

PERUSAL SCRIPT



Newport, Maine
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THE CRICKET ON THE HEARTH

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The Cricket On The Hearth

CAST LIST

4M 4W 1TB 1TG 3either gender/any age + ensemble of at least 16

MARY (DOT) PEERYBINGLE -- short, chubby, optimist, fair, young (20)

JOHN PEERYBINGLE -- tall, 6'6" bewhiskered, a Carter or Carrier (40)

TILLY SLOWBOY foundling, Peerybingle's live-in nurse. (15)

RUPERT TACKLETON domestic ogre, children's implacable enemy, a toy merchant who hates toys, children and women. Should be within a year of age to JOHN. Everything is veiled in sarcasm. He thinks himself a normal and gregarious man. (He sees no difference between himself and others) He doesn't like to accept thanks (42)

THE OLD GENTLEMAN (O.G.) -- (EDWARD PLUMMER) a homeless man of some means. appears as a youngish 60-65 but out of disguise is actually close to MAY's age (23)

CALEB PLUMMER -- small, shabbily dressed, dingy faced eternal optimist; always making the best of any situation. (40)

BERTHA PLUMMER -- his blind and all-knowing daughter (19)

JIMMY JEDDLER -- an eager lad with an irksome laugh Peerybingle's carter apprentice, lives in the stables, earnest, hardworking, but dull around adults he comes alive when around TILLY (16)

MAY FIELDING -- Very Pretty (20)

MRS. FIELDING little querulous chip of a lady (42)

DOT'S FATHER

DOT'S MOTHER

TACKLETON at 15

JOHN at 13

CALEB at 13

TACKLETON'S FATHER

CRICKETS -- one for each of the households --

#1 The Genius of Hearth and Home: potent spirit, ageless, dressed in black @ PEERYBINGLES, appears in human form when needed; otherwise all we hear is a chirp;

#2 @ PLUMMER's home;

#3 @ TACKLETON's. He is ignored so no such blessings pervade the house until the Dream where the CRICKET #3 joins forces with CRICKETS 2 & 1 to change TACKLETON and recall JOHN

HOUSEHOLD SPIRITS (2-6)

THE DREAM DANCERS (Can also be the Household Spirits)

CHILD JOHN - 10-12

CHILD DOT - 10-12

BRIDE JOHN - 22

BRIDE DOT -- 22

FATHER JOHN - 30

MOTHER DOT - 30

SON 1 - 12-13

SON 2 - 10-12

ADULT SON1 - 20

ADULT SON 2 - 22

TACKLETON AS FUNERAL DIRECTOR - 50

ADULT WEDDING GUESTS

SONG LIST:

ACT ONE

1 -- PRELUDE/HOME Orchestra/Crickets

Scene One --

1a -- CHRISTMAS IS COMING Crickets

2 -- GRUFF and TACKLETONS Tackleton and Company

Scene Two --

3 -- PEERYBINGLE and SON (*rewritten*) John

Scene Three --

4 -- CRICKET ON THE HEARTH John and Dot

5 -- JUST TO BE ALIVE Jimmy and Tilly

6 -- PEERYBINGLE AND SON REPRISE John

ACT TWO

Prelude--

7 -- MUSIC BOX MEMORIES Company

Scene One --

8 -- EVERYTHING Tackleton

Scene Two --

9 -- LOTS OF TOYS Caleb, Bertha, Tackleton

10 -- YOU ARE MY EYES Caleb, Bertha

Scene Three --

Scene Four --

11 -- CHRISTMAS IS HERE! Dot and All

12 -- STEEL YOURSELF! Mrs. Fielding

13 -- PUNCH AND JUDY Jimmy & Tilly

14 -- BETRAYED John, Caleb, Tackleton

INTERMISSION

ACT THREE

Scene One -- The Dream --

15 -- ACT THREE PRELUDE / HOME** Crickets

16 -- CALM, QUIET MOON / HOME** John / Crickets

17 -- IT'S IN HIS EYES Dot, John, Crickets

18 -- BRIGHTEST LITTLE STAR Household Spirits

18a BRIGHTEST LITTLE STAR (rep) Household Spirits

19 -- HOW GOOD Dot

20 -- YOU ARE MY EYES REPRISE Caleb & Bertha

21 -- I WILL REMEMBER! Tackleton

22 -- EVERYDAY, EVERY HOUR Dot/John, Bertha/Caleb,
Edward/May

23 -- AT THIS TIME OF YEAR All

24 -- CRICKET ON THE HEARTH All

** all sung over each other as contrapuntal

SETTING:

3int 1ext -- unit setting

Peerybingle Cottage SL -- with a bedroom inset as one; the fireplace should be constructed so that they allow each CRICKET to enter magically;

Plummer Hovel SR -- should have a 'scrim wall' or a 'reveal wall' for the DOT/EDWARD scene.

London Street SC

Tackleton's Residence -- imposing and grand, rises behind or to the side of the Plummer Hovel

Cricket on the Hearth
BOOK, MUSIC AND LYRICS BY
C. MICHAEL PERRY
(based on the Dickens short story)

ACT I

MUSICAL #1 -- PRELUDE/HOME

SCENE 1 -- *is seen only in silhouette -- a London street scene. JOHN PEERYBINGLE'S cozy cottage is STAGE LEFT and CALEB PLUMMER'S hovel/shoppe is on STAGE RIGHT with an open playing space between. GRUFF & TACKLETON'S toy shoppe and residence is a marked contrast sitting splendidly above and behind the PLUMMER'S residence. The CRICKETS maneuver in and around the 'frozen' characters onstage.*

CRICKETS: *(Variously)*

HOME IS A PLACE FOR YOU TO RETURN TO.
HOME IS A PLACE YOU NEVER HAVE TO LEAVE AT ALL.
HOME IS A CAUSE FOR CELEBRATION.
HOME IS A PLACE WHERE YOU CAN GRIEVE.
SO IF YOU'LL
COME HOME,
LOVE HOME,
FEEL AT HOME IN WHATEVER WAY THAT WARMS YOUR HEART.
START! THAT IS ALL YOU NEED DO.
HOME IS THE PLACE TO FEED YOU.
PLEASE, COME HOME.

Three Crickets. Three houses. Two blessings -- one curse. Three different reasons to call them home or to claim them at all. We bless each home according to the spirits that live there -- the spirits that are allowed to live there. You'll know we're there because of our chirp.

(A CRICKET chirp)

If all you hear is silence, then something must be wrong. We can only help if our Humans listen.

(The CRICKETS take their places at their various hearths. They all chirp. The stage comes alive, from vendors to pickpockets, but only the CRICKET'S sing while the children DANCE.)

CRICKETS: *(in a round)*

CHRISTMAS IS COMING. THE GOOSE IS GETTING FAT.
PLEASE PUT A PENNY IN THE OLD MAN'S HAT.
IF YOU HAVEN'T GOT A PENNY, THEN A HA'PENNY WILL DO.
IF YOU HAVEN'T GOT A HA'PENNY, THEN GOD BLESS YOU!
GOD BLESS YOU!
GOD BLESS YOU!

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(TACKLETON enters with his brightly colored merchant's wagon. The mood and music darkens.)

SEGUE

MUSICAL #2 -- GRUFF & TACKLETON'S

TACKLETON:

GRUFF AND TACKLETON -- FINE TOYS!
HOURS OF MERRIMENT WON'T STOP.
CREATURES, CANNONS AND THINGS THAT BANG AND POP FOR BOYS!
GRUFF AND TACKLETON UNFURLS
TOYS SO SCARY THAT YOU'LL WEEP.

(As TACKLETON approaches, ADULTS shy away, but the CHILDREN advance fascinated by the toys. He unfurls them, they gasp.)

PUPPETS, HORSES AND DOLLS THAT DO NOT SLEEP FOR GIRLS!
HANDMADE WITH LOTS OF CARE BY A CRAFTSMAN AND EACH HAND-PAINTED
POPPET'S PAST COMPARE -- SO RARE!
GRUFF & TACKLETON -- MY DEAR
TOYS FOR ALL THE GIRLS AND BOYS.
SOME SO SILENT AND SOME THAT MAKE A NOISE,
WITH GRUFF & TACKLETON'S
HOURS OF MERRIMENT
GRUFF & TACKLETON'S
PLAYTHING DEVIL-MENT!
GRUFF & TACKLETON'S HAS A WARRANTY
BUT IT WON'T COME FREE!

(The PEOPLE buy toys off the wagon.)

CHORUS

TOYS OF HIS WILL LAST ALL YEAR.
THEY PLEASE OUR EYES AND COST US DEAR.
CHRISTMAS SHOULDN'T BE A TIME TO FEAR;
BUT THE TOYMAN'S HERE!
HE WON'T ACT THE WAY HE SHOULD.
THE MAN IS ROTTEN BUT HIS TOYS ARE GOOD.
CALEB AND HIS DAUGHTER ONLY USE THE FINEST WOOD!

*(TACKLETON introduces a stick puppet that bounces and hangs grotesquely on it's stick.
HE pulls it's strings.)*

TACKLETON

FOR YOUR LITTLE GIRLS HERE'S THE ANSWER -- HELL'S DANCER!

SHOPPER

I NEED MONEY LEFT FOR THE GROCER -- SO, NO SIR!

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TACKLETON

YOUR SON COULD BE A VAMPIRE WITH HIS WINGS UNFURLED!

SHOPPER 2 (*Revealing a babe in arms*)

HE'S MUCH TOO YOUNG TO TERRORIZE THE WORLD!

SHOPPERS

GRUFF AND TACKLETON'S --
SO DEAR.

TOYS FOR ALL THE GIRLS
AND BOYS.

SOME SO SILENT AND
SOME THAT MAKE A
NOISE-- DON'T
FEAR!

TACKLETON

TOYS TO SCARE AND
BRING A TEAR!
SHOCK YOUR EYES AND
COST YOU DEAR.
CHRISTMAS TIME'S THE
TIME OF YEAR FOR
FEAR: WHEN THE
TOYMAN'S NEAR.

ALL

WITH GRUFF AND TACKLETON'S
HOUR OF MERRIMENT.

