

**THE CRICKET ON THE HEARTH**  
***REHEARSED***

**A play by David Jacklin**

*Adapted from the play by Albert Smith  
from the novella by Charles Dickens*

*with additional dialogue from the play by  
Dion Boucicault*

*and even more additional dialogue by  
David Jacklin*

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## THE CHARACTERS

JOHN PEERYBINGLE, a carrier; a lumbering, slow, honest man  
CALEB PLUMMER, a poor old toymaker in the employ of Tackleton

EDWARD PLUMMER, the son of Caleb Plummer

TACKLETON, a stern, ill-natured, sarcastic toy merchant

MRS. MARY PEERYBINGLE, called DOT, John Peerybingle's wife

BERTHA PLUMMER, the blind daughter of Caleb Plummer

MAY FIELDING, a friend to Mrs. Peerybingle

MRS. FIELDING, her mother; a little, peevish, querulous old lady

TILLY SLOWBOY, a great clumsy girl; Mrs. Peerybingle's nursemaid

FOH VOICE, the play's director, an increasingly ineffectual voice of wisdom

PROMPTER, who disseminates or withholds knowledge at whim

3<sup>rd</sup> VOICE, the technical operator, who has control over all



**THE CRICKET ON THE HEARTH**  
*Rehearsed*

**Act One**

*(The Scene represents the interior of John Peerybingle's Cottage. It is a poor cottage, but clean and tidy. A fire is alight in the grate L., on which is the Kettle, practicable spout, to steam. Table and tea-things. Chairs by the fire and around the table. A Cradle. There is a Door C., another U.L. and a Window R. with curtain furniture.)*

*(MUSIC: The Cricket On The Hearth)*

*(Lights up. The Company enter.)*

THE COMPANY: Oh, the birds have flown away and the summer's flow'rs have wither'd,  
and the autumn leaves have turned and falling fast.  
But I rest my weary soul by the dear old hearthstone fire  
And listen to the cricket on the hearth.

As the embers die away and the warmth and light are fading,  
I remember all the troubles that I have  
But my cares all disappear as I drowse here by the fire  
And listen to the cricket on – the cric- ket on the hearth.

Oh, oh, listen to the cricket song, singing on the hearth.  
Luck and joy, it seems to sing, for those who`ll hear its worth.  
Oh, oh, listen to the cricket song, singing there tonight.  
Lucky cricket singing now his happy song so bright.

I know this weary world never can o'erwhelm my spirit  
While the cricket makes his music by the fire.  
It will give me hope anew. It will lift my heavy load,  
To listen to the cricket on – the cricket on the hearth.

Oh, oh, listen to the cricket song, singing on the hearth.  
Luck and joy, it seems to sing, for those who`ll hear its worth.  
Oh, oh, listen to the cricket song, singing there tonight.  
Lucky cricket singing now his happy song so bright.  
Lucky cricket singing now his happy song so bright.

*(Lights down and all exit.)*

*(At the rising of the curtain, music, TILLY SLOWBOY is sitting down*

*The Cricket On The Hearth 2*

*on a low stool by the cradle, tending the baby. DOT is busy about.)*

DOT: There! there's the ham — and there's the tea — and there's the bread! Now all is comfortable against John comes home. Dear me! if it had been for anybody else, how tired I should have been! and cross, too! oh, very cross! I'm sure there was enough to make me so. First, when I went to fill the kettle, I lost my patterns, and splashed my legs —

FOH VOICE: Pattens!

DOT: Pattens!, and splashed my legs — that's hard to bear when one prides oneself upon one's legs. *(Breaking character.)* <INSERT PROMPTER'S NAME>, is that right?

PROMPTER: Yes.

DOT: *(Resuming character.)* Then the lid of the kettle turned itself topsy-turvy, and then slid sideways, right down to my bottom, and was as difficult to get out as if it had been the wreck of the Royal George!

FOH VOICE: Right down to your bottom? Really?

DOT: But now everything's right, and I can sit down for a minute and be cheerful.

*(Music. — She sits down at the fireside. The chirp of the Cricket is heard — the teakettle steams.)*

Ah! there's The Cricket On The Hearth again. *(The sound of the cricket continues to grow louder until it overpowers everything.)* I thought it wouldn't be quiet long when the kettle began to sing. How its voice sounds through the house! Why, I declare it's trying to outdo the kettle!! — no, the kettle's not to be finished like that! How I love its fireside song of comfort!!!  
AND JOHN LOVES IT, TOO!!!

FOH VOICE: Oh, for god's sake! Stop!

*(DOT stops, but the cricket goes merrily along.)*

<INSERT TECHNICIAN'S NAME>! Stop!

*(The cricket suddenly stop.)*

What is that supposed to be?

- EVERYBODY: A cricket.
- FOH VOICE: Sounds like a lawn-mower with a bad valve.
- 3<sup>RD</sup> VOICE: I've got others.
- FOH VOICE: Never mind. We'll fix it later. Dot! Go on! "John loves it, too."
- DOT: He's very late to-night. Oh! I hear him. Yes, I'm sure it is. *(Rises.)* Give me baby, Tilly; I know it is John coming home!
- (Music— She takes the baby from Tilly, and going to the door, opens it. Part of the cart is seen, with a lantern — JOHN comes in, stamping with cold — snow on him — he shakes his hat.)*
- Oh! goodness, John, what a state you're in, with the weather.
- (Starts to assist him to remove his coat, but he doesn't have one.)*
- JOHN: Well, Dot, it ain't exactly summer weather.
- (Puts down parcels. DOT mimes hanging up his coat on a hook U.S.)*
- FOH VOICE: *(Breaking character.)* Where's your coat?
- JOHN: Is there one?
- FOH VOICE: It's back there. Never mind. Keep going.
- DOT: I wish you wouldn't call me Dot, John — I don't like it.
- JOHN: *(Drawing her to him.)* Why, little woman, what else are you? A dot, and — *(Looks at baby.)* — a dot, and a da— no, a dash and a dot — no, dot and dash, that's right.
- PROMPTER: A dot and a da — I won't make a joke, I should only spoil it.
- JOHN: I won't make a joke; I've spoiled it already!
- DOT: Don't baby look precious in his sleep?
- JOHN: He's generally asleep, ain't he?
- DOT: Good gracious — no!

*The Cricket On The Hearth 4*

JOHN: Oh! I thought his eyes were — I thought he was generally — I thought he was — *(Breaking character.)* I'm going to need my book. *(He exits.)*

FOH VOICE: Fine. I just thought we'd try it.

*(The sound of crickets is heard very loudly.)*

<INSERT TECHNICIAN'S NAME>!

*(The crickets suddenly stop.)*

3<sup>RD</sup> VOICE: Oh, could you hear that?

JOHN: *(Returning with his script.)* I thought his eyes were generally shut. *(Shouts in baby's ear.)* Holloa!

DOT: Goodness, John!

JOHN: It ain't right for him wink that way, is it ? And look! He's gasping like a goldfish!

DOT: *(With dignity.)* You don't deserve to be father— you don't.

JOHN: No, I don't know much about it. I only know the wind's been blowing straight into the cart, the whole way home.

*(The sound of howling wind is heard.)*

FOH VOICE: <INSERT TECHNICIAN'S NAME>!

*(The wind sound stops.)*

DOT: Poor old man! So it has. Here, take the baby, Tilly, while I make myself of some use. Now see me bustle about, John, like a busy bee — "How doth the little busy bee" — and all the rest of it, you know, John. Did you ever learn "How doth the little," when you went to school, John?

JOHN: Not quite to know it. I was very near it, once; but I should only have spoilt it, I dare say.

DOT: *(Laughs.)* Ha! ha! what a dear old dunce you are, John, to be sure! Here, Tilly, take baby — and don't let him fall under the grate, whatever you do! *(At table.)* There! there's the tea-pot ready on the hob — and the cold knuckle of ham — and the crusty loaf — and there's the Cricket!



*(The sound of howling wind is heard.)*

FOH VOICE: Oh, god!

*(The sound of wind stops.)*

3<sup>rd</sup> VOICE: Sorry!

JOHN: *(Taking off and hanging up an imaginary coat – again.)* Heyday! It's merrier than ever, to-night. A cricket on the hearth is the luckiest thing in all the world!

DOT: And sure to bring us good fortune!

*(MUSIC)*

JOHN & DOT: I know this weary world never can o'erwhelm my spirit  
While the cricket makes his music by the fire.  
It will give me hope anew. It will lift my heavy load,  
To listen to the cricket on – the cricket on the hearth.

Oh, oh, listen to the cricket song, singing on the hearth.  
Luck and joy, it seems to sing, for those who'll hear its worth.  
Oh, oh, listen to the cricket song, singing there tonight.  
Lucky cricket singing now his happy song so bright.  
Lucky cricket singing now his happy song so bright.

DOT: There are not many parcels to-night, John. *(Goes to those he has put down.)*  
What's this round box? *(But there is no round box; she picks up a square one.)* Why, it's a wedding cake!

