayed*): It’s stopped! (*shakes it, producing a loud gurgling noise, and tries again*) Nope. Not a tick nor a tock. Now what am I going to do – it’ll take me ages to save up for a new one. You’re father’s so mean, Alice, he only pays me sixpence a month.

Alice: I do keep asking him to give you a wage rise, Jack, but somehow it always seems to fall on deaf ears. We’ll just have to think of something else to help keep you awake. I know! (*to audience*) Will you wake Jack up every time he falls asleep?

Audience: Yes! (*we hope*)

Jack: What a brill idea. (*to audience*) Can you make a noise like an alarm clock?

Audience (*encouraged by chorus*): Brrrr! Ringggg! Dingalingaling etc. (*Alice shakes her head*)

Jack: Well, that was a bit pathetic! I’ll just get confused.

Alice (*to chorus*): Any ideas, anyone? What else wakes you up?

4th chorus: Nightmares!

2nd kid: Your mum!

5th chorus: A cockerel!

Jack: That’s it! Can you all make a noise like a cockerel going off?

Audience (*encouraged by chorus*): Cock a doodle doo.

Jack (*with a thumbs up*): Brilliant! Would you all shout cock a doodle doo whenever you see me fall asleep?

Audience: Yes!

Jack: Let's try it. I'll pretend to fall asleep and you shout cock a doodle doo. (*He mimes sleeping*)

Audience: Cock a doodle doo.

Jack (*to Alice*) Have they shouted yet? Come on, you can crow louder than that! (*He pretends to sleep again.*)

Audience: Cock a doodle doo.

Jack (*with a thumbs up*): Brilliant! Now, don't forget, will you? Now that I'm wide awake, Alice, (*coming over all bashful*) is there anything I can do for you?

Alice: You can help me get the water, Jack. (*She puts the bucket under the pump and he starts to pump the handle, vigorously at first but getting slower and slower and finally slumping, asleep*)

Audience: Cock a doodle doo.

Jack (*waking, with a thumbs up*): Brilliant! Thanks everyone.

Fitzwarren (*offstage*): Jack! Jack! Where are you? (*Jack scoots behind Alice*)

Jack: Oo-er, it's old Fitzy!

Fitzwarren (*entering from shop, laden with broom, mop, feather duster, dustpan, bottle of Brasso, furniture polish etc.*): Jack! Oh, where is that idle, good for nothing assistant of mine? Jack!! Ah, there you are! (*he has reached the pump and is talking to it*) It's no good idling your time away out here chatting to your friends my lad. There's work to be done before the shop opens. (*The chorus laugh, two of them take him by the elbows and steer him round to face Jack, as Alice steps aside. Through the next bit he gradually transfers all he is carrying to Jack, who groans in despair and gradually sinks to his knees under the weight*) Sweep the steps, stock the shelves, and dust the display cabinets, clean the counter and clear the cobwebs, wash the windows, burnish up the brass handles and polish the parquet and then –

Jack (*almost sobbing*): Yes???

Fitzwarren: Open the shop and serve the customers. (*Alice crosses to him*)

Alice: Hello Daddy. (*He peers shortsightedly at her*).

Fitzwarren: Oh, it's you my dear. Happy Birthday.

Alice (*kissing him*): Thank you, Daddy.

Fitzwarren: Now, I'm afraid I didn't have QUITE enough money on me to buy you a present, but as a special treat I'm going to take you to see the Lord Mayor's Show this afternoon.

Alice (*not quite so enthusiastically*): Oh, thank you Daddy!

Fitzwarren: But that means we must work twice as hard in the shop this morning to make as much money as usual, so don't dawdle out here Alice. (*He exits into the shop*).

Alice (*a little sadly*): Oh, well, I didn't expect much, after all. I do keep hoping for lovely surprise wrapped in pretty paper and tied with a shiny ribbon – but every year Daddy takes me to the Lord Mayor's parade, and everyone knows it's free.

Chorus (*variously*): Cheapskate! Mean old Fitzy. Never mind, Alice. (*they gather round cheering her up. Meanwhile Jack has given up his struggle with the cleaning things. They fall to the ground and he sinks to his knees, his head drooping during the following*)

Jack: Dust the doormats, burnish the counter, brass the cobwebs, parquet the shelves, stock the steps..... (*he falls asleep*)

Audience: Cock a doodle doo.