GRUFF AND TACKLETON'S
PLAYTHINGS HEAVENSENT

GRUFF AND TACKLETON'S
HAS A WARRANTY --
BUT IT DON'T COME FREE!
BET IT WON'T COME FREE!

SCENE 2 -- *As the stage empties the scene shifts to "IN ONE". JOHN PEERYBINGLE and his apprentice, JIMMY JEDDLER, enter pulling their horseless horse-cart.*

JOHN: Do ya hear what I'm sayin', Jimmy? You have to find the right girl.

JIMMY: You mean there's only one?

JOHN: No——there could be many who are "right" but you have to find the one who's "most" right.

JIMMY: Because?

JOHN: Because the right woman will make life sweet and easy for the both of you.

JIMMY: (*Nodding and smiling.*) So Mrs. Perrybingle is your "most right" one?

JOHN: Exactly, m'boy! She is my calm, quiet moon.

JIMMY: Yer what?

JOHN: (*Smiling*) My light in the darkness. That's what I call her. And because it's right a little bit of me will live on.

JIMMY: (*A questioning look*) In John Junior?

JOHN: Yes, Master Jeddler -- in John Jr.

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MUSICAL #3 -- PEERYBINGLE & SON

JOHN:

A MAN HAS A DREAM AND IN HIS EYE IS A GLEAM;
THO' PEOPLE THINK IT'S EXTREME AND TELL HIM IT CANNOT BE DONE,
HE FORGES AHEAD, THAT SLENDER THREAD IS WHAT IS COVETED.
BUT IT'S OBVIOUS TO HIM HE HAS HARDLY BEGUN!
AND THEN ON A DAY HE SEES A GLEAM OF A WAY
THAT SEEMS TO BRIGHTLY CONVEY
THE DREAM THAT HE WAS TOLD TO SHUN:
A FLICK OF HIS WRIST, A LITTLE TWIST, TWO STRANDS WILL COEXIST.
SO MUCH STRONGER IN TWAIN ARE PEERYBINGLE AND SON!
A SON GIVES A MAN THE POWER TO MOVE!
THE POWER TO PROVE HIS LIFE GOES ON!
AND WHEN HE IS READY, STEADY AND SURE,
THE FUTURE'S SET; THERE'S NOUGHT HE CAN'T ENDURE!
BUT THEN COMES ALONG A SIMPLE LAD WITH A SONG,
WHO'S HANDY, HARDY AND STRONG AND KNOWS THE WAY TO GET THINGS DONE!
SO INTO THE WEAVE, HE CAN'T BELIEVE, THE THREADS BEGIN TO CLEAVE
HE'S A PARTNER ALONG WITH PEERYBINGLE AND SON!

JIMMY:

(AND SON!)

BOTH:

A PARTNER ALONG WITH PEERYBINGLE AND SON!

(The BABY cries and JOHN rushes to the front of the cart and cradles his son as JIMMY looks on.)

JOHN: We'd best be gettin' on.

(JIMMY nods and pulls the nearly empty cart as JOHN walks offstage.)

SCENE 3 -- *The lights come up on the PEERYBINGLE home, the third pair of married PEERYBINGLE'S to be living there. TILLY SLOWBOY is sitting agitatedly by the window waiting for someone to arrive. The shrill whistle of the ready kettle pierces the scene. DOT'S voice comes from offstage.*

DOT: *(off)* Catch that, will you Tilly?

TILLY: Yes'm. They're 'ere, Mum!

(SHE shouts as she grabs the hot handle, burns her fingers, drops it and picks up a cloth and takes the whistling kettle off the stove and places it on the table, all the time trying not to watch the door. DOT appears through the door from the back rooms of the residence primping and

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fussing and straightening while carrying a salver of bread and a bottle of wine: balancing both. She artfully sets her service on the table and rushes to open the door in time to admit JOHN PEERYBINGLE and SON.)

JOHN: Double ration to the horse and then come in to supper, Jimmy!

DOT: Give me that blessed child, you baby-napper, you!

(SHE takes the bundle of baby and gives her husband a kiss and a caress on the cheek. JOHN closes the door as DOT and TILLY coo over the baby while getting him in his cradle between table and fire. TILLY and DOT are so choreographed that their every move is a hilarious near-miss as the baby is set and the table is laid with hot food from the oven. As JIMMY enters we see the only break in the ritual of dinner preparation. JIMMY looks to and for TILLY who tries to hide the fact that she wants to plant a big one right on his lips. But she is again caught up in the flying plates, cups, trays, bowls and mugs landing on the table exactly where they are meant to be. All JIMMY and JOHN can do is stay out of the way. After the flurry of activity there is a pause and a sigh.)

DOT: Sit! Sit! Sit! It'll never be any hotter!

(All sit. DOT looks to the cradle as does JOHN.)

Isn't he beautiful?

(TILLY giggles as JIMMY catches her eye. He chuckles his distinctive chuckle as JOHN glances at the two youths.)

I said, John, isn't he beautiful?

JOHN: Tilly seems to think so!

(TILLY and JIMMY are aghast.)

DOT: Your son, John -- your son. Don't he look precious in his sleep?

JOHN: Very, my dear, very precious.

DOT: Bless him. I could smother him with kissing, I could.

JOHN: But that would wake him from his peace, wouldn't it?

DOT: Yes. But that's just an expression you dear, thick man. Well, let's sup!

(THEY pass the food around. TILLY and JIMMY are making a game of it as the plates pass and their hands touch. JOHN and DOT pretend not to notice.)

JOHN: We fought pretty stiffly with that wind tonight -- most of the way back home. Eh, Jimmy?

JIMMY: Yes, sir?

DOT: I'm sure you did, dear hard-working man you are. Right Tilly?

TILLY: Right, Mum.

(TILLY'S waist is 'goosed' by JIMMY.)

JOHN: Hands and mind on the dinner, boy. Plenty of time for the ladies later.

(TILLY and DOT laugh a little at the correction but TILLY reaches over and squeezes JIMMY'S arm affectionately easing his hurt at being caught.)

DOT: How'd the day go, Jimmy?

JIMMY: Fine, Mum. 'Cept the crate of candlewax for the chandler.

JOHN: Bit heavy, that one, wasn't it?

JIMMY: Heavy?! As we lifted it off, the cart tipped clean over.

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JOHN: Forgot we didn't have a horse attached to it!

JIMMY: Good thing the eggs didn't break!

JOHN: But that bag of feathers was launched into the air and 'cross the alley just as the Constable walked by.

JIMMY: Good thing it didn't break open or we would've run 'afowl' of the law.

(TILLY and DOT laugh and JIMMY chuckles. JOHN doesn't appreciate the joke at first. Then he gets it and laughs.)

JOHN: A fowl! Ha! Very clever, Master Jeddler.

(He giggles through his pudding as the rest enjoy his delayed enjoyment.)

JIMMY: I surely hope Old Charlie is well enough to pull the cart tomorrow. We got that new anvil fer the Blacksmith's comin' in, don't we?

JOHN: We most certainly do!

JIMMY: On second thought -- that Constable's been givin' me some trouble!

(Another laugh)

TILLY: An anvil's awfully heavy, Jimmy.

JIMMY: I can handle it, can't I, Mr. Peerybingle?

JOHN: If you can't I don't know who can!

(TILLY gapes at JIMMY who smiles back as she pokes his long, gangly arm muscle.)

TILLY: Who'd a thought it?

(DOT smiles warmly as the CRICKET chirps merrily on the hearth. The four diners try to ignore the insistent noise coming from the area of the fireplace by finishing their pudding, but JOHN just stares.)

DOT: John, you're far away tonight!

JOHN: Sorry. There's something but I can't remember what.

JIMMY: Fantastic pudding, Mum!

DOT: I'm glad you liked it. I never know if some people like anything.

JOHN: I ate it, didn't I?

DOT: And just what does that mean you loveable lunk?

JOHN: It means if I eat it I like it. Do I have to say so?

(DOT playfully pouts getting TILLY in on the game. JIMMY leans into JOHN.)

JIMMY: It always helps if you tell, 'em, Mr. John.

JOHN: *(Not so thick after all)* How could I help but love anything that's cooked by your hands, my dear!

DOT: *(Swells)* How about the bread?

JOHN: It was quite tasty.

DOT: Good! Thank Tilly for it!

(They laugh)

JIMMY: You made the bread?

TILLY: *(Nodding)* First time, too!

JIMMY: *(Reaching for another chunk)* Tastes like you been doin' it all yer life!

(TILLY blushes and JOHN and DOT laugh and cuddle a moment. DOT arises and begins to clear the table. JOHN'S mind is somewhere else again, and as DOT notices it, he comes back to himself.)

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DOT: Well, Miss Slowboy, are you going to help me clear or just sit there and blush?

(JOHN and JIMMY smile as they move to the fireplace. CRICKET chirps again. The table is cleared during the following.)

JIMMY: Will I ever be ready for my own carting company?

JOHN: It's only been two years, Master Jeddler. Give it time.

JIMMY: I know.

JOHN: 'Sides, why would you want your own when you could be a partner in mine someday!

(We hear TILLY squeal with glee as she enters to remove more of the table's load, smiling broadly at JIMMY. DOT enters right behind her and gives JOHN a playful punch and JIMMY a meaningful wink.)

JIMMY: Do ya mean it, Sir?

JOHN: Do I ever not mean what I say? You keep up the way you been keepin' up and it'll be sure and happen.

JIMMY: Jeddler and Peerybingle Cartage Company.

JOHN: Peerybingle and Jeddler Cartage Company.

JIMMY: That's what I meant.

JOHN: Nothin's wrong with dreams! Just remember your place.

JIMMY: Sir.

(CRICKET chirps. DOT and TILLY re-enter. DOT hands JOHN his pipe. TILLY hands JIMMY a candy stick. He licks it and then she licks it through the scene.)

JIMMY: Sir?

JOHN: Yes, Master Jeddler?

JIMMY: Why am I so lucky?

(This comment is not lost on TILLY.)

JOHN: It's the house.

(JIMMY and TILLY looked confused, doubtful. CRICKET chirps.)

It's been three generations of lucky in this house!

