

**“NORMAN CLAPPER: BEBOP BELL-RINGER”**  
**An Advent or Christmas sketch by Robin Hill**

**Cast:** *Mrs Honoria Smith, HR Department, Bethlehem Burgh Council;*  
*Mr Norman Clapper, job interviewee.*

**Props:** *Two chairs, either side of a desk or table;*  
*Church bell (or, perhaps more likely, hand bell).*

**Scene:** *An office, with Mrs Smith, seated behind her desk.*

*[Knock on the door]*

Smith: Come in!

*[Mr Clapper enters.]*

Clapper: Mrs Smith? I've come about the job. The name's Clapper. Norman Clapper.

*[The pair shake hands, remaining standing.]*

Smith: *[Eying him up pensively]* Clapper ... Clapper ... Clapper.

Clapper: Have we met before?

Smith: No, but your name rings a bell.

Clapper: Quite so. I come from a long line of Clappers, each one committed to the noble art of campanology. "Up the tower and down the steeple, if bells need rung, then we're your people."

Smith: This is wonderful news. You sound ideally suited to the job for which we are interviewing today, to wit, civic bell-ringer for the Royal Burgh of Bethlehem. Can I ask where you saw our advert? Was it in our local newspaper, the Bethlehem Argus.

Clapper: No. I saw it in the window of that new catalogue shopping place.

Smith: Ah yes! The Bethlehem Argos. Mr Clapper, let us proceed without delay to your practical test. Would you be so kind as to ring for me please ... our civic bell?

Clapper: It would be my pleasure!

*[The pair move to a nearby bell, either church bell or handbell.]*

Smith: In your own good time.

Clapper: Before I play, what style would you like?

Smith: What style have you got?

Clapper: Well ...

I'll ring out my bells in all manner of ways,  
from glittering peals on the brightest of days,  
to dark sombre clangs of funereal tone  
which send off a king who's expired on the throne.

I'll ring out my bells in all manner of ways,  
with glee and with gusto, ensuring it plays  
with the greatest of volume, so everyone hears  
its ding and its dong from Beirut to Algiers.

I'll ring out my bells in all manner of ways,  
from ...

Smith: Yes, yes, yes. I think we get the idea. Why don't you give us some bebop.

Clapper: Bebop?

Smith: Bebop.

Clapper: Charlie Parker or Dizzy Gillespie?

Smith: The choice is yours.

Clapper: So be it. One, two, a-one, two, three, four. *[Rings the bell a few times.]*

Smith: Excellent! If you don't mind my saying, you really can ring that crazy thing. Mr Clapper, I'm delighted to tell you that you've got the job. Congratulations!

Clapper: Why, thank you!

Smith: Now, Mr Clapper, let us repair to our seats, and I will apprise you of the current situation concerning Bethlehem's bell-ringing department.

Clapper: After you.

*[The pair take their seats.]*

Smith: Let me give you the good news and the bad news. You should be aware that Bethlehem takes the role of its civic bell-ringer very seriously. Very seriously indeed.

Clapper: I'm pleased to hear it.

Smith: Any time anything at all significant happens within the burgh, our civic bell-ringer is there, on the spot, primed and ready to go. (Coiled like a well-oiled cobra, one might say.) High days and holidays, coronations, royal weddings, sporting triumphs, visiting celebrities, guild coffee mornings, *[insert local occasions here]* – you name it, we'll ring it.

Clapper: Excellent! So what's the bad news?

Smith: Well ... nothing ever happens here.

Clapper: I beg your pardon?

Smith: Nothing at all ever happens in Bethlehem. Nada. Nichts. Niente. Zero. Zilch, Zippo.

Clapper: Diddly squat?

Smith: If you insist.

Clapper: Oh, dearie me.

Smith: In all honesty, Mr Clapper, we in the Royal Burgh of Bethlehem would dearly, dearly love to have something special to shout about or, for that matter, to ring bells about. But that special something ... *[close to tears]* never ... ever happens.

Clapper: What a shame. Why ever not?

Smith: It hurts to say it, Mr Clapper, but as places go, Bethlehem is a bit of a nonentity.

Clapper: *[In a concerned tone]* Like ... Aberlady? *[Substitute the local place name of your choice.]*

Smith: Almost as bad.

Clapper: *[Shaking his head]* My!

Smith: We're too small, you see. Too insignificant. And it's always been that way. It even says so in the Bible. You may recall the words of the prophet Micah, who describes Bethlehem as "too little to be among the clans of Judah".

Clapper: Yes, I do indeed remember those words, though I would urge you not to be dismayed.

Smith: Why not?

Clapper: Because that's not all that Micah says.

Smith: It's not?

Clapper: *[Excitedly]* Oh no! Micah actually says a whole lot more: "But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel."

Smith: Israel's ruler coming forth from Bethlehem of all places? Now that would be news worth celebrating. Then you'd have your work cut out for you!

Clapper: Trust me: as soon as that news breaks, I'll be there, ready to ring it out for all to hear! As we Clappers say:  
No matter the day and no matter the hour,  
in glorious sunshine or miserable shower,  
if you want to say it, and say it right well,  
then say it by ringing a dirty great ... BELL!

*[Exeunt to music: ideally, "Carol of the bells"]*

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If you use the sketch, have fun, and let me know how it goes!

With best wishes, especially for Christmas when it comes,

Robin

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