

BEFRIENDING BERTHA

BERTHA *is eating lunch alone on the playground. She is a quiet, shy girl, who is very shut down. She is actually very pretty but completely lacks any self-confidence or belief in herself. CHARLIE enters suddenly from out of nowhere and sits by her. He has a wild energy, sort of like a volcano that's about to explode. BERTHA is sort of shocked but doesn't do anything, just sits frozen.*

CHARLIE: *(As if nothing was out of the ordinary and they had been talking a while.)* See that's the whole trouble with tuna fish. You eat it, your breath smells for maybe one, two, sometimes even three hours afterwards. There's a number of ways to deal with the problem. You can use Certs, Tic-Tacs ... even Scope if you can find a little bottle in a convenient travel size ... Potato chip? *(He offers her his bag.)*

BERTHA: No thank you.

CHARLIE: Pickle? *(BERTHA just shakes her head.)*

CHARLIE: Sip of cola? *(BERTHA sits frozen and silent.)*

CHARLIE: I seem to have frightened you. *(BERTHA shakes head no)*

CHARLIE: No? *(BERTHA shakes head "No" again.)*

CHARLIE: Oh. Okay. Silent type. Good, we'll be great friends. You can listen, and I'll do all the talking. As I was saying... *(He looks at BERTHA who is still quiet and frozen.)*

CHARLIE: You know, for a girl of I would say, 11, or 12 years old you are abnormally quiet. *(BERTHA looks down at the word 'Abnormal' and CHARLIE re phrases his sentence so as not to hurt her feelings.)* I mean, unusually quiet ... I haven't said anything wrong, have I? I mean, nothing to offend you in any way, shape, form, or size? *(BERTHA shakes head "No ")*

CHARLIE: Or color? Or texture? Or luminosity?

BERTHA: Luminosity?

CHARLIE: *(Amazed that she has spoken.)* Yes, luminosity. You know... *(Gives Webster's Dictionary definition.)*... Containing a certain quantity of light, illumination or iridescence... the quality of glowing... sparkling, or shimmering... radiant, shining, aflame, afire...

BERTHA: No.

CHARLIE: *(Not understanding.)* No?

BERTHA: No. You haven't offended me.

CHARLIE: Oh. (*He pauses.*) Really? Not at all?

BERTHA: (*Not able to look at him.*) Not at all.

CHARLIE: Sure?

BERTHA: Yes!

CHARLIE: Good, then, I'll continue. So ... as to the subject of the tuna fish, another reason not to eat them is that some say the method of their capture has been highly illicit, immoral, shameful, even illegal perhaps, what with the growing number of dolphins getting caught in the traps and becoming extinct in the process

BERTHA: WHO ARE YOU???

CHARLIE: Charlie. I'm Charlie. And you're Bertha.

BERTHA: You know my name?

CHARLIE: We've known each other for weeks.

BERTHA: We have?

CHARLIE: Yes. In my mind, in the dark recesses of my mind, I've been talking to you for weeks and we've become very good friends by now.

BERTHA: During recess?

CHARLIE: Not recess, recesses... dark places in my mind, hidden places, areas of fantasy or daydreams...

BERTHA: (*Feeling nervous.*) Oh. You've got a very large vocabulary.

CHARLIE: I've been working very hard on it, thank you. I read the dictionary every night. Webster's -Third - Edition.

BERTHA: Oh.

CHARLIE: I take it you're not familiar with Webster's?

BERTHA: Not very.

CHARLIE: It's not very exciting. It has no plot.

BERTHA: How come you read it then?

CHARLIE: I'm accumulating words.

BERTHA: Oh.

CHARLIE: Oh yourself

BERTHA: What kind of words?

CHARLIE: Magical ones. Distraught ones. Ancient ones. Poetic ones. Ones to describe the beautiful things I see, places, even people ... who are beautiful, and therefore require description. (*BERTHA stares at him in complete shock.*)

CHARLIE: (*Loud voice to snap her out of it.*) Earth to Bertha, do you read me? (*He shakes her lightly.*) You're looking at me like I'm some kind of an alien.