MUSICAL #4 -- CRICKET ON THE HEARTH

DOT

THE VERY FIRST TIME I HEARD
THAT CHEERFUL LITTLE NOTE [*chirp*]
WAS THE VERY FIRST TIME I ENTERED THE DOOR
AND HANDED YOU MY COAT!

JIMMY & TILLY

WE WERE ONE YEAR WED!

DOT

WITH OUR SON NOT BORN!

JIMMY & TILLY

LITTLE JOHN NOT BORN?

DOT

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AND WHEN WE MOVED IN HERE ON A CHRISTMAS MORN
I WAS SCARED AND SHY AND I DON'T KNOW WHY
BUT YOU LOVED ME STILL!

JOHN

AND I ALWAYS WILL!

JIMMY & TILLY

HE ALWAYS WILL!

DOT

IT IS HEAVEN HERE IN THIS HOME THAT YOU HAVE MADE!

JOHN

I'M SO GLAD YOU STAYED!

JOHN & DOT

BLESSED BY A TINY, PLUCKY CRICKET,
A LUCKY CRICKET ON THE HEART.

JOHN

BETTER THAN A PENNY!

JIMMY & TILLY

BETTER THAN A PENNY!

JOHN

OR AN OLD HORSESHOE.

JIMMY & TILLY

OR AN OLD HORSESHOE!

DOT

HE BROUGHT ME LOVE!

JIMMY & TILLY

HE BROUGHT HER LOVE!

JOHN

HE BROUGHT ME YOU!

JIMMY & TILLY

HE BROUGHT US TOO!

ALL

BETTER THAN A PENNY OR AN OLD HORSESHOE

HE BROUGHT ME LOVE, HE BROUGHT ME YOU!

DOT

A CHIRP OF PROMISE AND ENCOURAGEMENT

GAVE A KIND AND GENTLE MAN TO ME.

A CHIRP OF WELCOME, SURELY HEAVEN SENT,

HAS MADE A HOME AND FAMILY!

ALL

ALL BLESSED BY A TINY, PLUCKY CRICKET;

A LUCKY CRICKET ON THE HEARTH!

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TILLY

BETTER THAN A PENNY!

JIMMY

OR AN OLD HORSESHOE!

DOT

HE BROUGHT ME LOVE!

JOHN

HE BROUGHT ME YOU!

ALL

BETTER THAN A PENNY OR AN OLD HORSESHOE

HE BROUGHT ME LOVE, HE BROUGHT ME YOU!

JOHN

HIS CHIRP HAS BEEN HERE

SINCE I CROSSED THAT THRESHOLD AS A BOY.

AND SINCE YOU CAME TO BE MY WIFE

MY LIFE'S BEEN NOTHING LESS THAN JOY!

(DOT & JOHN sing counterpoint.)

DOT

A CHIRP OF PROMISE
AND ENCOURAGEMENT
GAVE A KIND AND
GENTLE MAN TO ME,
A CHIRP OF WELCOME,
SURELY HEAVEN SENT
HAS MADE A HOME
AND FAMILY.

JOHN

HIS CHIRP HAS BEEN
HERE SINCE I
CROSSED THAT THRESHOLD AS A
BOY. AND
SINCE YOU CAME TO BE MY
WIFE MY LIFE'S BEEN
NOTHING LESS THAN
JOY!

(Counterpoint ends and a partner dance ensues to the strains of the opening melody.)

ALL

ALL BLESSED BY A TINY, PLUCKY CRICKET

A LUCKY CRICKET ON THE HEARTH.

BETTER THAN A PENNY, [echo]

OR AN OLD HORSESHOE, [echo]

HE BROUGHT LOVE! [echo]

HE BROUGHT ME YOU! [echo]

DOT & TILLY

BETTER THAN A PENNY OR AN OLD HORSESHOE

JOHN & JIMMY

BETTER THAN A PENNY OR AN OLD HORSESHOE

DOT & TILLY

HE BROUGHT ME LOVE!

JOHN & JIMMY

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SHE BROUGHT ME LOVE!

ALL

HE/SHE BROUGHT ME YOU! *[CRICKET chirps]*

JOHN: *(As the moment breaks)* Ah! Now I remember!

(HE motions to JIMMY and they go out. DOT and TILLY crowd the door. JIMMY re-enters dragging a large basket with a few undelivered parcels in it. JOHN is carrying a seemingly frozen body cradled in his arms.)

DOT: Heavens! What have we got here?

JOHN: Parcels still to deliver.

DOT: What's this?

JOHN: I finally remembered -- an old gentleman of some sort.

DOT: He can't be a parcel.

JIMMY: But he is!

TILLY: Yer both daft!

(JOHN sets the OLD GENTLEMAN down on a stool by the fire. The MAN seems frozen in his fetal-like pose.)

JOHN: There! Just the way we found him sitting by the roadside. Upright as a millstone!

JIMMY: And almost as deaf!

TILLY: And twice as cold!

DOT: Sitting in the open air, John?

JOHN: In the open air!

JIMMY: Carriage paid -- the tag around his neck says.

JOHN: Eighteen pence in the envelope around his neck, got him in the carriage and here he is.

DOT: He's going, John?

JOHN: Not for a while yet.

DOT: No, John -- tipping!

(The OLD GENTLEMEN, in the warmth of the fire, has started to slump to the side. He is thawing and they right him. He sits there blinking.)

O.G.: If you please, I was to be left till called for. Don't mind me.

(He closes his eyes, leans back against the fireplace bricks and starts a soft snore.)

TILLY: He's gone off!

(DOT leans in and listens)

DOT: Silly Tilly, he's alive. He's just asleep.

(Pats the O.G. on the shoulder)

Well, now, to business -- parcels still to be claimed?

(JOHN points at the O.G.)

Well, yes, besides him.

(DOT digs into the basket and comes up with a round box.)

A round box. Hmm. Must be a wedding cake!

JOHN: Only a woman could find that out. A man sure would never think of it.

DOT: *(Trying to lift)* Weight -- whole hundredweights -- whose is it? Where is it going?

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JIMMY: Writing's on the side!

DOT: *(Shrieks)* My goodness!

JOHN: Aye -- who'd have thought.

DOT: It's Gruff and Tackleton -- the toymaker.

(JOHN and JIMMY nod. TILLY looks disgusted.)

Who's the bride?

JOHN: May Fielding.

(The O.G. stirs)

DOT: We were girls at school together, John -- May and I.

JOHN: Yes.

DOT: And he's old.

JOHN: Yes.

DOT: Twice her age!

JOHN: And us?

DOT: I was a child -- you more like my guardian.

JOHN: Is ours such an ill-assorted marriage?

DOT: No, John. But Tackleton is not you.

JOHN: Maybe they have a cricket, also.

DOT: They'll need a whole flock!

(ALL laugh. The O.G. wakes, stands and stares.)

JOHN: You're an undeniable good sleeper, Sir!

(The O.G. takes spectacles out of one of his large pockets and a book from another, sits down again and begins to read. JOHN, DOT, and TILLY and JIMMY exchange looks of perplexity. TILLY and JIMMY move to the settle by the door. The O.G. raises his head and glances between JOHN and DOT.)

O.G.: Your daughter, my good friend?

JOHN: Wife.

O.G.: Niece?

JOHN: Wife!

O.G.: Indeed? Surely? Very Young!

(HE reads two lines in his book and interrupts himself.)

Baby yours?

(JOHN nods in a large manner as if to a deaf person.)

Girl?

JOHN: B-o-o-oy!

O.G.: Also very young, ah?

DOT: *(Too loud.)* Two months and three days. Considered by the doctor a remarkable beautiful child. May seem impossible to you but he feels his legs already.

(A knock on the door.)

JOHN: He's called for; so soon! Open the door Tilly.

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(Just as TILLY reaches it, it swings open from without and CALEB PLUMMER bursts merrily through, dressed poorly and shabbily. O.G. pulls into his book.)

CALEB: Good evening, John! Good evening, Mum. Good evening, unknown one. How's the baby, Mum?

DOT: All thriving, Caleb. I am sure you need only look at the dear child, for one, to know that.

CALEB: I'm sure I only need look at you for another.

JOHN: Busy just now, Caleb?

CALEB: Pretty much so. We've a run on Noah's Ark at present. It would be a satisfaction to my mind to make it clearer which was Shem's and Hams and which was wives but I don't see how it's to be done at the price. Have you anything in the parcel line for me, John?

(JOHN retrieves a small pot with a flowering rose in it.)

JOHN: There it is! Not a leaf damaged and full of buds. Very dear at this season.

CALEB: It would be cheap to me whatever the cost. Anything else?

JIMMY: *(Advancing, having retrieved the small box from the basket)* Here you are, Mr. Plummer. We came by but no one was there.

CALEB: *(Reading the address)* "For Caleb Plummer, with cash." Cash, John?

(HE hands the box back)

Not for me!

JIMMY: *(pointing)* "Care", Mr. Plummer.

CALEB: Ah! Yes, Jimmy. "With Care." Yes, yes, that's mine. If my golden boy from the South Americas had lived, John, it might have been with cash.

JOHN: A fine son, Caleb.

CALEB: Yes, yes.

JIMMY: What's in the box, Mr. Plummer?

CALEB: Eyes.

(Everyone's eyes grow big)

A box of dolls eyes for my daughter's work. I wish it was her own sight in a box, John.

JOHN: I wish it could be.

CALEB: *(Reaching to his flimsy coin purse)* What's the damage, John?

JOHN: I'll damage you if you inquire! Dot?

DOT: Agreed, John.

CALEB: Well, how like you to say so. It's your kind way. I think that's all, then.

JOHN: I think not, try again.

CALEB: Something for our Guv'nor, here? To be sure. That's what I came for -- but my head's so runnin' on them Arks and things. Hasn't been here?

JOHN: Not he -- to busy courting!

CALEB: He's coming 'round, though. He told me to keep on the near side of the street going home and it was ten to one he'd pick me up before I got there.

TILLY: Oh!!

(Her scream has been caused by the door opening into her backside. She steps out of the way, towards JIMMY, as TACKLETON enters.)