JOHN: *(To TILLEY.)* If you was to pack a wedding cake up in a tea chest inside a travel trunk inside a pickled salmon keg, a woman would be sure to find it directly. Yes, I called for it at the pastry cook's.

DOT: *(Reading the label.)* Why, John — good gracious, John! you never mean to say it's Old Tackleton, the toy maker's!

TILLY: *(Dancing the baby.)* Was it Old Tackleton's, the toy maker's, then? and did it call at pastry cook's, for its wedding cakes — and did its mothers know its boxes, when its fathers brought them homeses?

DOT: *(Still looking at the parcel.)* It's really come about! Why, May and I were girls at school together — and he's as old as *(starting to point to JOHN but*

*stopping herself.*) — How much older is he, I wonder?

JOHN: *(At the table.)* How many cups of tea shall I have tonight, I wonder? Ah! As to eating, I eat but little; but that little I do enjoy. Dot. Dot — *(Bops with the knife on table.)* Dot! *(Dot has remained plunged in thought since she last spoke. She starts at the noise.)*

DOT: Bless me, John! I was thinking. These are all the parcels, are they?

JOHN: That's all. Why, no! I — *(lays down knife and fork.)* — I declare, I've clean forgotten the old gentleman!

DOT: The old gentleman?

JOHN: In the cart. He was asleep amongst the straw the last time I saw him — Halloo! yahoo there! — *(goes out of the door; losing his line)* Rouse up there! — *(Breaking character.)* Argh, me hearty — or something like that.

PROMPTER: “That's my hearty.”

JOHN: *(OFF.)* Whatever.

*(Music. — John returns with the Stranger, who removes his hat, and remains bare-headed, in the centre of the room.)*

*(Resuming character.)* You are such a good sleeper, sir, that I was going to ask where the other six are, only that would be a joke and I know I should spoil it. Ha, ha!

DOT: *(Breaking character.)* I don't understand why that's supposed to be funny.

FOH VOICE: The Seven Sleepers of Ephesus. Keep going.

DOT: *(Sarcastically.)* Oh, I get it now! Ha, ha.

FOH VOICE: Keep going.

*(Music. — The Stranger looks round him, and bows to John and Dot, gravely — then sits on a chair by the fireplace.)*

JOHN: There! that's the way I found him, sitting by the road-side. Upright as a millstone, and almost as deaf.

DOT: Sitting in the open air?

JOHN: In the open air, just at dusk. "Carriage paid," he said! and gave me eighteen pence. Then he got in; and there he is!

STRANGER: If you please, I was To Be Left Till Called For. Don't mind me.

*(He puts on a pair of spectacles, takes a book from his pocket, and begins to read. John and Dot look at him with astonishment.)*

*(Nodding his head towards Dot.)* Your daughter, friend?

JOHN: Wife!

STRANGER: Niece?

JOHN: *(Loud.)* Wife!

STRANGER: Indeed — very young! *(Reads for an instant, then resumes.)* Baby yours? *(John and Dot nod eagerly.)* Girl?

JOHN: *(Bawling.)* B — o — y!

STRANGER: Also very young, eh?

DOT: *(Bawls in Stranger's ear.)* Two months and three days! — vaccinated just six days ago!

*(A pause; JOHN and DOT stand waiting expectantly. Finally, JOHN stamps his foot three times. Immediately, someone knocks at the door.)*

JOHN: He's called for, sure enough! — open the door, Tilly.

*(Music. — Tilly goes to the door, open it, and lets in CALEB in his sack-cloth coat.)*

CALEB: *(Reading from a script.)* Good evening, John! Good evening, mum! Good evening, Tilly— good evening, Unbeknown! How's baby, mum? Boxer's pretty well, I hope?

FOH VOICE: <INSERT ACTOR'S NAME>, it's the dress rehearsal! Our only dress rehearsal! Do you not know this?

CALEB: *(Breaking character.)* No.

FOH VOICE: Fine. What's Dot's line?

PROMPTER: All thriving, Caleb.

DOT: All thriving, Caleb! You need only to look at the dear child to know that.

CALEB: And I'm sure I need only look at you, for another — or at John, for another— or at Tilly, as far as that goes.

JOHN: Busy just now, Caleb?

ALEB: Well, this is a good time of year for the toy business; There's rather a run upon Noah's arks, just at present. I wish I could improve Noah's family. It would be satisfaction to make it clearer which was Shems and Hams and which was wives but I don't see how it's to be done at the price. Ah, well! Have you got any parcel for me, John? *(He drawls the last sentence egregiously.)*

JOHN: *(Breaking character, shielding his eyes and looking out into the lights)* Is he going to do it like that?

FOH VOICE: Who knows?

CALEB: Ah, well! Have you got any parcel for me, John?

*(John begins to go to the pocket of his coat, but realizes he needs a prop that is in the coat that isn't there.)*

FOH VOICE: Ah-ha! And now you know.

*(JOHN snaps his fingers to someone OFF and a little plant in a flower-pot is thrust into the light by a hand and arm.)*

JOHN: There it is! Not so much as a leaf damaged— full of buds! It was very dear, though, Caleb, at this season.

CALEB: Never mind; it would be cheap to me whatever it cost. Anything else?

JOHN: A small box— here you are! *(He stops and speaks OFF.)* I need the box!

PROMPTER: You've got it!

*(CALEB hands him a small box from those JOHN brought on.)*

JOHN: A small box— here you are! *(He hands the box back to CALEB.)*

CALEB: *(Spelling.)* "For Caleb Plummer, with cash." With cash? I don't think it's for me.

JOHN: "With care." Where do you make out "cash"?

CALEB: Oh! "With care"? Yes, yes, that's mine. Ah! if my dear boy in the golden South Americas had lived, John, it might have been cash indeed! Yes, yes; for my poor blind Bertha's work— it's a box of dolls' eyes. *(He shakes the box.)* I wish it was her own sight in a box, John.

JOHN: I wish it was, or could be.

CALEB: To think she should never see the dolls, and them a-staring at her all day long. That's where it cuts. What's the damage, John?

JOHN: I'll damage you, if you inquire. Nearly a joke, Dot; very near, wasn't it? Stop, Caleb — here's something for your governor, Old Tackleton. *(Breaking character)* I don't have enough parcels. I need one for the wedding cake, two for Caleb and one for Tackleton.

FOH VOICE: Fine! Can we just keep going?

DOT: No, the one for Tackleton is the wedding cake.

JOHN: Right. So, I just need three.

FOH VOICE: Keep going.

CALEB: He hasn't been here, has he?

JOHN: But should I have more? Extras?

FOH VOICE: Keep going.

CALEB: He hasn't been here, has he?

JOHN: *(Resuming character.)* Not he, he's too busy, counting.

FOH VOICE: "Courting."

JOHN: *(Breaking character.)* Courting. That makes more sense.

CALEB: He isn't a pleasant man, is he, though he does sell toys. 'Pon my honour, I think he only likes to sell those that make children cry. I think I had better go. By the bye, you couldn't have the goodness to let me pull Boxer's tail, for a moment, could you?

DOT: Why, Caleb, what a question!

CALEB: Oh! never mind, mum; he mightn't like it, perhaps. There's a small order just come in for barking dogs and I'd like to get as close to nature as I could for sixpence. That's all, never mind, mum; good-bye!

*(He starts to exit.)*

FOH VOICE: Take the box!

*(CALEB continues out.)*

Take the box!

*(CALEB returns and picks up the box.)*

CALEB: *(Breaking character.)* I was coming back for it.

*(He puts the box on his shoulder, and starts out; he stops at the door and waits.)*

FOH VOICE: What?

CALEB: Tackleton is supposed to come in.

FOH VOICE: Tackleton!

*(A pause.)*

Where is he?

*(The stage door bangs OFF.)*

PROMPTER: Here he is!

*(CALEB starts out and is met by TACKLETON on the threshold.)*

TACKLETON: *(Entering.)* Oh! here you are, are you? Wait a bit; I'll take you home.

*(Breaking character)* Sorry, I was in the – *(Resuming)* John Peerybingle, my service to you; and to your pretty wife. Handsomer every day! *(Aside.)* And younger, there's the devil of it.

DOT: I should be astonished at your paying compliments, Mr. Tackleton, but for your condition.

TACKLETON: *(Breaking character)* It sounds like I'm pregnant.

FOH VOICE: Oh, come on. This is our only dress rehearsal. Let's get it together.

TACKLETON: Sorry. I'm going to need my script.

FOH VOICE: Why not?

DOT: Could I . . . ?

FOH VOICE: Why should you be any different? Everybody get your scripts!

DOT & TILLY: Thank you.

*(DOT, TILLY and TACKLETON exit to get their scripts. A pause.)*

JOHN: When do we open?

FOH VOICE: When do we close?

3<sup>rd</sup> VOICE: I've got another cricket sound. You want to hear it?

