

*[Music plays in the darkness. This is joined by a slow but steady metallic beat. As the stage lights up, we see **Magnus Coffinkey** in the centre tier hammering on a large metal bell. The **Storyteller** sits nearby.]*

Storyteller Many stories start with once upon a time.

Magnus Ours does not.

Storyteller No. It doesn't. Our story today starts at a very *specific* time.

Magnus 3:43.

Storyteller The time when everything changed.

Magnus 3:43*am*.

Storyteller When everything ended. Without warning.

Magnus And the emptiness began.

Storyteller Right... Let's get to it then. You ready?

*[Magnus shrugs. The **Storyteller** takes a deep breath as the music changes.]*

There is a land where no one lives – no little girls or boys,

Magnus And all of its inhabitants: unwanted, broken toys.

Storyteller That doll with chewed-up fingers, that worn-out teddy bear,

Every toy that's thrown away inevitably ends up there.

Magnus An all-imposing atmosphere of greyness and depression,

Storyteller And among the population, a solitary obsession.

Magnus Fix... fix... fix...

Storyteller A perennial fixation.

Magnus Enhance, improve, be better.

Storyteller Erase each aberration.

Within this hollow landscape, a toy named Magnus dwells.

To earn his place among his peers, he specialised in...

Magnus ...bells.

Storyteller From little bells on jesters' hats to giant ones on steeples;

He ventured far and mended bells of all the country's peoples.

Broken, cracked, or fractured, or split irreparably,

Magnus No bell can not be mended by Magnus Coffinkey.

Storyteller His craftsmanship unquestioned, his skill renowned, however

Upon this night he was to face his greatest challenge ever.

Magnus Tonight?

Storyteller Tonight.

The Sacred Bell of What Could Be – a large and hallowed wonder,
Which years of hail and lightning strikes had all but rent asunder.

Magnus Do you think I'm ready for it?

Storyteller Only one way to find out...

From a tower bleak and high it hung – enclosed by the abyss,
And not two feet to either side, a yawning precipice.

Magnus How long will it take to finish?

Storyteller It will take nine hours. Eleven if you count the two hours it takes to climb up and down.

Magnus I will.

[He starts walking around the perimeter of the stage.]

Storyteller The clouds concealed the tower's top – such was its dizzy height.

Yet, resolute, this Coffinkey ascended through the night.

Magnus Wait, why do I have to do this at night?

Storyteller Because... because I'm telling this story. *[Magnus sighs and proceeds.]*

The tower gargoyles teased him with the promise of a plummet:

The old ones at the bottom and the young ones at the summit.

[An old Gargoyle appears as Magnus continues his climb and walks past it.]

Gargoyle Boo! *[Magnus gets a fright and the Gargoyle cackles as he follows him.]*

Magnus stops and turns around as the **Gargoyle** freezes.

Magnus looks at it suspiciously before turning around and moving on. Once again, the **Gargoyle** follows after him.

Magnus stops and sighs.]

Magnus What do you want?

Gargoyle Me?

Magnus Yes, you and your grotesque brethren. Why do you torment me?

Gargoyle *[shrugging]* Something to do, I guess. We don't get a lot of visitors up on the spire.

Magnus I'm no visitor. I come to repair the Bell.

Gargoyle We get even less of those. So what do you want then?

Magnus I told you. I come to repair the Bell.

Gargoyle And?

Magnus And nothing. *[He walks on but the Gargoyle follows.]*

Gargoyle You know, I was carved from stone seventeen centuries ago.

Magnus So?

Gargoyle So I wasn't born yesterday. What is it that you *really* want? [**Magnus** stares at it.]

Storyteller For it was said by those who knew that once per century,

Magnus The wish came true of he who rung the Bell of What Could Be.

Storyteller One wish.

Magnus Any wish.

Storyteller Declared the prophecy. One wish.

Magnus Any wish.

Storyteller He hoped so desperately.

Gargoyle Is it money? Fame? Glory? I bet it's money. You look like you're broke.

Magnus He walked away and from then on refused to stop or speak.

Storyteller And step by step he climbed and climbed to reach its windy peak.

Alone above that jagged spire, beset by vertigo,

Magnus He did not dwell on how the world was very, *very*... far below. [*Another Gargoyle,*

Omegus turns to him.]

Omegus Eh, you get used to it after a while.

Magnus Ugh. Even here?

Omegus I'm afraid so. Listen, before you start –

Magnus I don't have time for your nonsense. The moon is up and I must finish before dawn.

[*Omegus mimes locking its mouth, throwing the key off the top, and watching it fall.*

Magnus sets to work by tapping on the bell with a small hammer.

After a bit he leans back as far as he dares and looks up. A strong gust of wind puts him off-balance and he grabs the bell for safety.]

Can you see the clock? What time is it?

Omegus [*It tells him wordlessly that it cannot speak.*]

Magnus Come on!

Omegus It's a quarter past eight.

Magnus Thank you.

Omegus Don't mention it.

Magnus You're not quite as annoying as the other gargoyles.

Omegus I expect I will be in time. I'm not as old as they are.

Magnus How come?

Omegus Well, I don't know if you've ever seen them build a tower before, but typically they start from the bottom and work their way up. So the top bits tend to be newer.