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TACKLETON: Ah! Here you are! Wait a bit, I'll take you home. John Peerybingle, my service to you. More of my service to your pretty wife. Handsomer every day. Younger, too!

DOT: A compliment, Mr. Tackleton in your condition?

TACKLETON: You know about it, then?

DOT: Somehow I've come to believe it.

TACKLETON: After a hard struggle, I suppose?

DOT: Very.

TACKLETON: Thursday week. Christmas Eve. That's my wedding day!

JOHN: That's our wedding day, too!

TACKLETON: Ha-ha! Odd! You're just such another couple! Just!

(Dot is slightly furious. She is not impressed with TACKLETON who motions JOHN to a corner.)

A word with you, John Peerybingle.

(They go. The rest try not to listen; especially O.G.)

You'll come to the wedding? We're in the same boat, you know.

JOHN: How in the same boat?

TACKLETON: *(Nudging JOHN)* The same disparity. Spend the evening with us beforehand?

(CRICKET chirps.)

JOHN: Why?

TACKLETON: There's a new way to receive an invitation. Why? For pleasure -- for sociability.

DOT: *(Mumbling to TILLY in the background)* For another chance to show off!

(CRICKET chirps)

JOHN: I thought you were never sociable.

TACKLETON: No pulling the wool over your eyes, John. You and your wife have comfortable appearances together. That would produce a favorable effect on the future Mrs. Tackleton. Say you'll come? Even though your good lady's not very friendly to me in this -- say you'll come?

JOHN: It is our promise to ourselves these last six years to keep our wedding day at home.

(CRICKET chirps)

TACKLETON: What's home? Four walls and a ceiling.

(CRICKET chirps)

Why don't you kill that cricket?

(CRICKET chirps)

There are four walls and a ceiling at my house.

DOT: *(Still mumbling)* And dead crickets too, I'll wager.

TACKLETON: Come to me!

JOHN: You kill your crickets, eh?

TACKLETON: Scrunch 'em, sir! Say you'll come. It's as much your interest as mine. Women always persuade each other that they are quiet and contented and couldn't be better off. It's the spirit of emulation among 'em.

JOHN: You're joking.

TACKLETON: I have the humour to marry a young wife and a pretty wife. It's my whim. There my humour stops. She honors and obeys -- like your good lady -- and as I am not a man of sentiment, that's enough for me. How could you think there's anymore in it?

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JOHN: I should chuck any man out the window who said there wasn't more in it!

TACKLETON: To be sure. Good night.

(The O.G. is standing near DOT, facing her. CALEB is resting his chin on the cake box. TILLY and JIMMY are cuddling on the settle. DOT screams as she notices the O.G. staring in front of her at the fire. CALEB stands and almost drops the cake. TILLY & JIMMY stand and knock heads. DOT stares at the O.G., wringing her hands.)

JOHN: Dot! Mary, darling. What's the matter?

(As JOHN holds her shoulders she sinks to the ground, covers her face with her apron and weeps. JOHN helps her up and sits her where she was before.)

DOT: I'm better now -- I'm quite well.

(She stares as the O.G.)

Only a fancy, John. It's gone -- quite gone.

TACKLETON: I wonder where and what it was? Caleb, come here. Who's that with the grey hair?

CALEB: I don't know sir. Never seen him before. He's a great figure for a nutcracker, though.

TACKLETON: Not ugly enough.

CALEB: Or a match box on the mantle?

TACKLETON: Not half ugly enough. Come. Bring the box. All right now, Mrs. Peerybingle?

DOT: Oh quite. Quite gone. Good night!

(JIMMY holds open the door for TACKLETON & CALEB.)

TACKLETON: Take care of how you carry that box, Caleb. Let it fall and I'll murder you.

(JIMMY smiles broadly. TACKLETON looks sharply around the room and stalks out with CALEB balancing the box on his head.)

JIMMY: *(Closing the door)* I hope the cart didn't ruin the cake.

DOT: Oho! Poor Caleb if it did!

(The O.G. stands again. DOT flinches slightly.)

O.G.: I beg your pardon, friend -- the more so as your wife, apparently, has not been well; but with the attendant, whom my infirmity renders almost indispensable not having arrived, I fear there must be some mistake. The bad night seems worse. Would you, in your kindness, suffer me to rent a bed here?

DOT: Oh, yes. Certainly!

JOHN: Well, I don't object. Come along, sir, and we'll prepare your bed.

(DOT, JOHN and O.G. leave the room by the back archway. TILLY and JIMMY are alone. The baby cries as they regard each other. TILLY rushes to pick it up and quiet it and hug it and kiss it.)

JIMMY: Is that all women do? Fuss over a child after it's born? Doesn't the man of the house get any attention?

TILLY: The man of the house, indeed. It's not your house and you're not a man -- yet!

(TILLY smiles and rolls her eyes. JIMMY smiles back and chuckles in his peculiar way. The BABY is quiet and TILLY is tucking it back in his cradle. JIMMY is there to peek over her shoulder.)

JIMMY: That wasn't so hard.

(TILLY, with a finger to her lips, leads JIMMY away to the settle.)

TILLY: And it never takes too long either if you'll just let me do it.

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JIMMY: So that's the way it'll be after our little ones start arrivin'?

TILLY: And just how many are ya plannin' on, Mister Jimmy Jeddler?

JIMMY: Oh, I'd say at least six or eight.

TILLY: It's a good thing you'll be a carter.

JIMMY: Why's that?

TILLY: So you can cart me off to bedlam!

(JIMMY grabs each of TILLY'S hands and kisses them.)

JIMMY: I can't wait.

(CRICKET chirps)

TILLY: Fer what Jimmy Jeddler?

JIMMY: To be yer husband.

TILLY: Ah! That.

JIMMY: I'll try to make you happy.

TILLY: Only try?

JIMMY: Trying's all a man can do until he succeeds.

(He beams at her.)

MUSICAL #5 -- JUST TO BE ALIVE

JIMMY

I'LL BRUSH YER HAIR

AND BRING YA FLOW'RS

AND READ YA STORIES BY THE HOURS.

WE'LL WORK ALL DAY?

(SHE nods)

AND SLEEP ALL NIGHT!

(SHE smacks him playfully)

IN A COZY LITTLE COTTAGE I'LL LIVE WITH YOU

OUR WHOLE LIFE THROUGH.

TILLY

I'LL MAKE YOUR FAVORITE PUDDING EVERY NIGHT WHEN YOU COME HOME.

BUT DON'T FORGET THAT YOU'RE IN LONDON, NOT SOME CAESAR BACK IN ROME!

I'LL CARE FOR EACH OF OUR CHILDREN, WITH YOUR HELP WE'LL RAISE THEM RIGHT.

BUT THE ONE WHO FALLS ASLEEP FIRST LEAVES THE OTHER TO DOWSE THE LIGHT.

JIMMY & TILLY

IN OUR OWN LITTLE CORNER OF THE WORLD

WE'LL LIVE -- WE'LL THRIVE.

TILLY

WITH A CHILD OR TWO...

JIMMY

OR SIX OR EIGHT!

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JIMMY & TILLY

OUR WORLD WILL COME ALIVE!
WITH A HOUSE AND A STABLE
AND A FAMILY WHO'S ABLE
WE'LL DO MORE THAN JUST SURVIVE!

JIMMY

WITH OUR ONE PLUS ONE

TILLY

PLUS TWO!

JIMMY

PLUS TWO -- PLUS FOUR!

TILLY

I'LL BE LUCKY TO BE ALIVE!

JIMMY

I'LL BRUSH YER HAIR
AND BRING YA FLOW'RS
AND TELL YOU STORIES
BY THE HOURS
WE'LL WORK ALL DAY?
AND SLEEP ALL NIGHT!
IN A COZY LITTLE COTTAGE
I'LL LIVE WITH YOU
OUR WHOLE LIFE THROUGH.

TILLY

I'LL MAKE YOUR FAVORITE PUDDING
EVERY NIGHT WHEN YOU COME HOME.
BUT DON'T FORGET THAT YOU'RE IN LONDON
NOT SOME CAESAR BACK IN ROME!
I'LL CARE FOR EACH OF OUR CHILDREN
WITH YOUR HELP WE'LL RAISE THEM RIGHT.
BUT THE ONE WHO FALLS A-
SLEEP FIRST LEAVES THE
OTHER TO DOWSE THE LIGHT.

JIMMY & TILLY

IN OUR OWN LITTLE CORNER OF THE WORLD
WE'LL LIVE -- WE'LL THRIVE.
WITH A CHILD OR TWO
OR SIX OR EIGHT
OUR WORLD WILL COME ALIVE!
WITH A HOUSE AND A STABLE
AND A FAMILY WHO'S ABLE
WE'LL DO MORE THAN JUST SURVIVE!
THEN WHEN OUR BABIES ARE BEHIND US
WE'LL HAVE LOVE LEFT TO REMIND US
WHY IT'S GOOD JUST TO BE ALIVE!

(THEY indulge in a sweet kiss as DOT and JOHN enter. CRICKET chirps.)

DOT: *(Talking back through the curtain)* The kettle will be on the stove all night warming and the tea is in the caddy on the mantle.

(DOT and JOHN notice TILLY and JIMMY.)

Time for bed, you two!

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(TILLY starts for the back door but JIMMY hangs on, both to her delight and consternation.)

JOHN: Master Jeddler.

(JOHN nods to the front door.)

JIMMY & TILLY: I was just goin' to say good-night.

JOHN: I think you've already done that.

(JIMMY drops TILLY'S hand and looks like a puppy who's just been kicked as he makes his way forlornly to the door.)

TILLY: Six or eight!

(JIMMY smiles, maybe even chuckles his peculiar chuckle and goes out the door. TILLY goes to the back with a smile on her face and perkiness in her walk. DOT hums the melody to the song just sung as she busies herself with the last bits of tidying up and placing the kettle on the stove. JOHN comes up to her, arms around her.)

JOHN: I think they'll be alright.

DOT: Yes. Isn't it nice?

(DOT lifts the baby out of the cradle.)