FOH VOICE: Not really.

*(A sound of crickets with highway traffic is heard.)*

Really?

*(The sound stops; DOT, TILLY and TACKLETON re-enter with scripts)*

Okay. Take it from Tackleton's entrance --- from Caleb's exit. *(TACKLETON exits.)* What's the line?

CALEB: Oh! never mind, mum; he mightn't like it, perhaps. There's a small order just come in for barking dogs and I'd like to get as close to nature as I could for sixpence.

DOT: *(Breaking character.)* I don't get that.

CALEB: *(Breaking character.)* He wants to hear what a dog sounds like when you pull its tail, so that he can make toys that sound like . . .

FOH VOICE: Keep going!

CALEB: *(Resuming character.)* That's all, never mind, mum; good-bye!

FOH VOICE: Take the box!

*(CALEB shoulders the box and starts out and is met by TACKLETON on the threshold.)*

TACKLETON: *(Entering.)* Oh! here you are, are you? Wait a bit; I'll take you home. *(Looking at DOT.)* John Peerybingle, my service to you . . .

JOHN: *(Breaking character.)* Over here.

TACKLETON *(Turning to him.)* . . . and to your pretty wife.

JOHN: That's over there.

TACKLETON: *(Turning to DOT.)* . . . and to your pretty wife. Handsomer every day! *(Aside.)* And younger, there's the devil of it.

DOT: I should be astonished at your paying compliments, Mr. Tackleton, but for your condition.

TACKLETON: Oh! You know all about it! Next Thursday, Christmas Day, is to be my wedding-day.

JOHN: Why, it's our wedding-day, too.

TACKLETON: Ha! ha! You'll come to the wedding — we're in the same boat, you know.

JOHN: How, in the same boat?

TACKLETON: *(Nudging him.)* A little disparity in age, you know. Come and spend an evening with us beforehand.

JOHN: Why?



TACKLETON: Why? For pleasure, sociability, you know, and all that.

JOHN: I thought you were never sociable.

TACKLETON: The truth is, you have a— a comfortable appearance together, you and your wife. We know better, but . . .

JOHN: No, we don't know better. What are you talking about?

TACKLETON: Well, we don't know better, then but, as you have an appearance, your company will produce a favourable effect on Mrs. Tackleton that will be.

JOHN: We've made a promise to ourselves, these six months, to keep our wedding-day at home.

TACKLETON: Bah! what home?

*(Cricket is heard --- or maybe it's a gorilla. It's hard to tell. At any rate, it's very loud.)*

Why don't you kill that cricket? I always do! I hate their noise!

JOHN: You kill your crickets, eh?!

*(The sound suddenly cuts off.)*

TACKLETON: SCRUNCH 'EM, SIR! *(He realizes that he is yelling over nothing.)* You'll say you'll come; because, if your wife says to my wife, "My husband's the best husband in the world, and I dote on him!", my wife will say the same, or more; and half believe it, too.

JOHN: Do you mean to say she don't believe it, then?

TACKLETON: Ha! ha! We both had the humour, sir, to marry a young wife. But now, look there! *(Points to Dot, who is sitting at the fire.)* She honours and obeys, no doubt. But, do you think there's anything more in it?

*(The STRANGER moves to DOT and whispers in her ear.)*

JOHN: I think I should chuck any man out of the window who said there wasn't.

TACKLETON: I see. Good night! You won't give us to-morrow evening? Well, next day you go visiting, then. Good night!

*(DOT gives a loud shriek, starts up from her seat, and remains transfixed with terror and surprise. Music.)*

JOHN: Dot! Are you ill? Mary, what's the matter? *(He supports her.)* What is it? Tell me!

*(The STRANGER has moved back to his spot. DOT falls into a fit of hysterical laughter, claps her hands together, and sinks back onto her chair.)*

What is it, Mary?

DOT: *(Excited.)* I'm better, John — I'm quite well — something came suddenly before my eyes — I don't know what it was — it's quite gone— quite gone!

TACKLETON: I'm glad it's gone! — I wonder where it's gone, and what it was? Humph! Caleb, come here — who's that, with the gray hair.

*(Points to Stranger.)*

CALEB: I don't know, sir. Never see him before. A beautiful figure for a nutcracker — quite a new model — with a screw jaw opening down into his waistcoat, he'd be lovely!

TACKLETON: Not ugly enough!

CALEB: Or for a firebox, perhaps — what a model! Unscrew his head, to put the matches in — turn him heels upwards, for a light — and what a firebox for a gentleman's mantelpiece, just as he stands!

TACKLETON: Not half ugly enough! Come, bring that box — *(To DOT.)* All right now, I hope?

DOT: *(Hurriedly.)* Oh! quite gone— quite gone! Good night!

TACKLETON: Good night! — Good night, John Peerybingle!

JOHN: Stop! — this good gentleman may be glad of company— I must give him a hint to go!

STRANGER: *(Rises, and advances towards John.)* I beg your pardon, friend, but the attendant whom my infirmity — *(Points to his ears)* — renders almost indispensable, not having arrived, I fear there must be some mistake. The

bad night is still as bad as ever. Would you, in your kindness suffer me to rent a bed here?

DOT: *(Eagerly.)* Yes, yes, certainly.

JOHN: Oh! well, I don't object; but still, I'm not quite sure that . . .

DOT: Hush, dear John!

TACKLETON: Hush! why, he's stone deaf! — Odd! *(To John.)* Isn't it?

DOT: I know he is, but— yes, sir — certainly — there's the spare room, and the bed ready made up!

TACKLETON: Well, now I'm off! Good night, John — good night, Mrs. Peerybingle! Take care, Caleb; let that box fall, and I'll murder you!

DOT: *(To Stranger.)* This way, sir— this is your room!

*(She takes a candle, and beckons the STRANGER to an apartment at the side. — TACKLETON, who is going, preceded by CALEB, turns back, and laying his hand on JOHN's shoulder; points towards his wife and the STRANGER.)*

FOH VOICE: And, lights! Music, music, music.

### **Tableau**

### **End of Act 1.**

*(The lights go to black. An entirely inappropriate piece of music is heard.)*

What the hell is that?

3<sup>rd</sup> VOICE: I haven't got the scene change music loaded up, yet.

FOH VOICE: Can we do that before tomorrow?

3<sup>rd</sup> VOICE: Sure.

FOH VOICE: Thank you — and scene change!

*(The lights come up and the actors come out and set the new*

*scene.)*

Make it march, people! The audience is getting up and going home, right now.

BERTHA: I don't blame them.

FOH VOICE: What?

BERTHA: It's not much of a story.

PROMPTER: I don't get why the young girls are marrying the old men.

CALEB: It was a different time, back then.

PROMPTER: It's creepy.

BERTHA: And, it's so melodramatic.

JOHN: What do you mean? It's Dickens!

DOT: It's really a pretty boring story, though, isn't it?

JOHN: It's Dickens!

DOT: Yes, but . . . I mean . . .

JOHN: What?

DOT: Never mind.

JOHN: It's Dickens! Everybody loves Dickens!

ALL BUT JOHN: *(OFF)* I don't!

FOH VOICE: Alright, that's enough! We're doing Dickens!

JOHN: Yeah, God bless us, everyone!

DOT: Can't we do a good one? Who ever heard of The Cricket On The Hearth? I never did.

FOH VOICE: Ever heard of Jiminy Cricket?

DOT: Sort of.

FOH VOICE: Same story. Maybe this isn't his greatest writing. Maybe there's no "God bless us, everyone" or "Please, sir, can I have more?" or "It's a far, far better thing I do" but audiences loves Dickens! They're suckers for it.

MRS. FIELDING: I don't see why we just didn't do the show we announced.

FOH VOICE: Because, apart from you and two others, nobody signed up for it. Alright! Places for Act Two!

*(People start to move to their Act Two places.)*

Is Tackleton back there?

PROMPTER: He's just gone to the washroom.

CALEB: *(OFF)* He needs a prostate exam.

FOH VOICE: I'll give him a prostate exam.

*(The stage door slams.)*

PROMPTER: Here he is!

TACKLETON: *(Entering.)* Sorry. Am I late?

FOH VOICE: No, no. Take your time. There'll still be one or two audience members left. Places! *(TACKLETON exits.)*

PROMPTER: We're ready.

FOH VOICE: And, music! And, lights!

*The Abode of CALEB PLUMMER—A poor, half tumbling down interior. — The room is filled with toys of all descriptions, especially dolls' houses and dolls.— There are movable sand toys, and musical carts, fiddles, drums, weapons, Noah's arks, horses, etc., etc. — CALEB's coat hung up — it is ragged and non-descript.*

*As the curtain rises, CALEB (with script) is discovered making a Baby-house. He sings —*

CALEB: THE GLASSES SPARKLE ON THE BOARD,

THE WINE IS RUBY BRIGHT.  
THE REIGN OF PLEASURE IS RESTORED,  
OF EASE AND OF DELIGHT.

