

Bertha + Caleb #2

~~BERTHA~~

~~Sitting down.~~

~~I know. I understand~~

~~TACKLETON~~

~~Do you? More than I expected. Caleb, make sure she does not forget.~~

~~CALEB~~

~~We won't forget, sir. We aren't clever enough to forget.~~

~~Tackleton shrugs with his entire face and exits.~~

~~Pause. Caleb is staring at his daughter.~~

BERTHA

Father, I am lonely in the dark. I want my eyes.

CALEB

They are here for you. They look around. Our house is cheerful and neat. The bright flowers, all over the // walls –

BERTHA

I know where I live. Tell me about May Fielding.

CALEB

You know her.

BERTHA

I know her voice, it's musical and sweet. Is she fair?

CALEB

She is.

BERTHA

Her hair?

CALEB

Black.

BERTHA

Color of night. Her face?

CALEB

There's not a doll in the room to equal it.

BERTHA

Her eyes?

Caleb looks at his daughter and cannot answer.

To be his constant friend and patient companion – to be his gentle nurse in sickness and age – to know no weariness for his sake; to talk to him awake and watch him asleep – what privileges would these be! Would she do all this, father?

CALEB

No doubt of it.

BERTHA

Then I love her. I love her with all my soul.

CALEB

Stands up and walks away from her. To himself:

What have I done.

~~Lights on the house fade. Dot runs in, baby in arms.~~

~~DOT~~

~~To the audience.~~

~~Meanwhile, there was a commotion at John Peerybingle's, for Dot naturally couldn't go anywhere without the baby – and to get the baby ready took time. Not that there was much of the baby, speaking of it as a thing of weight and measure, but there was a vast deal to do about it, and it all had to be done by easy stages. When the baby was got, by hook and crook, to a certain point of dressing, and you might've supposed that another touch or two would finish him off and turn him out a tip-top baby challenging the world, he unexpectedly, and loudly, announced he did not care for the world and needed a nap – which took the best part of an hour. From this state of inaction he was then recalled, shining very much and roaring violently, to partake of – of – well – of a – of a slight repast. After which, he went to sleep again. John, by the way, surveyed all this from a safe distance, with a kind of puzzled pride, such as an amiable mastiff might show if he found himself one day the father of a young canary.~~

~~By the point the baby woke up and was dressed in a cream-colored blanket and a hat shaped like a meat pie, John was ready to go and the dog was ready to go and the horse was tearing up the road with his impatient autographs. And then we were getting out of the house and –~~

~~No! No, we were not! John, where is the basket? The basket with the veal and ham pie and things and the bottles of beer! I did not bring the basket!~~

~~JOHN~~

~~Off-stage.~~

~~I'm a quarter hour late and still have mail to deliver.~~

~~DOT~~

~~I'm sorry for it, John, but I really could not go and see Bertha, on any account, John, without the veal and ham pie and things and the bottles of beer!~~

~~JOHN~~

~~I brought your basket. It's here in the cart.~~

~~DOT~~

~~Is it, John? Because I declare I would not go to Bertha's without the veal and the ham // pie –~~

~~JOHN~~

~~I – have – your – beer.~~

~~DOT~~

~~And then we were on our way.~~