MUSICAL #6 -- PEERYBINGLE AND SON (REPRISE)

JOHN

ONE SPECIAL DAY A MAN SEES
ONE SIMPLE WAY THAT SEEMS TO
BRIGHTLY CONVEY THE DREAM THAT HE HAD HOPED HE'D WON!
I'M HUMBLE AND THRILLED, AND WARM AND CHILLED;
THE DREAM STANDS HERE, FULFILLED!
SO MUCH STRONGER IN DOT AND JOHN PEERYBINGLE AND SON!

(JOHN and DOT take BABY and empty cradle to the other door in their house -- their bed chamber. The door closes as the LIGHTS fade to dim. Street light and firelight glow in the room. The curtains in the archway part and the O.G. totters in, not seeming quite so old. He gets a cup, pours water and adds tea and stirs. He brings it to the table and sits and sips.)

O.G.: Married...and not to me!

(The scene fades to black.)

END OF ACT I

The Cricket On The Hearth

ACT II

MUSICAL #7 -- MUSIC BOX MEMORIES

INTERLUDE -- Strange lighting marks this as a dream. *We see DOT and JOHN asleep in their bed; whether they are revealed through a scrim wall or the bed is on rollers at CENTER stage, DOT is sleeping soundly and peacefully while JOHN is restless, tossing and turning as the CRICKET presents his dream. This should not be danced, per-se, but the movement should be stylized.)*

(There are three DOT'S and three JOHN'S all dressed in a version of their costumes of the previous scene. DOT and JOHN, the CHILDREN, enter playing hopscotch. CHILD/JOHN pulls a lolly out of his pocket, unwraps it and gives it to CHILD/DOT who pops it in her mouth as they skip off the stage.)

(BRIDE/DOT and GROOM/JOHN, a white veil and top hat added to their clothing, enter and proceed down a line of SPIRITS who are 'throwing' rice at them. They run down the gauntlet and off.)

(MOTHER/DOT and FATHER/JOHN enter with a baby in each of their arms. Two young BOYS enter and take the 'BABIES' from their parents. They shake the wadded bundles into two pieces of flat cloth. Each has "Peerybingle Brother's Cartage" printed on it. Two SONS, as adults, come in and replace the BOYS and the BOYS disappear. MOTHER/DOT and FATHER/JOHN re-enter and shake hands with and embrace their SONS.)

(TACKLETON enters somberly dressed in funeral garb carrying along a black pole with radiated black feathers topping it. He walks past FATHER/JOHN who is torn away from MOTHER/DOT and follows TACKLETON off. MOTHER/DOT is consoled by the two SONS.)

(JOHN sits up in bed with a shout and the dream LIGHTS go out as DOT proceeds to wake and then comfort him.)

SCENE 1 -- *TACKLETON'S rooms on STAGE RIGHT. It is evening. The music is angry. TACKLETON bursts through the door with the cake box and sets it on the table then angrily paces as he removes his outer vestments.*

MUSICAL #8 -- EVERYTHING

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TACKLETON

BLAST THEIR EYES, THEIR AFFRONTERY!
 AND DAMN THEIR LIES!
 THEY LAUGH AT ME AND PATRONIZE!
 WELL, DAMN THEIR EYES!
 I DIDN'T RISE TO GREAT HEIGHTS
 BY LETTING THE WOLF BE CONTROLLED BY THE MITES.
 NOTHING COMES FROM NOTHING.
 WITHOUT A MAJOR FIGHT.
 AND I ESCAPED MY NOTHING
 WITH FORTITUDE AND FRIGHT.
 EVERYDAY I FACED MY CURE WITH A STALWART, STURDY AIR.
 MY FATHER GAVE IT FREELY,

(He pantomimes a beating.)

JUST TO SHOW HOW HE COULD CARE.
 I NEVER MINDED, REALLY, THAT THE SCAPS WERE ON MY BACK
 FOR THE ONE THING I WAS SURE OF: I WOULD NEVER WANT OR LACK --
 I WOULD HAVE EVERYTHING!
 EVERYTHING A BOY COULD NEED;
 EVERY WORD WAS SPOKEN,
 EVERY TOY WAS BROKEN,
 EVERY MEAL WAS SUMPTUOUS --
 EVERY THOUGHT PRESUMPTUOUS --
 EVERY MEETING GLORIOUS.
 BEATINGS WERE EUPHORIOUS.
 THROUGH EVERY LITTLE DEED
 I FILLED EVERY NEED.

WHEN YOU HAVE EVERYTHING
 EVERYTHING A MAN CAN KNOW;
 NOTHING'S UNEXPECTED
 AND YOU ARE PROTECTED
 FROM THE GOOD OF OTHER MEN.
 HEARTACHE CANNOT TOUCH YOU THEN.
 I BUILT THIS BUSINESS TOY BY TOY
 AND FRIGHT BY FRIGHT --
 AND NIGHT BY NIGHT I PUSHED AND SCRAPED
 AND DAY BY DAY I MADE MY WAY
 TILL TODAY--
 WHEN I HAVE EVERYTHING!

(BLACKOUT)

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SCENE 2 -- *The LIGHTS come up on the busy toy hovel of the PLUMMER'S. CALEB and BERTHA are working. CALEB'S clothes are near rags but BERTHA wears a pretty dress. DAYLIGHT streams through the cracked and filthy window from the street.*

MUSICAL #9 -- LOTS OF TOYS

CALEB

A LITTLE DAUB OF PAINT GIVES A ROSY GLOW
TO A PRETTY LITTLE FACE OR A GREEN HEDGEROW.
BE IT DOLL OR HOUSE OR MUSIC BOX
OR NOAH'S ARK OR A HORSE THAT ROCKS
WITH PAINTS FROM POTS ON ALL WHAT-KNOTS
THERE'S LOTS AND LOTS OF TOYS.

BERTHA

STITCHES, EVEN LITTLE STITCHES
STURDY LITTLE BRITCHES --
SO MY FATHER SAYS!
LACES, PRETTY LITTLE LACES
SETTING OFF THE FACES --
SO MY FATHER SAYS!

CALEB & BERTHA

MAKE WHAT THE CHILDREN ARE WANTING -- THAT'S DAUNTING!

(LIGHTS up on TACKLETON)

TACKLETON

GIVE THEM ONLY THE TOYS THAT THEY CRAVE!

CALEB & BERTHA

WHO KNOWS THE WAYS OF THE CHILD? SO WILD!

TACKLETON

ALL PLEASURE'S ON THIS SIDE OF THE GRAVE!

A DASH FOR A MOUTH AND BRIGHT RED EYES;
THE WING OF A BAT AS IT FLAPS AND FLIES;
A JACK-IN-THE-BOX THAT REACHES OUT TO CLUTCH
WON'T SCARE THEM MUCH.
A PUPPET OR SIMPLE MARIONETTE
WON'T STARTLE OR CAUSE A CHILD TO FRET.
UNTIL YOU CAN PAINT THE FEAR ON EVERY FACE --
IT HAS NO PLACE!

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CALEB

A LITTLE DAUB OF
PAINT GIVES A ROSY
GLOW TO A PRETTY LITTLE
FACE OR A GREEN HEDGE-
ROW. BE IT
DOLL OR HOUSE OR
MUSIC BOX OR
NOAH'S ARK OR A
HORSE THAT ROCKS WITH
PAINTS FROM POTS ON
ALL WHAT-KNOTS THERE'S
LOTS AND LOTS OF TOYS!
LOTS OF TOYS!

BERTHA

STITCHES, EVEN LITTLE
STITCHES STURDY LITTLE
BRITCHES -- SO MY FATHER
SAYS!
LACES,
PRETTY LITTLE
LACES
SETTING OFF THE
FACES --
SO MY FATHER
SAYS!
MY FATHER SAYS!

TACKLETON

A
DASH FOR A MOUTH AND BRIGHT RED EYES; THE
WING OF A BAT AS IT FLAPS AND FLIES; A
JACK-IN-THE-BOX THAT REACHES OUT TO
CLUTCH WON'T SCARE THEM MUCH. A
PUPPET OR SIMPLE
MARIONETTE WON'T
STARTLE OR CAUSE A
CHILD TO FRET. UN-
TIL YOU CAN PAINT THE
FEAR ON EVERY
FACE -- IT'S OUT OF PLACE!
IT HAS NO PLACE!

TACKLETON

ALL PLEASURE'S ON THIS SIDE OF THE GRAVE!

(LIGHTS fade on TACKLETON and leave us with the PLUMMERS. The CRICKET chirps, BERTHA smiles and CALEB remains unaffected.)

BERTHA: You were out in the rain last night in your beautiful new great-coat, Father?

CALEB: My new great-coat?

(CALEB glances at the 'sack cloth garment' he wore last night that is hanging on a line near the broken-down fireplace.)

BERTHA: Yes-- your new, blue great-coat. How glad I am you bought it, Father!

CALEB: And of such a tailor, too -- Quite a fashionable tailor. It's too good for me.

BERTHA: What can be too good for you?

CALEB: I'm half-ashamed to wear it, though. Boys shout out, "Hullo -- there's a swell!" I don't know where to look. I feel as if I haven't a right to wear it.

BERTHA: I see you father as plainly as if I had the eyes I never want when you are with me; your dark hair -- looking so young and handsome.

CALEB: I shall be vain presently.

BERTHA: I think you are already.

(SHE laughs.)

I have found you out!

(The door pushes open and TACKLETON enters from his quarters.)

TACKLETON: Such a lot of noise down here earlier.

CALEB: Just a little song to make the work go along.

TACKLETON: I can't afford for you to to sing. I'm glad you can afford it. I hope you can afford to work too!

CALEB: *(Whispering to BERTHA)* If you could only see how he's winking at me. Such a man to joke!

BERTHA: Always merry and light-hearted with us.

TACKLETON: Oh! It's you. Poor idiot. How are you?

BERTHA: Happy as even you can wish me to be. Happy as you would make the world if you could.

TACKLETON: Not a gleam of reason.

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(BERTHA takes TACKLETON'S hand and kisses it, then holds it, then lays it against her cheek. TACKLETON is sickened.)

What's the matter now?

BERTHA: I stood the little gift you sent -- the little potted rose tree -- by my bedside. When the day broke -- the glorious red sun, father --

CALEB: Red in the mornings and evenings, Bertha.