Ah, me! my voice gets fainter every day. I'm often afraid that my poor blind child, Bertha, will perceive it, and realize that I not young and lively.

THE DAY IS GONE; THE NIGHT'S OUR OWN,  
THEN LET US FEAST THE SOUL.  
IF ANY PAIN OR CARE REMAIN, WHY,  
DROWN IT IN A BOWL.

*(TACKLETON enters.)*

TACKLETON: What, you're singing, are you? I can't afford the time to sing . . .

CALEB/PROMPTER/

FOH VOICE: Not yet!

TACKLETON: I can't afford the time to sing, not yet.

FOH VOICE: Not yet! That wasn't your cue.

TACKLETON: *(Breaking character.)* Yes, it was. "Drown it in a bowl."

CALEB: *(Breaking character.)* I say that again, later.

FOH VOICE: Much later.

TACKLETON: Sorry.

*(He goes out.)*

CALEB: *(Resuming.)* I'LL DROWN IT IN A BOWL.

Poor Bertha! yet her blindness may be a blessing. She doesn't know that the walls are blotched, and bare of plaster, that the wood is rotting, and the paper peeling off.

THE WORLD, THEY SAY'S A WORLD OF WOE,  
BUT THAT I DO DENY.  
CAN SORROW FROM THE GOBLET FLOW,  
OR PAIN FROM BEAUTY'S EYE?

I have made her believe that all of Tackleton's harsh reproofs are meant as jokes — she thinks he is our guardian angel. If my poor boy had lived to come back from the golden South Americas, how different it would have been.

THIS NIGHT IS OURS, THEN STREW WITH FLOWERS  
THE MOMENTS AS THEY ROLL.  
IF ANY CARE OR PAIN REMAIN, WHY,  
DROWN IT IN A BOWL.

CALEB: *(Turning to the door.)* Bertha!

*(TACKLETON enters with BERTHA directly behind him. TACKLETON sees that he's wrong again and exits, bumping into BERTHA as they both try to get through the door. BERTHA feels her way to CALEB. The effect of her blindness is somewhat dissipated by the fact that she carries a script as well.)*

BERTHA: *(Feeling his shoulders for damp.)* Father! You were out in the rain last night, in your beautiful new coat.

*(He has forgotten to put on his coat.)*

FOH VOICE: Is that script in Braille, Bertha?

BERTHA: *(Breaking character.)* Everybody else has theirs.

FOH VOICE: I know, but . . . never mind. Keep going. <INSERT PROMPTER'S NAME>?

PROMPTER: . . . in your beautiful new great coat.

BERTHA: . . . in your beautiful, great new coat.

CALEB: In my beautiful new grey coat.

BERTHA: *(Clapping her hands with delight.)* I see you, father, as plainly as if I had the eyes I never want, when you are with me. A blue coat . . .

CALEB: Bright blue.

BERTHA: Yes, bright blue! The colour I can remember in the blessed sky. A bright blue coat *(laughing)* and in it you, dear father, with your merry eye, your smiling face, and your dark hair, looking so young and handsome.

CALEB: Now, now! I shall be vain presently.

BERTHA: Not at all, father. But I am idling; I can talk just as well at work.

*(Feels about for her basket. As she reaches out, the PROMPTER runs on and places a basket under her hands, then exits. She begins to dress dolls from the basket.)*

CALEB: *(Taking up the dolls' house. In a low tone. )* There we are, as near the real thing as twelve ha'p'nce is to sixp'nce. If there was only a staircase in it now, and regular doors to the rooms, but that's the worst of my calling. I'm always deluding myself and swindling myself.

BERTHA: You are speaking quite softly; you are not tired, father?

CALEB: Tired! What could tire me, Bertha? I was never tired.

*(Sings with forced energy.)*

WE'LL DROWN IT IN A BOWL,  
WE'LL DROWN IT IN A BOWL.

*(There is a pause.)*

WE'LL DROWN IT IN A BOWL.

*(TACKLETON hurries in.)*

TACKLETON: I'm sorry, was that it?

FOH VOICE: Yes.

TACKLETON: Sorry. So, it's the third time he sings it? Can you give me that again?

*(He exits.)*

CALEB: Tired! What could tire me, Bertha? I was never tired.

*(Sings with forced energy.)*

WE'LL DROWN IT IN A BOWL,  
WE'LL DROWN IT IN A BOWL.



*(TACKLETON enters again.)*

TACKLETON: Sorry. Does he sing it twice there?

FOH VOICE: Yes.

TACKLETON: So, he sings it four times in all?

FOH VOICE: When you hear the word “drown” for the fourth time, do it!

*(TACKLETON exits.)*

CALEB: Tired! What could tire me, Bertha? I was never tired.

*(Sings with forced energy.)*

WE'LL DROWN IT IN A BOWL — twice!

*(As he is singing, TACKLETON enters.)*

TACKLETON: What, you're singing, are you? I can't afford the time to sing — I'm glad you can. I hope you can afford to work too. Hardly time for both, I should think.

CALEB: *(To Bertha.)* If you could only see him, Bertha, how he's winking at me. Such a joker. *(Breaking character.)* Shouldn't he be winking at me?

FOH VOICE: Why? Do you think you're that attractive?

CALEB: I just said “See how he's winking at me” and he's not winking at me.

FOH VOICE: Because Caleb is lying – to make Bertha feel good.

CALEB: Oh? Oh, that makes more sense. *(To BERTHA.)* If you could only see him, Bertha, how he's winking at me. Such a man to joke.

TACKLETON: The bird that can sing, and won't sing, must be made to sing, they say. What about the bird that oughtn't to sing, and will sing — is there anything that he should be made to do?

CALEB: *(Aside to BERTHA.)* The way he's winking at this moment! Oh, my gracious!

BERTHA: Always merry and light-hearted with us, Mr. Tackleton.

TACKLETON: Oh — there you are, are you? Poor idiot! Umph! — well — and being there, how are you?

BERTHA: Oh, as happy as ever you can wish me to be; as happy as you would make the whole world if you could. *(Rising.)*

TACKLETON: Poor idiot! not a gleam of reason.

*(BERTHA, who does not hear him, takes TACKLETON's hand, and presses it to her lips.)*

What's the matter now?

BERTHA: I stood the plant you sent me close beside my pillow and dreamt of it; and when the day broke and the glorious red sun — father, the red sun?

CALEB: Red in the mornings and evenings, Bertha. *(Aside.)* Poor thing! I must lie to her to make her believe he is not the harsh man he is.

BERTHA: When it rose, and the warmth of its light came into the room, I turned the little plant towards it and blessed you for sending it to cheer me.

TACKLETON: *(Aside.)* Worse and worse! We shall arrive at the strait waistcoat soon. Bertha, come here. Shall I tell you a secret?

BERTHA: If you will.

TACKLETON: This is the day on which little What's-her-name — the spoiled child — Peerybingle's wife, pays her regular visit to you, isn't it?

BERTHA: Yes, this is the day.

TACKLETON: I thought so; I should like to join the party.

BERTHA: *(Gladly.)* Do you hear that, father?

CALEB: I hear it, but I don't believe it. *(Aside.)* It's one of my lies, no doubt.

TACKLETON: You see, I want the Peerybingles more in company with May Fielding. I am going to be married to May Fielding.

BERTHA: Married!

TACKLETON: *(Muttering.)* I knew she'd never comprehend me. *(Aloud.)* Mar-ried!—

church, parson, clerk, beadle, bells, breakfast, bride-cake, favours and all the rest of it! A wedding, you know — a wed-ding! Don't you know what a wedding is?

BERTHA: I know; I understand.

FOH VOICE: It would help with the illusion of blindness, Bertha, if you didn't look straight at him, all the time.

BERTHA: *(Looking up into the grid)* I know; I understand.

FOH VOICE: Do you? That's good.

TACKLETON: Do you? It's more than I expected. Well, I want to bring May and her mother to the party today. I'll send a cold leg of mutton, or some comfortable trifle of that sort. You'll expect me.

BERTHA: Yes. *(Turns away, and her head droops.)*

TACKLETON: I don't think so. You seem to have forgotten all about it already. Caleb!

CALEB: *(To himself.)* I may venture to say I'm here, I suppose. *(Aloud.)* Sir!

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

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

TACKLETON: Every man thinks his geese swans. Well, good-bye! Hmph!— poor devil!

*(Exit.)*

CALEB: *(To himself, taking up a toy waggon and horses, which he proceeds to put harness on.)* Phew! I'm glad he's gone, *(Singing.)*

THE GLASSES SPARKLE ON THE BOARD,  
THE WINE IS RUBY BRIGHT.

BERTHA: *(Puts her hand on his shoulder.)* Father, I am lonely, in the dark; I want my eyes — my patient, willing eyes.

CALEB: Here they are — always ready. What shall your eyes do for you, dear?

BERTHA: Look round the room, father.

