

DOT + JOHN

Flute and violin duet.

Dot (cont.)

They went very well together, fresher than ever, until they got so jumbled together, helter-skelter, than it would take a clearer head than yours or mine to tell who of them chirped and who of them hummed, or they hummed and chirped together. But this I know: their song reached the candle, and the light of that candle shone out of the window and down the lane, and lit upon a man, who was driving his cart toward this house through the gloom, and what this light said to that man was: "Welcome home."

Flute ends on an ascending fortissimo, followed by the same two-note chirp of the violin, and the music is over – for now.

At this point, the kettle, having boiled over, was taken off the fire, and there was a bark of the dog outside –

Bark of a dog outside.

– and a creak of a wheel, and the tramp of a horse, and the lantern outside, dancing like a will-of-the-wisp, and the voice of a man –

JOHN

Off-stage

Heel, Boxer! Heel! Stay.

DOT

Good gracious, he'll want to see the baby!

Dot dashes out through the archway and quickly returns with the baby, her services as the narrator over.

Enter John Peerybingle. There's snow on his hat and on his shoulders and in the folds of his scarf, and he's carrying a sack of mail.

DOT

John, what a state are you in!

JOHN

Puts down the mail.

Why, you see, Dot, it ain't exactly summer –

He's interrupted with the kiss – he's bending down, she's on her tiptoe, both extremely aware she's holding the baby. They've only been married two days shy of one year, so it's a long kiss.

DOT

Ain't he beautiful?

JOHN

Very. Very much so. He's generally asleep, ain't he?

DOT

She is very much aware she did not get an uninterrupted night of sleep for the last two months and three days.

No. No, he's not.

JOHN

Oh! Hello! He's winking. With both eyes. At once. And his mouth. He's like a goldfish. Or a silverfish. Which is not a fish.

DOT

With immense affection.

You don't know much about children, you stupid fellow.

JOHN

Very true. I only know the north-east wind has been blowing straight into the cart all the way home.

DOT

Oh you poor old man, so it has! Are you asleep? Now you're asleep? You are, the precious thing – I could smother you with kissing, so I could – what was I doing? – I was making tea! Can you set up the table?

Dot places the baby in the crib and starts making tea. John removes his hat and gloves and scarf and jacket, each laden with handfuls of snow. Then he brings out a folding table – only slightly bigger than an ironing board, and built on the same principle – and sets it up in the middle of the room. When the table is ready, Dot starts getting food out of the sideboard.

So the tea is all ready – and what else we have? – do we have // cheese –

JOHN

Dot.

DOT

What?

JOHN

There's something you need to see.

He lifts his mailbag, places it on the table, and rolls down the sides. Inside, there are many small parcels, and one large round carton. Dot stares at the carton.

DOT

Heart alive, it's a wedding cake.

JOHN

Pack it into a tea chest, or in a rolled-up bedspread, or in a pickled salmon keg – a woman will know it at once. Yes. I called for it at a pastry cook's.

DOT

Trying to lift the cake box.

And it weighs I don't know what! For whom is it, John?

JOHN

Read the label.

Dot reads the label. Two minor thirds from the cricket, staccato. Silence.

DOT

She and I were at school together, John.

Pause.

And now she'll be a Gruff and Tackleton.

JOHN

Not Gruff, perhaps.

DOT

Yes, he's that enough for both. And he's old! Even older than you!

John stares at her until she realizes what she just said.

No – I – no! No!

She comes up to him and embraces most of him from the side – not quite being able to reach all the way around his bulk – and rests the top of her head against the bottom of his shoulder.

JOHN

I know, Dot.

DOT

Now eat!

Gets out the food.

There's the knuckle of ham; and there's the butter; and there's the crusty loaf, and all! Eat.

JOHN

What am I forgetting?

DOT

Eat!

John sits down to eat, looking around his house. Dot is watching the fire. The baby is asleep. The fire is blazing. The room is bright. John is looking around trying to find a way to say how happy he is – but he's not too quick with words, and as he is still thinking, when something else says it all for him, and says it without a single word. The cricket chirps, and no words are needed. John hears it, and nods, and laughs.

JOHN

It's merrier than ever, to-night, I think

DOT

A cricket on the hearth is the luckiest thing in all the world.

Pause.

Two days short of a year. The first time I heard it. You remem//ber –

I remember.