BERTHA: When it rose the bright light came into the room. I could feel it on my face. I turned the little tree toward it and blessed you for sending them both to cheer me.

TACKLETON: Bedlam's broken loose! Bertha, come here!

BERTHA: Straight to you. You needn't guide me.

TACKLETON: Yes -- well...

(HE stares into her face -- her darkened eyes.)

This is the day when Peerybingle's little wife has her little picnic with you?

BERTHA: Yes.

TACKLETON: I should like to join the party.

BERTHA: Do you hear that, Father?

CALEB: Yes, I hear it -- but I don't believe it!

TACKLETON: You see, I wanted to bring the Peerybingles a little more into company with May Fielding. I am going to be married to May!

BERTHA: Married?

TACKLETON: Ah -- yes -- church, parson, clerk, beadle, glassware, bells, breakfast, bride cake, favors; all the tom-foolery!

BERTHA: I know what a wedding is.

TACKLETON: Do you? It's more than I expected. I want to join the party and bring May and her mother. I'll send in a little something or other. You'll expect me?

BERTHA: Yes.

(TACKLETON regards BERTHA'S shyness as idiocy.)

TACKLETON: Caleb?

CALEB: I'm here -- I suppose.

TACKLETON: Take care she don't forget what I've been saying.

CALEB: She never forgets, sir. It's one of the few things she ain't clever in.

TACKLETON: *(Shrugs and makes for the door.)* Every man thinks his own geese are swans. Poor devil!

(TACKLETON is gone. BERTHA stands lost in sad meditation. CALEB sits and continues working on some toy or other. BERTHA approaches him.)

BERTHA: Father -- I am lonely in the dark. I want my eyes -- my patient, willing eyes.

MUSICAL # 10 -- YOU ARE MY EYES

CALEB: *(Takes her hands and covers his eyes with them, briefly.)* Here they are, always ready. More yours than mine -- what shall your eyes do for you?

BERTHA

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LOOK AROUND THE ROOM, FATHER --
DO IT NOW FOR ME.
JUST A LOOK AROUND THE ROOM --
TELL ME WHAT YOU SEE.

(HE looks around but doesn't seem to be able to look at BERTHA.)

THE COLORS ON THE WALLS;
THE FLOWERS ON THE PLATES;
THE WOOD SHINING GOOD
FIRE BURNING AS IT SHOULD
NEVER NOTICED BY THE FATES. [WARM AND COZY ON THE GRATES]
THE SNUG, HAPPY CORNERS OF OUR COTTAGE SMALL
ARE BRIGHT FOR YOUR EYES REVEAL IT ALL.

BERTHA: Oh, let me see May Fielding, Papa -- please!

(HE faces her squarely.)

CALEB

THE FAIRNESS OF HER FACE;
THE FIRE OF HER HAIR;
AND THE LILT OF HER VOICE,
SWEET AND MUSICAL AND CHOICE,
MADE OF FAIRY DUST AND AIR --
HER LOVE IS A PATIENT SORT OF MAGIC BALM.
HER LIFE, LIKE YOUR EYES, IS WARM AND CALM.

BERTHA: Oh, to be his patient companion in infirmities and age, his gentle muse in sickness, his constant friend in suffering and sorrow; to know no weariness in working for his sake; to watch him, tend him, talk to him awake, pray for him asleep... Would she do all this, Father?

CALEB: No doubt of it.

BERTHA: Then I love her, Father!

I SEE, DEAR FATHER, YOU CANNOT TELL ME LIES.
YOU SEE, DEAR FATHER, AND MY HEART LAUGHS AND CRIES.
WE SEE TOGETHER AND I FEEL SO WISE.
IT'S TRUE, FOR YOU ARE MY EYES.

And our friend and benefactor, Father. I never tire of hearing about him.

(CALEB is uneasy, for this is a pure fantasy he has spun for her. He looks down even though BERTHA cannot see him for he cannot confront her in any way.)

CALEB: *(Hesitantly)*

A MAN OF...NOBLE MIND.
A FACE TO SAY HE'S... KIND.
AND A HEART SET APART,
MASKED BY ROUGH, UNWILLING ART
SIMPLY CLOAKING WHAT WE FIND.
HE'S OLDER THAN MAY --

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HE HAS NOVEMBER'S YEARS --
AND LOVE IS A LANGUAGE...HIS HEART HEARS.

BERTHA

I SEE, DEAR FATHER -- YOU CANNOT TELL ME LIES!
YOU SEE, DEAR FATHER, AND MY HEART LAUGHS AND CRIES.
WE SEE TOGETHER AND I COULD GROW WISE;
IT'S TRUE -- FOR YOU ARE MY EYES.

CALEB & BERTHA

THE LITTLE THINGS WE LOVE;
THE MOMENTS THAT WE PRIZE;
AND THE THRILL, STANDING STILL,
SENSING LIFE BEGIN TO FILL
EVERY RECESS OF THE SKIES!
THE SNUG, HAPPY CORNERS OF OUR COTTAGE SMALL
ARE BRIGHT, FOR YOUR EYES REVEAL IT ALL:
IT'S TRUE -- FOR YOU ARE MY EYES.

(The LIGHTS fade.)

SCENE 3 -- *Outside the PEERYBINGLE'S residence the cart is loaded with both parcels to deliver and picnic packages that will end up at PLUMMER'S; the O.G. is rolled up and covered. JIMMY is tottering from foot to foot in the cold and flapping his arms around him for warmth. TILLY is inside helping DOT with the final preparations for the baby. JOHN is stomping around outside.*

DOT: John -- you've got the basket with the veal and ham pie and things... and the punch?

JOHN: Yes, you have the baby?

DOT: Almost.

JOHN: I'm a quarter hour behind my time for the deliveries and we haven't left the door.

DOT: I am sorry for it, John, but I cannot think of going to Bertha's without the picnic things or the baby.

JOHN: The basket's here, safe enough. Right, Jimmy?

JIMMY: *(Continuing to embrace himself)* Right!

JOHN: And the baby, wife?

DOT: Almost! We've not missed our monthly picnic at the Plummer's in all our marriage. And now we have a baby -- and the Old Gentlemen. If anything were to go wrong we might never be lucky again.

JOHN: It was a kind thought to set it all up and I honor you for it.

DOT: Dear John, don't talk about honoring me -- good gracious!

JOHN: *(Shouting)* Jimmy! How's the Old Gentleman?

JIMMY: *(Still flapping and shifting while checking the cart)* Fine!

JOHN: He's an odd fish. I can't make him out. I don't believe there's any harm in him.

DOT: Who, dear? Jimmy?

JOHN: No -- the Old Gentleman.

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DOT: None at all. I'm sure there's none at all.

JOHN: I'm glad you're certain of it. Things do come about so strangely.

DOT: Yes.

JOHN: He's a good natural Old Gentleman, pays as a gentleman. His word can be relied on, I think, as a gentleman. All in all, a good lodger.

(DOT and TILLY appear with the BABY just as JIMMY has finally given up and come into the warmth; and it feels good to him.)

DOT: Ready!

(JIMMY reacts in frustration as he turns and heads back out too soon into the cold. DOT, TILLY, BABY and JOHN follow. CRICKET chirps. JOHN turns, looks at the fireplace, tips his hat and exits. TILLY is warming JIMMY up by rubbing his hands, arms and face. DOT and BABY situate themselves in the cart. TILLY climbs on. JOHN and JIMMY go to the front.)

JOHN: We're off! Drop the gentleman off at his stop. Then off to the picnic while we do our rounds. Heigh Ho, Jimmy! Geeyap Charlie!

(The cart moves off as the LIGHTS fade.)

SCENE 4: *The Plummer's Hovel. CALEB & BERTHA, THE PEERYBINGLE's, TILLY & JIMMY are pursuing their regular activities as they await the arrival of their guests, they are dancing. The DANCE turns into a brief song. NOTE: A CRICKET needs to chirp through this scene until TACKLETON enters, then again after he leaves.)*

MUSICAL #11 -- CHRISTMAS IS HERE

DOT:

IF THE SUN SHINED BRIGHTER TODAY

I COULDN'T BE HAPPIER NOW.

IF THE RAINS CAME BRINGING THE GLOOM

IT SIMPLY WOULDN'T MATTER AT ALL!

FOR CHRISTMAS IS HERE

A BEAUTIFUL DAY!

A BEAUTIFUL WAY TO END THE YEAR SO RIGHT!

IT'S EVERYTHING I'VE EVER WANTED,

AND COMES EACH YEAR.

IT SHINES A LITTLE LIGHT, THERE'S NOTHING TO FEAR!

(Back to the DANCE)

ALL: CHRISTMAS IS HERE!

(At the end of the DANCE, MAY FIELDING, MRS. FIELDING and TACKLETON enter

upon the glee and seem to give only gloom. TACKLETON has a leg of mutton and tarts on a platter. The rest of the food is already on the table.)

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DOT: May! My dear old friend! What a happiness to see you.

(THEY embrace warmly.)

JOHN: Well, I'll be plucked and cooked for supper. It's like seeing double it is.

DOT: May, this is my husband, John.

MAY: Very happy, Sir, to make your acquaintance.

JOHN: The pleasure's mine.

(Looking between MAY and DOT)

You two could be sisters!

(TACKLETON feels a little ignored, so he steps forward with MRS F.)

TACKLETON: May I introduce Mrs. Fielding. May's...mother.

(Hellos are said and hands are shaken. MRS F is led to the table, upon which is heaped all sorts of food. TACKLETON leads her to a chair at the side, but she maneuvers herself to a chair at the end; obviously the chair that TACKLETON meant to sit in, himself. But MRS F, in gloves and cap, presides, whether it is her natural station, or right, or not. CALEB sits near MRS F and next to BERTHA, DOT next to MAY, TACKLETON between MRS F and MAY, JIMMY and TILLY between BERTHA and JOHN, who is at the other end of the table.)

MRS F: I must say that it is all quite unsettling, this business of marriage. For it is a business. It can be nothing else. But my daughter, being a child, and Mr Tackleton being in the business of pleasing children, it is highly appropriate. A fine match.