CALEB: All right; no sooner said than done.

BERTHA: Tell me about it?

CALEB: It's the same as usual; homely, but snug. The bright colours on the walls—the flowers on the plates and dishes — the shining wood beams and panels — very pretty.

BERTHA: You have your working-dress on — and are not so gallant as when you wear the handsome coat.

CALEB: Not quite so gallant. Pretty brisk, though!

BERTHA: *(Putting a hand around his neck.)* Father, tell me something: about May — she is very beautiful?

CALEB: She is, indeed!

BERTHA: Her hair is dark — darker than mine. Her voice is sweet and musical, I know. I have often loved to hear it. Her shape —

CALEB: There's not a doll's, in all the room, to equal it; and her eyes —

BERTHA: Her eyes, father?

*(Hides her face, and her head sinks on his arm.)*

CALEB: *(Aside.)* Fool!

BERTHA: But Mr. Tackleton — our kind, noble friend — he is older than May?

CALEB: Y-e-e-es — he's a little older, but that don't signify . . .

BERTHA: Oh! father, would she be his companion in infirmity and age — his nurse in sickness, and his friend in sorrow. Would she do all this?

CALEB: No doubt of it!

BERTHA: I love her, father from my soul. *(Clings to him, and is affected.)*

CALEB: Come, Bertha — all the dolls are staring at us and our company will be here soon. Let us go and be about the potatoes in that handsome wooden bowl that is so beautiful to look at — come, come!

*(They exeunt; after a moment, enter DOT and JOHN, carrying all sorts of parcels and lastly, TILLY, carrying the baby.)*

DOT: Nobody here to receive us — and nobody else come yet! Never mind; we're not proud, John, are we?

JOHN: Well, Dot; I'm proud of you. *(Pulling off his imaginary great coat.)*

FOH VOICE: There's a coat back there!

DOT: Hush, John! I'm sure I'm only proud of our cart, and who wouldn't be?

JOHN: And of getting into the cart — the legs, eh, Dot?

DOT: Now, John, how can you! Think of Tilly. And are you sure you've got the basket with the veal and ham pie, and things — and the bottles of beer? Because if you haven't, we must go back.

JOHN: You're a nice article, to talk about going back, when you kept me a quarter of an hour! They're all right! By the bye — that old gentleman — he's an odd fish — I can't make him out — I don't believe there's any harm in him.

DOT: Not at all— I'm sure there's none at all!

JOHN: *(With meaning.)* I'm glad you feel so certain — because it's a confirmation to me. It's curious he should have taken it into his head to ask leave to go on lodging with us, ain't it? That's strange.

DOT: *(Almost aside.)* Very strange.

JOHN: However, he's a good-natured old gentleman, and pays well, doesn't he? Why, Dot! what are you thinking about?

DOT: *(Starting.)* Thinking of, John? I— I was listening to you.

JOHN: Oh! I was afraid from the look of your face, I had set you to thinking about something deep.

DOT: Oh, no, John, no! But here comes Caleb and Bertha! *(But they don't.)* Here comes Caleb and Bertha!

*(Enter CALEB and BERTHA)*

CALEB: Halloa, John! here you are, then, and the missus, too. How d'ye do, mum?

BERTHA: *(Going to Dot.)* Dear Mary!

CALEB: The rest of the company will be here directly. *(He starts drawling out the next sentence again.)* The pertaters is all right — you never seen such pertaters —

JOHN: *(Looking out through the lights.)* Again, is he going to do it like that?

FOH VOICE: Not if I kill him first.

CALEB: I don't think I could make any half so natural, not if the dolls wouldn't have nothing else in their kitchens.

*(A pause.)*

. . . not if the dolls wouldn't have nothing else in their kitchens.

*(Another pause. Finally CALEB stomps three times with his foot. Immediately, there is a knock on the door.)*

CALEB: *(Without possibly knowing who is behind the door.)* There's May and her mother, and Old Tackleton! *(He opens the door.)* Come in!

*(Enter TACKLETON, with the PROMPTER on one arm, and MRS. FIELDING on the other, wearing a calash over her cap, which is very fine. Tackleton is carrying two parcels. — Caleb receives them awkwardly.)*

TACKLETON: Well, we've come. I don't suppose you wanted me much, though. *(He hands the parcels to CALEB.)*

FOH VOICE: Don't give him the parcels yet!

TACKLETON: *(Breaking character.)* Yes! It says "Caleb receives them awkwardly."

FOH VOICE: The people, not the parcels!

TACKLETON: Oh. *(He goes out, followed by MRS. FIELDING and the PROMPTER.)*

CALEB: I don't think I could make any half so natural, not if the dolls wouldn't have nothing else in their kitchens.

*(A pause.)*

. . . not if the dolls wouldn't have nothing else in their kitchens.

*(Another pause. Finally CALEB stomps three times with his foot. Immediately, there is a knock on the door.)*

CALEB: There's May and her mother, and Old Tackleton! *(He opens the door.)*  
Come in!

*(Enter TACKLETON, with the PROMPTER on one arm, and MRS. FIELDING on the other. Tackleton is carrying two parcels. — Caleb receives them awkwardly.)*

TACKLETON: Well, we've come. I don't suppose you wanted me much, though.

DOT: *(Going to May.)* May! my dear old friend! what a happiness to see you!  
*(DOT embraces the PROMPTER.)*

TACKLETON: Ah! that's it — women always are so deuced affectionate before people —  
it's all trick — only to make us envious, don't you think so, Peerybingle?

JOHN: No, I don't! I call that as pleasant a sight as a man might see. Their faces  
quite set one another's off. They ought to have been born sisters.

PROMPTER: *(To Bertha.)* And are you quite well and happy, Bertha?

*(But it's not MAY but the PROMPTER.)*

FOH VOICE: Where's May?

PROMPTER: They made her stay for an extra half-shift at Tim Horton's.

FOH VOICE: It's the dress rehearsal!

PROMPTER: She'll be here as soon as she can.

FOH VOICE: It's the dress rehearsal!

PROMPTER: She's very sorry.

FOH VOICE: It's the dress rehear . . . ! Never mind. Keep going.

MAY: *(To Bertha.)* And are you quite well and happy, Bertha?

BERTHA: Quite, dear May! How can I be otherwise when you are here?

CALEB: Bless me! I'm quite nervous; I feel as if somebody was pulling a string, and making me jump all ways at once. I'll go and get the potatoes.

*(Exit)*

TACKLETON: There, there's a leg of mutton. *(Puts it on table.)* And there's a tart. *(Puts the tart down.)* Ah! you may stare, but we don't mind a little distillation when our brides are in the case.

FOH VOICE: Dissipation!

TACKLETON: *(Breaking character.)* Dissipation? *(He looks at his script.)* That makes more sense! *(Resuming character.)* We don't mind a little dissipation when our brides are in the case. I haven't been married a year, like you, John.

DOT: *(Aside.)* Spiteful creature.

JOHN: Come, let us begin dinner. *(Placing the chairs.)* You have not driven along the road three or four miles; I'm hungry.

CALEB: *(Enters with a bowl of smoking potatoes.)* Shan't be long, John. Here's the silver. *(JOHN and CALEB both corpse.)*

FOH VOICE: Stop it!

CALEB: There they are — look at 'em — it's almost a shame to eat 'em. Now, sit down, sit down. *(To Mrs. Fielding)* You there, ma'am, if you please — *(To Tackleton.)*— and you there. Perhaps, too, sir, you'd like May next you. And, Mrs. Peerybingle, you'll be to the side of your old friend, John, here; and Bertha next to me. There we are, beautiful!

DOT: Oh! how comfortable this is! It seems but yesterday, May, that we were at school; and now to think you are quite a woman grown!

PROMPTER: And you, Dot — married!

JOHN: Yes; and got a baby!

DOT: Now, John!

JOHN: Well! is it anything to be ashamed of?

DOT: *(Interrupting him.)* You dear, good, awkward John; there, take some pie,



and there's a nice bit of egg! And now don't talk with your mouth full!

CALEB: But you, May; you don't eat anything.

DOT: Oh, May's in love; and people in love are never hungry. I never was.

TACKLETON: Perhaps you were never in love. Ha! ha!

DOT: *(Imitating his hollow laugh.)* Ha! ha! what a funny man you are. *(Aside.)* He's as out of place as a fresh young salmon on the top of the pyramid!

MRS. FIELDING: *(Gravely.)* Ah! girls are girls, and bygones, bygones; and as long as young people are young, they'll behave as young people do.

DOT: Dear May, to talk of those happy schooldays makes one young again.

TACKLETON: Why, you ain't particularly old at any time, are you?

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

JOHN: Forty!

DOT: How many you'll add to May's, I'm sure I don't know; but she can't be less than a hundred years of age on her next birthday.

TACKLETON: Ha! ha! *(Aside.)* I could twist her neck like a sparrow's!

