

# Caleb monologue

## Chirp the Second

*Scherzo e trio*

Christmas Eve

Caleb and Bertha's house

*Caleb shuffles toward the stage; as soon as he enters the house proper, his walk changes to purposeful and brisk, because his daughter is there, and he does not want her to know he is old and weak. While he talks, the scenery behind him changes; we would describe how it looks, but he will do a better job. The toys do not have to be real, because not everything in this story is.*

CALEB

Caleb Plummer and his blind daughter lived by themselves all alone, as the story-books say – and my blessing on the story-books for saying anything in this work-a-day world! They lived in a little cracked nutshell of a house, which looked like a pimple on the prominent brick-red nose of Gruff and Tackleton. That house was the great feature of the street; but Caleb's dwelling you might have knocked down with a hammer, and carried the pieces off in a cart. But it was also a seed from which the great trunk of the toy company had sprung – for under this roof the Gruff-before-last made toys for a generation of boys and girls, who were gifted them, and played with them, and broke them, and cried over them, and gone to sleep.

I said Caleb and Bertha lived here. But, in truth, she lived elsewhere – in an enchanted home of Caleb's furnishing, where scarcity and trouble never entered. She never knew that ceilings were discolored, the walls blotched, cracks widening daily, iron rusting, beams moldering and bending down. She never knew that shabbiness and sorrow were in the house; that her father's thinning hair was turning more and more grey; that the toy merchant they worked for was cold, exacting, and mean; never knew, in short, that Tackleton was Tackleton.

And all of that was the doing of her simple father. Caleb, too, had a cricket on his hearth, when he was taking care of his motherless blind daughter, and he listened to its music, and he thought that even her great deprivation might be almost changed to a blessing.

*Lights. Bertha is revealed, sewing a doll's dress.*

What a strange place their work-room was, full of houses of all sizes, from fancy town residences for the dolls of high class, to lowly suburban dwellings for the dolls of moderate means. The dolls were there, too, also separated according to their degree in society by the choice of material from which they were made. The doll-ladies of distinction had wax limbs of perfect symmetry; the less fancy dolls were made of polished wood; as to the common people, they were made from cardboard with matchstick arms and legs. In this way, all the dolls were well-established in their social sphere, with no possibility of ever leaving it – which was, of course, due to them being dolls, since this is not at all the case in real life.

On the floor, there were horses of all sorts – stationary, rocking, and on wheels – and little fiddles, drums, and other instruments of torture. Trivial things, all – but trivial things, pursued for bread, become very serious. And if Caleb had been a businessman, or a lawyer, or a member of Parliament, he would've dealt with no less whimsical – but not at all as harmless – toys.