MAY: I can't believe it. It has all happened so fast.

(TACKLETON smiles and MAY does not see it.)

DOT: Ah, May, what changes! To talk of those merry school-days would make one young again.

TACKLETON: You aren't particularly old, at any time; are you?

DOT: Look at my sober husband there, he adds twenty years to my age at least. Don't you, John?

JOHN: Forty.

DOT: *(Laughing)* How many you'll add to May's, then, Mr. Tackleton, I am sure I don't know.

(TACKLETON is not amused.)

MAY: How we used to talk, at school, about the husbands we would choose.

DOT: All the husbands we saw in each boy who looked our way.

MAY: Silly schoolgirls!

MRS F: Yes! Silly.

DOT: I thought, how young, and how handsome, and how lively. But mine was not to be!

(A look at JOHN)

And as to May's! I don't know whether to laugh or cry, when I think what silly girls we were. We little thought how things would come about. I never fixed on John, I'm sure; I never so much as thought of him. And if I had told you, you were ever to be married to Mr. Tackleton, why you'd have slapped me. Wouldn't you, May?

(TACKLETON, who is sickened, laughs -- almost shouts and JOHN, mistaking it for real humor, joins in, but not as loudly.)

TACKLETON: You couldn't help yourselves, for all that. You couldn't resist us, you see. Where are your young bridegrooms now!

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DOT: (*Earnestly*): Some of them are dead war and hunger are dreadful things. And some of them are quite forgotten. Others of them, if they could stand among us at this moment, would not believe we were the same creatures; would not believe that what they saw and heard -- all those years ago -- was real; that we could forget them so.

(*BERTHA gets up, a little disturbed, and separates herself from the company. CALEB looks after her. MAY's eyes are downcast.*)

JOHN: (*A gentle reproof*) Why, Dot -- Little Woman! We'll lift us a glass. To tomorrow! To the wedding!

(*NOTE: So today is Christmas Eve.*)

TACKLETON: Here! Here!

(*They all drink the health of TACKLETON and MAY.*)

MRS F: I thank the heavens that young and thoughtless persons of either gender do not stay that way with the proper interference. May has always been a dutiful and obedient child. Interference was not necessary in her case. She never received any interference from her father, who was always off on the Indigo Trade, but left us comfortable and well.

DOT: Where is Mr. Fielding?

MRS F: He never returned. But the money comes in dribbles and drabbles. It is enough. He was a provider. Mr. Tackleton is a provider. He will do well for my daughter. She will have what she needs.

DOT: But what about love?

MRS F: I have found, in my own experience, that the marriages with the least amount of silliness are the ones of a lasting nature; are even, I dare say, filled with the most happiness.

(*ALL but TACKLETON cough and splutter.*)

I have lived all my life working toward tomorrow and the settling of my daughter. When it is all over, I expect I'll just be packed up and disposed of, my duty done.

MAY: Mother, how could I do without you?

MRS F: Well.

JOHN: Well, it's time for our rounds. I'll be back at the old time. Come on, Jimmy. Goodbye, all!

(*ALL say their goodbyes and JOHN bends over to kiss the BABY.*)

Goodbye, young shaver! Time will come, I suppose, when you'll turn out into the cold, my little friend, and leave your old father to enjoy his pipe and his rheumatics in the chimney-corner; eh? Where's Dot?

DOT: I'm here, John!

JOHN: Come, come! Where's the pipe?

DOT: I quite forgot the pipe, John.

JOHN: Forgot the pipe! Was such a wonder ever heard of! She! Forgot the pipe!

DOT: I'll -- I'll fill it directly. It's soon done.

(*SHE pulls it from its place in his coat pocket and fills it clumsily with the tobacco as all look on. She then strikes a match and lights it awkwardly. TACKLETON disapproves because of the bad example in it for MAY, and leaves the room.*)

JOHN: (*Good-naturedly*) What a clumsy Dot you are, this afternoon. I should have done it myself.

(*JOHN and JIMMY exit. CALEB moves away to BERTHA. MAY and MRS. FIELDING sit. DOT stares. TILLY slouches.*)

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CALEB: (*Softly*) Bertha! What has happened? How changed you are in a few hours — since this morning. You silent and dull all day! What is it? Tell me!

BERTHA: (*Crying*) Oh father, father!

CALEB: (*drawing his hand across his eyes*) But think how cheerful, how happy you have been! How good, and how much loved, by many people.

BERTHA: That strikes me to the heart, dear father! Always so mindful of me! Always so kind to me!

CALEB: (*Perplexed*) To be ... to be blind ...is a great affliction; but...

BERTHA: I have never felt it! Never felt that, in its fullness. Never! I have sometimes wished that I could see you, or could see him — only once ... only for one little minute — that I might know what it is I treasure up

(She places her hand across her heart)

...and hold here! That I might be sure and have it right! Sometimes, when I was a child, I wept in my prayers at night, to think that when your images ascended from my heart to Heaven, they might not be the true resemblance of yourselves. But I have never had these feelings long. They have passed away and left me tranquil and contented.

CALEB: And they will again.

BERTHA: Bear with me in my wickedness. This is not the sorrow that so weighs me down!

(CALEB still does not understand but his tears flow)

Bring her to me. May. Bring May!

(MAY, having heard her name, comes quietly towards BERTHA and touches her on the arm.

BERTHA turns immediately, holding MAY by both hands.)

Look into my face, Dear May, read it with your beautiful eyes, and tell me if the truth is written on it.

MAY: (*Almost overcome*) Oh Bertha, Yes!

BERTHA: There is not, in my soul, a wish or thought that is not for your good, May! There is not, in my soul, a grateful recollection stronger than the deep remembrance which is stored there, of the many, many times you have had consideration for me, even when we two were children! Every blessing on your head! Light upon your happy course! The knowledge that you are to be his wife has wrung my heart almost to breaking! Father, May, Mary -- oh forgive me that it is so, for the sake of all he has done to relieve the weariness of my dark life: and for the sake of the belief you have in me, when I call Heaven to witness that I could not wish him married to a wife more worthy of his goodness!

CALEB: (*Finally understanding*) Have I deceived her from the cradle, only to break her heart at last?

DOT: Come, Bertha! Caleb, take her to the office, won't you, Caleb? To — be — sure!

(CALEB and BERTHA go to a far corner of the shop, where they can be alone. DOT turns to MAY and MRS F.)

So bring me the precious Baby, Tilly. While I have it in my lap, Mrs. Fielding will tell me all about the management of babies. I daresay that she will put me right in twenty points where I'm as wrong as can be.

Won't you, Mrs. Fielding?

MRS.F: Well, I, that is to say... May is the proof of my pudding, if you'll excuse the metaphor.

TILLY: 'ope I can make such a lovely pudding!

(DOT, MAY and TILLY laugh. MRS F. only glowers)

MRS. F: A pudding of this sort takes only the finest of ingredients.

(TILLY is caught off-guard, getting the slight to her station, she sits quietly and tends the baby.)

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Of course, girls are different from boys. Girls you show. Boys you tell!

DOT: I just can't help but love him to death!

MRS. F: Love! Completely unnecessary.

(MAY starts at that.)

A firm but gentle hand with the girls. The boys need a man to raise them. Glad I didn't have one!

DOT: What? A son or a man?

MRS F: Either.

(BABY cries and DOT and TILLY fuss over him. MAY wants to, but she sits there in deference to MRS F.)

MRS.F: Don't coddle the child so. He's a boy. Let him be a man. There are enough fops in the world. Don't need another.

MUSICAL #12 -- STEEL YOURSELF!

MRS. F:

I WILL TELL YOU HOW TO REAR ONE:
YOU MUST NEVER LEARN TO FEAR ONE.
EVEN IF YOU CANNOT CHEER ONE
YOU MUST NEVER CALL THEM "DEAR ONE."

BOYS ARE BEASTS RIGHT FROM THE CRADLE
EVERY TEMPEST AND TIRADE'LL SET YOU OFF
BUT DON'T START STEWING.
FOR HE KNOWS IT'S YOUR UNDOING!
HE'S AWARE, THE MESS HE'S BREWING;
EVEN WHEN HE'S ONLY COOING,
IT'S A SCOFF!

STEEL YOURSELF! DON'T SPARE THE ROD.
IF HE TELLS A LIE -- JUST WHACK HIM
IF HE FAILS TO TRY -- THEN SMACK HIM
STEEL YOURSELF, OR SPOIL THE CHILD
IF HE CRIES, YOU MUST IGNORE HIM
CAN'T BE EVERY MINUTE FOR HIM.

(DOT, TILLY & MAY are horrified at the thoughts MRS F has about child-rearing.)

HE'LL BE STRONGER WITH CORRECTION.
BOYS HAVE NO NEED OF AFFECTION!
WHAT'S THE PLAN?
MAKE HIM A MAN.

NOW, GIRLS ARE DIFFERENT CREATURES;

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DIFFERENT BODIES, MINDS AND FEATURES.
 BUT NEVER BE TOO TENDER;
 DON'T OFFEND HER WEAKER GENDER.
 BE FIRM AND FAIR AND DON'T DESPAIR.
 SHE UNDERSTANDS MUCH MORE THAN SHE LETS ON.
 SHE STUDIES YOU; IT'S HOW THE GIRL GETS ON.
 SHE'LL LIVE HER LIFE; BECOME A WIFE.

STEEL YOURSELF! DO NOT HOLD BACK.
 IF SHE FALTERS INTERVENE,
 (A look to MAY, who blushes.)
 EVEN WHEN SHE MAKES A SCENE.
 STEEL YOURSELF! BUT DON'T ATTACK.
 IF SHE CRIES, YOU MUST BE FOR HER,
 YOU WILL PAY IF YOU IGNORE HER!
 EVERY WILE THAT YOU INDUCE
 HELPS HER STAND UP TO ABUSE!
 SHE MUST BE STRONG
 TO GET ALONG!

DIFFERENT CHILDREN, DIFFERENT WAYS,
 IF YOU LEARN NOTHING IN YOUR DAYS,
 LEARN THIS: STEEL YOURSELF!