DOT: Dear, dear; remember how we used to talk at school, about the husbands we should choose. How handsome and young, and lively mine was to be. And as to May's — oh, dear! what silly girls we were.

TACKLETON: Ah! you couldn't resist us! Here we are! And where are your young bridegrooms now?

DOT: Some dead, some forgotten. Some would not believe that we could forget them. No, they would not believe it.

JOHN: Why, Dot, what are you thinking of? Come, I'll give a toast. "Here's to tomorrow, — *(They pass the beer round)* — the wedding day."

CALEB: Yes, the wedding day.

ALL: The wedding day; the wedding day.

*(Bertha gets up and leaves the table.)*

JOHN: Well, I must be stirring. I have got parcels to deliver.

CALEB: But you won't be long, John?

*(The whole company corpse.)*

FOH VOICE: Stop it!

JOHN: Oh, no; the old horse has had a rest as well as myself.

CALEB: Well, good bye, John.

JOHN: Goodbye — goodbye, all! — and where's Dot?

DOT: *(Starting.)* I'm here, John.

JOHN: *(Claps his hands.)* Come, come, where's the pipe?

*(She rushes to the wing and whispers OFF.)*

DOT: *(Whispering.)* I forgot the pipe! *(A hand comes out of the wing with the pipe, which she takes and goes to the fireplace.)* I'll fill it directly.

JOHN: Forgot the pipe! Was ever such a wonder?

TACKLETON: I'll go with you, John Peerybingle, if you'll take me.

JOHN: Oh, willingly! Good bye, all! I shall be back very soon.

All: Good bye, John!

*(TACKLETON goes out and shuts the door in JOHN's face.)*

JOHN: Hey! I'm coming with you.

*(TACKLETON, OFF, opens the door and JOHN exits.)*

DOT: And now, Tilly, bring me the precious baby — and you help May put things to rights, and do everything she tells you.

MRS. FIELDING: I should have sat by fire-places of a very different kind, if people had done by other people as ought to have been done, especially in the Indigo trade.

DOT: *(Shaking her head.)* Ah, I'm sure you would.

MRS. FIELDING: But when a friend asks a friend to befriend a friend's friend, we must put up with what other friends have to offer us.

DOT: Very true, ma'am. But now — *(Pulling up a chair.)* — sit down here with baby and myself, and tell me how to manage it, and put me right upon twenty points, where I am as wrong as can be. Won't you, Mrs. Fielding?

MRS. FIELDING: Before that occurrence with the Indigo, I never managed my babies at all, but had proper persons, whom we paid. My husband was quite enough for me to manage.

DOT: Ah, I should think so.

*(Dot seats herself upon a stool, with baby near the fire, and close to Mrs. Fielding. May and Tilly are putting the room to rights. Caleb and Bertha come forward.)*

CALEB: Bertha, what has happened? How changed you are, my darling, and in so short a time. What is it? Tell me.

BERTHA: *(Bursts into tears.)* Oh, father— father— my hard, hard fate!

CALEB: But think how happy you have been, Bertha! I know, to be— to be blind, is a great affliction — but . . .

BERTHA: Bring her to me. May — bring May. *(The PROMPTER comes to her. BERTHA has her script held in front of her face.)* Look into my face, dear heart, and tell me if truth is written on it.

MAY: Dear Bertha, yes.

BERTHA: There is not in my soul a wish, or thought, that is not for your good, not the less — not the less — because, the knowledge that you are to be his wife, has wrung my heart to breaking.

CALEB: Is it possible — she loves him, then — Tackleton!

BERTHA: Father — May — Mary! Oh! forgive me.

CALEB: Gracious Heaven! Have I deceived her only to break her heart at last!

DOT. *(Who has been listening, advances.)* Come, dear Bertha! come away with

me. There, dear — come and sit by us. Stop; I hear some footsteps I know.

BERTHA: *(Starts.)* Whose — step is that?

CALEB: Whose — why, it's John's.

*(Enter JOHN.)*

DOT: Why, John — how soon you have returned.

JOHN: Well — ain't you glad of it, Dot? I met young Hobbins in the street, and he is going to take the cart on, and call for us on his way back.

BERTHA: But whose is the other's step — that of a man's — behind you?

CALEB: She's not to be deceived.

JOHN: Why, our old deaf gentleman, who'd been up town to buy some things; so I brought him along with me. Come along, sir, you'll be welcome, never fear! — *(The STRANGER enters.)* Sit down, sir. All friends here, and glad to see you.

CALEB: What can we do to entertain him, John?

JOHN: Oh, a chair in the corner, and leave to look pleasantly about him, is all he cares for.

*(He helps the Stranger to a chair. Bertha and May are talking; so, also Dot and Mrs. Fielding — to Dot.)*

An absent-minded Dot she was, this afternoon; and yet I like her, somehow. See yonder. Dot!

*(Points to Stranger.)*

DOT: *(Confused)* Well, John, what's there? *(Aside.)* Can he suspect anything?

JOHN: He's— ha! ha! ha! — he's full of admiration for you! Talks of nobody else.

DOT: I wish he had a better subject.

JOHN: There's no such thing! Come, a cosy half-hour by the fire. *(To Mrs. Fielding.)* My humble service, mistress. A game at cribbage, you and I?

That's hearty! The cards and board! And a glass of beer here, if there's any left, small wife.

DOT: Yes, John, plenty!

*(The PROMPTER arranges the table and cards, while Dot gets the beer. TACKLETON enters at the door.)*

MRS. FIELDING: That's quite right, my dear. Thank Heaven, I have always found May a dutiful child, and an excellent wife she will make.

TACKLETON: Well, I don't doubt that.

MRS. FIELDING: And though we are reduced in purse — I don't say this, sir, out of regard to what we are to play for— we have always had pretensions to gentility.

JOHN: Which nobody doubts. *(Dot brings beer.)* There's a good Dot. And now we will cut for deal. *(Cuts.)* Seven!

MRS. FIELDING: Nine!

JOHN: Ah! you are fortunate, mistress.

*(The Stranger, who has been exchanging looks with Dot, gets up, unperceived, and goes out the door. Dot appears anxious to follow him, as he beckons to her. This is through the dialogue.)*

MRS. FIELDING: Well, I will say that if the Indigo trade had turned out different our fortunes might have been lucky.

JOHN: *(Deals.)* Now, I wonder what my fortune will be to-night. *(Takes his cards.)* What ought I to throw out? Here, Dot, Dot.

*(Dot is about to follow the Stranger, who has gone out, she starts at John's voice, and turns back.)*

What would you do, Dot?

DOT: *(Alarmed.)* I, John; nothing.

JOHN: No, the cards — which shall I throw out? *(Dot takes cards and throws them down.)* There, that starts me. I won't call you away from May again.

*(The others watch the game, except TACKLETON, who watches*

*her DOT.)*

MRS. FIELDING: I play, I think.

*(Music. — During the game Dot takes a candle from the table, and follows the Stranger. Tackleton advances and lays his hand upon John's shoulder.)*

TACKLETON: I'm sorry to disturb you, but a word immediately.

JOHN: I'm going to deal — is it a crisis?

TACKLETON: It is. Come here, man — come.

JOHN: *(Rising and alarmed.)* What do you mean?

TACKLETON: *(Leading him from the table)* Look round ye. Where's Dot, where's the old, deaf gent, eh? They're gone, ain't they?

JOHN: Gone, where?

TACKLETON: I'll show you where. Come; hush.

*(JOHN and TACKLETON exit.)*

CALEB: What shall we do, play a round game or tell fortunes?

TILLY: Tell fortunes; it frightens a body so nice.

CALEB: Now, cut, Ma'am. *(MRS. FIELDING cuts the cards)* What's here? There's the King of diamonds, that's John. There's a black Knave —

TILLY: That's Tackleton.

CALEB: He stands between John and — *(Drawing a card)* — the Queen of Hearts.

BERTHA: Dot is the Queen.

CALEB: There she is, along with a man who comes across the water. I wish it could be my boy from the golden South Americas. What's this? A bundle.

TILLY: A bundle? That's baby.

CALEB: I can't make it out.

*(Re-enter JOHN and TACKLETON, carrying a gun, at back of Cottage.)*

TACKLETON: Come here.

CALEB: There's that Knave again. What is he about?

JOHN: Why have you brought that gun?

TACKLETON: To keep it from you, because it is loaded, and you might be rash.

JOHN: What are ye driving at?

TACKLETON: John, the old man, the guest that your wife was so urgent should stop under your roof, is no old man, but a strapping, young fellow in disguise.

JOHN: Ye lie, vermin, ye lie.

TACKLETON: I tell ye, they are together, in yonder barn. I saw 'em: look, look.

JOHN: My wife. She is there?

TACKLETON: Hush! Look there! *(Goes to stable door.)*

CALEB: I don't like that Knave.

TILLY: He do stick out bad, don't he?

*(TACKLETON opens the stable door and discovers EDWARD & DOT.)*

JOHN: *(Seizing the gun from TACKLETON.)* My wife! And he!