BERTHA: You're new at this school.

CHARLIE: Yup. Very new. So new, you could even say this was my first day.

BERTHA: Who told you my name?

CHARLIE: I told you, you did... in one of our previous conversations.

BERTHA: What previous conversations???

CHARLIE: Don't hurt my feelings, Bertha.

BERTHA: What did we talk about?

CHARLIE: All about your wooden leg.

BERTHA: What???

CHARLIE: Your wooden leg. How you spent the good, portion of your childhood in Hawaii. How you're planning to join The Merchant Marines after 6th grade is over. Why you pour whiskey in your chocolate milk.

BERTHA: You're crazy.

CHARLIE: Yup.

BERTHA: I have to leave now.

CHARLIE: Oh, come on, Bertha... I was just kidding you.

BERTHA: You were?

CHARLIE: Yes.

BERTHA: Oh. So who told you my name?

CHARLIE: Honest?

BERTHA: Honest.

CHARLIE: Truth?

BERTHA: Truth!

CHARLIE: George Washington.

BERTHA: Who?

CHARLIE: I'm sorry, I meant The National Guard.

BERTHA: What?

CHARLIE: Excuse me, my mistake again ... I seem to be having difficulty concentrating today.... Did I say the National Guard?

BERTHA: Yes...

CHARLIE: Seems to be one of my off days, what I meant to say was ... Tiny Simko told me your name. I asked her, and she told me your name.

BERTHA: Oh. (*She looks down.*)

CHARLIE: Something the matter? (He looks at her for a moment. She says nothing.)

CHARLIE: You're sort of a... quiet type, right? No, no, let me guess ... I'll bet you're ... shy. (BERTHA is quiet, doesn't know what to say) You okay in there? (BERTHA nods) Sure? (BERTHA nods again)

BERTHA: Yes.

CHARLIE: Bertha.

BERTHA: What?

CHARLIE: What are you thinking about?

BERTHA: Luminosity.

CHARLIE: Oh. You like that word?

BERTHA: (*Shrugs*) I think so.

CHARLIE: It suits you. (*BERTHA is silent, not sure what to make of that.*)

CHARLIE: (*As if to reassure her.*) It's a good word ... a very good word. There's others, many others you might like as well ... maybe you'd like to hear some more tomorrow... at lunch again... that is, if you're not previously engaged.

BERTHA: Previously engaged?

CHARLIE: Yes, if you're available.

BERTHA: I guess.

CHARLIE: Okay ... good. Urn... Bertha ... I gotta go back to class in a little bit but ... um ... if my Mom or Dad asks me if I made any new friends today, can I just say that I made one real nice one ... and her name is Bertha? Just so they don't think I bombed out on my first day, or anything, and spent it all alone Can you do me that one favor?

BERTHA: Okay.

CHARLIE: Just 'cause I don't want them to worry about me or anything, you know.

BERTHA: Okay. (*They sit for a few moments in silence, a little awkwardly.*) ... Why accumulating words?

CHARLIE: (*Picking up quickly, relieved to be off the other subject.*) Well, you know ... words come in very handy, you know. Sometimes. For certain occasions. You know?

BERTHA: Oh. (*Pause*) No.

CHARLIE: Well ... for example, like ... for days like today. When you want to meet somebody who ... you've never met before ... who you would like to meet... Words are one way that you can do that. (*He leans into her ear.*) Capiche?

BERTHA: (*Thinking he's sneezed.*) Guzundheit.

CHARLIE: Hey, you speak a little German there, too, Bertha! That's terrific ... I mean really terrific. I'm a quarter Italian myself, but uh, anyway ... well, we can talk more about it later sometime, Bertha, okay?... Like maybe tomorrow at lunch, alright? Okay? Okay. (*Bell rings. CHARLIE gets up.*) See you later, Bertha. See you 'round.

BERTHA: Bye ... Charlie.

(CHARLIE leaves.)

BERTHA: See you 'round...