Scene Five -- *TACKLETON's house.*

MUSICAL #12A -- EVERYTHING (Reprise)

TACKLETON:

WHEN YOU HAVE EVERYTHING
 EVERYTHING A MAN CAN KNOW;
 NOTHING'S UNEXPECTED
 AND YOU ARE PROTECTED
 FROM THE GOOD OF OTHER MEN.
 HEARTACHE CANNOT TOUCH YOU THEN.
 I BUILT THIS BUSINESS TOY BY TOY
 AND FRIGHT BY FRIGHT --
 AND NIGHT BY NIGHT I PUSHED AND SCRAPED
 AND DAY BY DAY I MADE MY WAY

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TILL TODAY--
 BUT TOMORROW -- I WILL HAVE EVERYTHING!
 (**BLACKOUT.**)

Scene Six -- *Back at the PLUMMER's Hovel. LIGHTS come up on DOT, CALEB, BERTHA, MAY and MRS. F -- little moved from the previous time we were with them. TILLY has the baby. A dog barks. Wheels are heard.*

BERTHA: Whose step is that?

(JOHN and JIMMY enter. DOT rushes to them.)

BERTHA: Whose step is that?

JOHN: Nought but my own.

BERTHA: I heard another. The man's tread behind you, Mr. P.

JOHN: *(Still joking)* Well, she couldn't mean you, could she Jimmy?

(JIMMY laughs his odd laugh.)

BERTHA: Mr. Peerybingle...

JOHN: She's not to be deceived.

(JOHN pats BERTHA's shoulder and then turns and calls, over-loudly, out the door)

Come along, Sir. You'll be welcome. never fear!

(He lowers his voice a little)

He's not so much a stranger, Caleb, for you have seen him once. And he's the best company on earth to speak secrets in front of. I have reasonable good lungs and he tries 'em, I can tell you that.

(THE O.G. hobbles through the door.)

All friends here, Sir. Come, sit down.

O.G.: Just a chair in the corner and leave to sit quietly there.

JOHN: Never more than that, either.

(The O.G. takes a while to get there, comically, of course, but with JOHN's and CALEB's assistance he is finally settled. The O.G. motions surreptitiously to DOT. She becomes quickly disturbed. But MAY is full of smiles. Even JIMMY and TILLY get a kick out of him.)

DOT: How's your pipe, John?

JOHN: Still full. 'ent even had a chance to use it. So much fuss over a silly old pipe.

(HE encircles DOT with his long, strong arms, as HE looks around.)

Yet, somehow, I like her.

(ALL laugh.)

Why even the O.G. is full of admiration for you. Talked of nothing else the whole way here. He's a brave old boy and I like him for it

DOT: *(looking uneasily at the O.G.)* I wish he had a better subject, John.

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JOHN: *(Done with a flourish and a wink)* There's no such thing! My calm, quiet moon! Here! Off with the greatcoat, the shawl, the wrappers and spend a cozy evening by the fire with friends and Cribbage! Eh, Mrs. Fielding? And maybe a glass of beer, Dear One, if there's any left?

DOT: Of course there is.

(SHE gets him his glass and all the while can't take her eyes off of the O.G. TILLY, JIMMY settle downstage to play with the baby while others play Cribbage at the table. TILLY holds the baby while JIMMY begins to play with some puppets they have found in the shop. The baby and TILLY laugh at JIMMY's antics. Others are soon paying attention to him, as the Cribbage game stops. DOT and the O.G. take the distraction to exit to a near by room. TACKLETON enters in time to see them go off and seeks to spy on them.)

MUSICAL #13 -- PUNCH AN' JUDY

JIMMY:

IT STARTS WITH A WHACK
AND A FALL AND A THWACK
AND A HOWL TO MAKE YOU LAUGH.

(HE howls in mock pain as the puppets bat at each other.)

ON AND ON IT'LL GO
IT'S A SILLY OLD SHOW
FILLED WITH PRATFALLS AND A GAFF.

OH, THE TIMES I SAW IT LIVE
IN THE STREETS AROUND THE TOWN.
HOW MY HEART SEEMED TO COME ALIVE
AT THE ANTICS OF THE CLOWN.
I LOVE PUNCH AND JUDY.
AND JOHN WILL LOVE THEM, TOO.
HE'LL NEVER BE RUDE, HE'LL SEE
THAT THEY DO IT ALL SO YOU DON'T HAVE TO.
PUNCH AND JUDY!
PUNCH AND JUDY!
PUNCH AND JUDY!

(He arises to his feet, still with the puppets on his hands, but dances around like Punch with Judy after him. He trips, and hops and falls and dances and howls as the imagined Judy smacks him. Needless to say that JIMMY should be a pretty good young dancer and comic.)

I LOVE PUNCH AND JUDY.
AND JOHN WILL LOVE THEM, TOO.
HE'LL NEVER BE RUDE, HE'LL SEE
THAT THEY DO IT ALL SO YOU DON'T HAVE TO.
PUNCH AND JUDY!

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PUNCH AND JUDY!

PUNCH AND JUDY!

(There is applause and a few whistles from those left in the room. TACKLETON approaches JOHN through the noise.)

TACKLETON: I am sorry to disturb you -- but a word -- directly.

JOHN: *(In the middle of still applauding)* Must it be a crisis?

TACKLETON: It is -- just that!

JOHN: Whatever can be...

TACKLETON: Hush, John Peerybingle. I am sorry for this. I am indeed. I have been afraid of it. I have suspected it from the first.

(JOHN and TACKLETON draw away from the others who have encircled JIMMY and TILLY in well-wishes. The LIGHTS shift to the room where DOT and the O.G. are talking, seen in silhouette through a window. They seem to know each other. We hear nothing of them, we only see what JOHN and TACKLETON see.)

Can you near to look through that window? You are a strong man and I fear you might do murder before you know it. Forebear!

(JOHN recoils and then is at the window in a flash. We all see the O.G. in the same clothes but without his wig. He is young. A wig is in his hands. DOT is talking and laughing. O.G. whispers in DOT's ear. They both laugh. He places his hands about her waist and they head for the door, where she places the wig and adjusts it on his head before they vanish from the room. JOHN is clenching and unclenching his fists. It is all TACKLETON can do to get him away and back to the party, unnoticed. But it is managed. JOHN immediately dons his greatcoat, holding his shawl and wraps in his hands. Then he heads out the door. TACKLETON watches as O.G. and DOT as they reenter the room. The others are sitting at the table, engrossed in a game of Cribbage which they entered into during the scene in the adjoining room. The O.G. shuffles to his corner as if he had never left it.)

DOT: Where is my John?

TACKLETON: Waiting!

DOT: Where?

TACKLETON: Outside.

DOT: Then, Tilly, give me the baby! Goodnight, Mr. Tackleton. Caleb -- Bertha. May? Tomorrow.

(TILLY gives DOT the baby as she and JIMMY get ready to leave. They watch as the O.G. goes through the motions of heading for the door with coat and hat. It doesn't take as long as before, but still could be funny to some. But not to others. TACKLETON, MAY, MRS F prepare to leave BERTHA and CALEB. As DOT reaches the cart outside, JIMMY seats the O.G. in the back and hops in. JOHN is nowhere to be found, but he is in the shadows.)

DOT: John! John, dear. Where are you?

TACKLETON: *(Emerging briefly)* Gone home!

DOT: Walking on Christmas Eve?! He's never left my side if he didn't have to.

TACKLETON: He had to.

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(TACKLETON, with a strange smile on his face, exits into the Hovel, collects MAY and MRS F and exits through the back of the shop.)

DOT: John! John! Oh, dear!

(DOT falters in the street. JIMMY seats TILLY in the back with the O.G. and goes to help DOT up onto the seat. He then pulls the cart offstage. BERTHA has exited to her room. CALEB is alone in the shop. The toys are silent, almost ominous. The CRICKETS are silent. CALEB is distressed.)

MUSICAL #14 -- BETRAYED

CALEB:

HAVE I DECEIVED HER FROM THE CRADLE
 JUST TO BREAK HER HEART AT LAST?
 HAVE I LOVED HER FROM THE CRADLE
 TO NO LONGER BE STEADFAST?
 I'VE LED HER ON, I'VE PLAYED A GAME
 TO EASE HER JOURNEY HERE.
 WAS IT ALL FOR NOTHING MORE THEN FOR
 MY HEART TO CREEP WITH FEAR?
 HAVE I BETRAYED HER?
 HAVE I DELAYED HER?
 HAVE I KEPT HER FROM THE TRUTH TO ONLY FIND THE TRUTH?
 WITH EVERYTHING I WISHED FOR HER,
 I PROTECTED HER FROM HARM.
 AFTER ALL IS SAID AND DONE
 AM I THE ONE
 WHO CAUSED THE MOST ALARM

(LIGHTS fade up on JOHN. Alone.)

BETRAYED.
 BETRAYED!
 WHO'D HAVE THOUGHT
 THAT LITTLE DOT
 COULD EVER BE UNTRUE?
 BETRAYED.
 BETRAYED!
 WAS IT ME
 WHO DIDN'T SEE?
 OR IS IT ALL, DOT,
 AS YOU HAVE SHOWN, DOT --
 INSIDE OF YOU?
 OR WAS IT ME WHO DIDN'T SEE?

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JOHN:
BETRAYED.
BETRAYED!
WHO'D HAVE THOUGHT
THAT LITTLE DOT
COULD EVER BE UNTRUE?
BETRAYED.
BETRAYED!
WAS IT ME
WHO DIDN'T SEE?
OR IS IT ALL, DOT,
AS YOU HAVE SHOWN, DOT --
INSIDE OF YOU?
OR WAS IT ME WHO DID NOT SEE?

(The LIGHTS fade to:)

CALEB:
HAVE I BETRAYED HER?
HAVE I DELAYED HER?
HAVE I KEPT HER FROM THE TRUTH
TO ONLY FIND THE TRUTH?
WITH EVERYTHING I WISHED FOR HER,
I PROTECTED HER FROM HARM.
AFTER ALL IS SAID AND DONE
AM I THE ONE
WHO CAUSED THE MOST ALARM?

WAS IT ME WHO COULD NOT SEE?

INTERMISSION

23 more pages to the end (ACT III)