TACKLETON: Take care.

JOHN: In his arms. *(Raises gun then drops it.)* I cannot. See. My brain, my brain. *(Falls in the snow)*

CALEB: *(Laying another card.)* Look: the little Queen seems in more trouble still.

TILLY: She don't stand well, do she?

FOH VOICE: And, lights. Music. *(The lights go to black; music sounds.)* Pre-set up! *(The stage warmers come on.)* House lights. *(The house lights come up.)*

*The Cricket On The Hearth 36*

Okay, take fifteen, people.

*(The house lights come up.)*

**END OF ACT ONE**



## THE CRICKET ON THE HEARTH

### *Rehearsed*

*Adapted from the play by Albert Smith  
from the novella by Charles Dickens*

### Act Two

*The scene is the same as for Act I*

FOH VOICE: Alright! Let's try to get through this! Keep it together and please, try to drop your books when you can. We open when? Tomorrow! Let's make it work! Everything ready backstage?

PROMPTER: Ready.

FOH VOICE: Tackleton is back from the john?

*(The stage door closes with a clunk.)*

TACKLETON: I'm here!

FOH VOICE: Alright! Music! House lights! Go!

*(The house lights go out; Music; the stage lights come up; DOT enters and comes pensively to centre)*

DOT: Sail! home, as straight as an arrow.  
My love sails along on the crest of the sea;  
Sail! home, to sweet Maggie Darrow,  
In our dear little home I am waiting for thee.  
High up! where the cliffs they are craggy,  
That's where the girl of your heart waits for thee!  
Heigh! ho, I long for you, Maggie,  
So spread out your White Wings and sail home to me.  
Yo! ho, how they go! oh, how the winds blow!

White Wings, they never grow weary.  
They carry thee cheerily over the sea;  
Night comes, I long for my dearie,  
So spread out your White Wings, and sail home to me.

Sail! home, to love and caresses,  
To your own true love, to the arms of your bride;  
Sail! home, blue eyes and gold tresses,  
Await for you here with your love, by your side.

Sail! home, to part from me never,  
Always together life's voyage shall be;  
Sail! home, to love me forever!  
So spread out your White Wings and sail home to me.  
Yo! ho, how they go! oh, how the winds blow!

White Wings, they never grow weary.  
They carry thee cheerily over the sea;  
Night comes, I long for my dearie,  
So spread out your White Wings, and sail home to me.

*(DOT exits; JOHN enters and leans against the fireplace --Enter TACKLETON)*

TACKLETON: John, my good fellow, how goes it? You look a little streaky, don't ye?

JOHN: I have had a poor night, Mr. Tackleton, but it's over now, and I am glad you're here. I want to say a word to you.

TACKLETON: I'm all attention.

JOHN: Last night you showed me my wife alone with that man.

TACKLETON: I saw it — so did you.

JOHN: I did, and the live-long night through I've seen nothing else, and I've thought out how I shall act.

*(DOT enters behind them and listens.)*

TACKLETON: You will act as a husband should.

JOHN: I'll act as a man should. Listen! I married my wife because I had seen her grow up and I loved her, and that love blinded me. I did not consider what she was.

TACKLETON: Young, giddy, frivolous; I understand.

JOHN: *(Breaking character.)* What is it?

PROMPTER: No, you don't, and you'd best not interrupt . . .

JOHN: Thank you. *(He very deliberately drops his book and resumes character.)*  
No, you don't, and you'd best not interrupt me till you do. Yesterday I'd have struck down the man who dared to breathe a word against her.

Today, I'd set my foot in his face if he were my own brother. Did I consider I took her a child from her home? No, I married her because I loved her, not because she loved me.

TACKLETON: But she has deceived you, hasn't she?

JOHN: She has, for when she found she could not love me as she thought she might, why, she kept that knowledge from me, and only now, I begin to feel how hard she has tried to be a good and dutiful wife.

TACKLETON: Holloa! What d'ye mean?

JOHN: I mean she has been good and dutiful, until she no longer could . That will be some comfort to me when I am here alone.

TACKLETON: Oh! Then you do mean to do something about it?

JOHN: I mean to do her kindness, and make her the best reparation I can.

TACKLETON: Make *her* reparation? Did you see what I saw?

JOHN: *(Seizing him by the collar.)* Listen to me, and take care you hear me right. Listen! Do I speak plainly?

TACKLETON: Very plainly.

JOHN: As if I meant it?

TACKLETON: Very much as if you meant it.

JOHN: I sat upon that hearth, last night — all night — on the spot where she has often sat beside me, with her sweet face looking into mine. I called up our whole life together in review. And beside me, that Cricket On the Hearth you would “scrunch” said to me over and over: “She is innocent! She is innocent!”

TACKLETON: Very likely, John Peerybingle; very likely.

JOHN: Then listen to me. I acquit her of all blame. All. This day one year ago she became my wife, and this day I will take her back to her father's house, and if any man wants to say a word agin her, he's got to strip and stand up afore John Peerybingle! D'ye hear?

TACKLETON: Distinctly. I'm uncommonly sorry for this affair, but — you'll excuse me — I'm going to be married to-day. May Fielding makes no show of her

affection for me, that's why I have no suspicion of her sincerity, ha! ha!  
This is altogether the happiest day of my life.

JOHN: So, farewell, Dot. If I can't make you love me, at least I shan't make you despise me. No, it's a tough fight, but I'll act like a man.

DOT: *(Coming forward.)* Oh! no, John, not farewell — do not say farewell, yet; I have heard your words — do not say it's over, till the clock strikes again.

JOHN: No hand can make the clock stand still. It will strike again. But let it be so, if you will. It will strike soon enough. It's of little matter what we say.

TACKLETON: Well, I must be off; for, when the clock strikes again, it'll be necessary for me to be on my way to church. Good morning, John Peerybingle, I'm sorry to be deprived of the pleasure of your company — sorry for the loss and the occasion of it, too.

JOHN: I have spoken plainly?

TACKLETON: Oh, quite!

JOHN: And you'll remember what I've said?

TACKLETON: If you compel me to make the observation: I'm not likely to forget it.

JOHN: I'll see you to your chaise. I shall not come back, until the clock strikes.

*(TACKLETON makes a rude obeisance to DOT as he is going out with JOHN. TILLY enters with the baby. JOHN stops — kisses it — and rushes out. DOT bursts into tears.)*

***(FROM THIS POINT, ALL BEGIN TO DROP THEIR BOOKS,  
SO THAT BY THE END, ALL ARE OFF BOOK.)***

TILLY: *(Howling.)* Ow! if you please, don't — it's enough to dead and bury the baby — so it is, if you please.

DOT: Will you bring him sometimes to see his father, Tilly, when I can't live here, and have gone to my old home?

TILLY: Oww!— if you please, don't! Oww! Where has everybody been and gone and done with everybody, making everybody else so wretched — oww!

*(As she is going off, she meets CALEB and BERTHA entering.)*

CALEB: Heyday! What's the matter here?

TILLY: *(Exiting.)* Oww!

BERTHA: What! Mary, not at the wedding!

CALEB: I told her you would not be there, mum. I heard as much last night— but, bless you, there ain't much of me, but that little should be torn to pieces sooner than I'd trust a word against you.

*(Takes her hand.)*

DOT: You are very kind, Caleb, very.

BERTHA: Mary, I heard them speaking, last night, of some blame against you.

CALEB: They were wrong.

BERTHA: I know it! I told them so!

CALEB: Bertha, my dear, I have a confession to make to you.

BERTHA: A confession?

CALEB: Your road in life was rough, my poor one, and I meant to smooth it for you. I have altered things, changed the characters of people, invented things that never have been, to make you happier. I have lied to you, many times and surrounded you with fancies..

BERTHA: But living people are not fancies, father, you can't change them.

CALEB: I have done so, Bertha — to some that you love.

BERTHA: Oh, father! why do you say so?

CALEB: The marriage that takes place to-day, May's marriage, is with a sordid, stern, grinding man; hard master to you and me for many years; ugly by looks, and nature; entirely unlike what I have painted him to you.

BERTHA: Oh! why did you fill my heart so full, and then come in, like death, and tear away what I love? Oh heaven, I am so miserably blind, helpless, and alone! Mary, tell me truly what my home is.

DOT: It is a poor place, Bertha, very poor and bare, indeed. The house will scarcely keep out wind and rain another winter.

- BERTHA:           *(Leading Dot aside.)* And the presents, Mary, that came from Mr. Tackleton; who sent them, did you?
- DOT:                No!
- BERTHA:           *(Shaking her head, presses her hands to her eyes.)* Dear Mary, a moment more, look across the room where my father is, and tell me what you see.
- DOT:                I see an old man worn with care and work; but striving hard, in every way, for your happiness; and I honour his gray head, and bless it.
- BERTHA:           *(Leaves Dot, goes to Caleb.)* I feel as if my sight was restored. There is not a gallant figure on the earth that I would cherish so devotedly as this — the grayer and more worn, the dearer — father.
- CALEB:             The fresh, smart father, in the blue coat, Bertha — he's gone.
- BERTHA:           Nothing is gone, father. Mary—
- CALEB:             Yes, my dear; here she is.
- BERTHA:           You never told me anything of her, that was not true?
- CALEB:             I must have changed her for the worse, if I had changed her at all— nothing could improve her, Bertha.
- DOT:                More changes may happen than you would think. You mustn't let them startle you too much, Bertha! Hark! Are those wheels upon the road?
- BERTHA:           *(Listens.)* Yes; coming very fast.
- DOT:                *(Flurried.)* I— I— I know you have a quick ear; though, as I said just now— *(listens)*— there are great changes in the world — great changes; and we can't do better than to prepare ourselves to be surprised. They are wheels, indeed, coming nearer — nearer! — very close— and now you hear them stopping at the garden gate — and now you hear a step, outside the door — and now — ah! he is here!

***(ALL OFF BOOK BY HERE.)***

*(Music. — She utters a cry of delight. — The STRANGER, but as a young man, comes in, throwing his hat upon the ground. — Dot holds both her hands before Caleb's eyes.)*

- DOT:                It's over?

EDWARD: Yes.

DOT: Happily over?

EDWARD: Yes.

DOT: Do you recollect the voice, dear Caleb?

CALEB: If my boy, in the golden South Americas, was alive . . .

DOT: *(Takes her hands away.)* Look at him! — healthy and strong! your own dear son — your own brother, Bertha. *(They embrace.)*

*(JOHN enters, and starts back.)*

JOHN: Why— how's this? What does this mean?

CALEB: It means, John, that my own boy is come back from the golden South Americas— him that you were always such a friend to.

JOHN: *(Advances to shake hands, then recoils.)* Edward, was it you? Were you the man?

DOT: Now, Edward, tell him all, and don't spare me.

EDWARD: I was the man.

JOHN: You could steal disguised into the house of your old friend?

EDWARD: There was a friend once who never would judge me, or any other man, unheard. I am certain he will hear me now.

JOHN: Well, that's but fair.

EDWARD: When I left here, I was in love; and my love was returned. She perhaps didn't know her own mind. But I knew mine, and I had a passion for her.

JOHN: Had you!

EDWARD: Indeed I had, and I believed she returned it; now I am sure she did.

JOHN: Heaven help me! this is worse than all.

EDWARD: Returning, full of hope, after many hardships, I heard that she had forgotten me but I wished to see her, that I might have the truth — the real

truth. I dressed myself — you know how — and waited on the road, you know where. You had no suspicion of me, neither had — had she — *(points to Dot)* — until I whispered into her ear at the fireside, and she so nearly betrayed me.

DOT: *(Eagerly.)* But when she, that's me, John, told him how his old sweetheart had believed him dead, and how she had, at last, been persuaded by her mother into an “advantageous” marriage and when she, that's me again, John, told him they were not yet married, and that there was no love on her side, and when he went nearly mad with joy, then she, that's me again, said she would sound his sweetheart, and be sure that what she, me again, thought was right, and it was right, John! and they were brought together and they were married an hour ago, and here! — *(runs for door, and brings in MAY)* — here's the bride, and Old Tackleton may die a bachelor, and I'm a happy little woman!

JOHN: But I saw!

DOT: No, John, no! It was wrong to have a secret from you, John, I'm very sorry. Last night I knew by what was written in your face that you had seen me walking in the gallery with Edward, and knew what you thought. But John, how could you think so?

JOHN: Dot! Mary! How could I, indeed?

DOT: You believe me, don't you, John?

JOHN: I do, I do. *(Advances.)*

CALEB: Hooraw! hooraw!

DOT: When I first came home here, I was half afraid I mightn't learn to love you but, every day, every hour, I loved you more and more. If I could have loved you better, the words I heard you say this morning would have made me, but I can't; all the affection I had I gave you long ago. Now, dear, take me home to your heart and never think of sending me to any other. *(Breaking character.)* Is that right?

FOH VOICE: Close enough. Keep going.

*(She rushes into his arms; at this moment TACKLETON enters, followed by MAY, who crosses to EDWARD. The Prompter exits.)*

TACKLETON: What the devil's this? I beg your pardon, sir *(To Edward.)*! I haven't the pleasure of knowing you; but if you can do me the favour to spare me that



young lady; she has rather a particular engagement with me, this morning.

EDWARD: But I can't spare her— I couldn't think of it.

TACKLETON: What do you mean, you vagabond!

EDWARD: *(Holding out May's ring finger.)* I am sorry, sir, that the young lady can't accompany you to church; but she has been there once, this morning!

*(Tackleton looks at ring, scratches his ear, and takes a little parcel containing a ring from his pocket.)*

TACKLETON: Miss Slowboy, will you have the kindness to throw that in the fire? *(She does so.)* Thank'ee!

EDWARD: It was a previous engagement that prevented my wife from keeping her engagement with you, I assure you.

MAY: Mr. Tackleton will do me justice to acknowledge that I revealed it to him faithfully; and that I told him many times I never could forget it.

TACKLETON: Oh, certainly, to be sure! Oh, it's all right. It's quite correct! Mrs. Edward Plummer, I infer.

EDWARD: That's the name.

TACKLETON: Ah! I — I give you joy, sir!

EDWARD: Thank'ee.

TACKLETON: Mrs. Peerybingle, I'm sorry, upon my life, I'm sorry— you are better than I thought you; John Peerybingle, I am sorry — you understand me, that's enough. It's quite correct, ladies and gentlemen all, and perfectly satisfactory. Good morning!

*(Exit.)*

TILLY: If it ain't correct, I'll marry him.

BERTHA: I think I may have prior claim, Tilly.

JOHN: Now we'll make a day of it, if ever there was one!

DOT: And we'll have such a merry-making! My goodness, John, Mrs. Fielding at the door all this time, sitting out in the chaise. Go, John. And Caleb, run

and help him and we must get food and drink — and May, stay here for a moment — there's the tub of ale in the pantry — Tilly, here's the key — and we've a nice ham — my goodness, Bertha, what a day this has turned out to be!

*(Enter JOHN and MRS. FIELDING.)*

JOHN: There, mum, there's your son-in-law, and a fine fellow he is!

MRS. FIELDING: That ever I should have lived to see this day! Carry me to my grave!

JOHN: Not at all, mum; you're not dead, nor anything like it, nor won't be, we hope, for many a year to come. There; let them tell their own story, and get out of their scrape as they can, and as I am sure they will.

*(He brings EDWARD, MAY, and MRS. FIELDING together, and pushes them towards the fireplace. Enter CALEB.)*

CALEB: How d'ye do, Mrs. Fielding? Here are we— and won't we be jolly? Halloo! Who's this?

*(Enter TACKLETON with parcels.)*

TACKLETON: My compliments to the newly-weds, and as I have no use for the cake myself, perhaps you'll eat it. There it is.

CALEB: Law!

MRS. FIELDING: Hmmph! It's probably poisoned.

TACKLETON: And my compliments to Mrs. Peerybingle, and here are a few toys for the baby — they ain't ugly.

DOT: Why, what can this mean?

TACKLETON: Mrs. Peerybingle, it means this — I'm more sorry than I can say. What a miserable idiot I was when I took Miss Fielding, your pardon, Mrs. Plummer, for to be one. Friends, if I may say so, my house is lonely; I have not so much as a cricket on my heart.

FOH VOICE: A cricket on my hearth!

TACKLETON: *(Breaking character.)* Hearth! That makes more sense. *(Back in character.)* Let me join this happy party. Do!

JOHN: We'll make you so jolly that you shan't believe you're yourself!

EDWARD: *(Running offstage, he returns with a "harp")* A dance! a dance! Bertha, here's your harp! Now play us your liveliest tune.

DOT: John, you won't send me home this evening, will you?

JOHN: *(Embraces her.)* We are home. Tap the ale, Tilly! Bless my darling little wife Dot, and bless us all, everyone!

TILLY: And the babies.

*(Cricket chirps)*

DOT: And don't forget The Cricket On The hearth!

*(Music. Bertha plays the harp. General dance. At the end of the dance:)*

ALL: I know this weary world never can o'erwhelm my spirit  
While the cricket makes his music by the fire.  
It will give me hope anew. It will lift my heavy load,  
To listen to the cricket on – the cricket on the hearth.

Oh, oh, listen to the cricket song, singing on the hearth.  
Luck and joy, it seems to sing, for those who'll hear its worth.  
Oh, oh, listen to the cricket song, singing there tonight.  
Lucky cricket singing now his happy song so bright.  
Lucky cricket singing now his happy song so bright.

*(Lights fade. Music stops. A beat.)*

FOH VOICE: Alright. That was good! Let's try to do it like that tomorrow night!

**END OF PLAY**