children are black, MARTHA *and* PERCY. *The third child is* HELEN, *six and a half years old, quite unkempt, in body a vivacious little person with a fine head, attractive, but noticeably blind, one eye larger and protruding; her gestures are abrupt, insistent, lacking in human restraint, and her face never smiles. She is flanked by the other two, in a litter of paper-doll cutouts, and while they speak* HELEN*'s hands thrust at their faces in turn, feeling bafflingly at the movements of their lips.)*

MARTHA. *(Snipping.)* First I'm gonna cut off this doctor's legs, one, two, now then –

PERCY. Why you cuttin' off that doctor's legs?

MARTHA. I'm gonna give him a operation. Now I'm gonna cut off his arms, one, two. Now I'm gonna fix up –

(She pushes HELEN*'s hand away from her mouth.)*

You stop that.

PERCY. Cut off his stomach, that's a good operation.

MARTHA. No, I'm gonna cut off his head first, he got a bad cold.

PERCY. Ain't gonna be much of that doctor left to fix up, time you finish all them opera–

(But HELEN *is poking her fingers inside his mouth to feel his tongue; he bites at them, annoyed, and she jerks them away. She now fingers her own lips, moving them in imitation, but soundlessly.)*

MARTHA. What you do, bite her hand?

PERCY. That's how I do, she keep pokin' her fingers in my mouth, I just bite 'em off.

MARTHA. What she tryin' do now?

PERCY. She tryin' *talk*. She gonna get mad. Looka her tryin' talk.

*(***HELEN** *is scowling, the lips under her fingertips moving in ghostly silence, growing more and more frantic until in a bizarre rage she bites at her own fingers. This sends* **PERCY** *off into laughter but alarms* **MARTHA**.*)*

MARTHA. Hey, you stop now.

(She pulls **HELEN***'s hand down.)*

You just sit quiet and –

(But at once **HELEN** *topples* **MARTHA** *on her back, knees pinning her shoulders down, and grabs the scissors.* **MARTHA** *screams.* **PERCY** *darts to the bell string on the porch, yanks it, and the bell rings. Inside, the lights have been gradually coming up on the main room, where we see the family informally gathered, talking, but in pantomime:* **KATE** *sits darning socks near a cradle, occasionally rocking it;* **CAPTAIN KELLER**, *in spectacles, is working over newspaper pages at a table; a benign visitor in a hat,* **AUNT EV**, *is sharing the sewing basket, putting the finishing touches on a big, shapeless doll made out of towels; an indolent young man,* **JAMES KELLER**, *is at the window watching the children. With the ring of the bell,* **KATE** *is instantly on her feet and out the door onto the porch to take in the scene; now we see what these five years have done to her: The girlish playfulness is gone; she is a woman steeled in grief.)*

KATE. *(For the thousandth time.)* Helen.

(She is down the steps at once to them, seizing **HELEN***'s wrists and lifting her off* **MARTHA***;* **MARTHA** *runs off in tears and screams for Momma, with* **PERCY** *after her.)*

Let me have those scissors.

(Meanwhile, the family inside is alerted, AUNT EV *joining* JAMES *at the window;* CAPTAIN KELLER *resumes work.)*

JAMES. *(Blandly.)* She only dug Martha's eyes out. Almost dug. It's always almost, no point worrying till it happens, is there?

(They gaze out while KATE *reaches for the scissors in* HELEN*'s hand. But* HELEN *pulls the scissors back; they struggle for them a moment, then* KATE *gives up and lets* HELEN *keep them. She tries to draw* HELEN *into the house.* HELEN *jerks away.* KATE *next goes down on her knees, takes* HELEN*'s hands gently, and using the scissors like a doll, makes* HELEN *caress and cradle them; she points* HELEN*'s finger houseward.* HELEN*'s whole body now becomes eager; she surrenders the scissors.* KATE *turns her toward the door and gives her a little push.* HELEN *scrambles up and toward the house, and* KATE*, rising, follows her.)*

AUNT EV. How does she stand it? Why haven't you seen this Baltimore man? It's not a thing you can let go on and on, like the weather.

JAMES. The weather here doesn't ask permission of me, Aunt Ev. Speak to my father.

AUNT EV. Arthur. Something ought to be done for that child.

KELLER. A refreshing suggestion. What?

*(*KATE*, entering, turns* HELEN *to* AUNT EV*, who gives her the towel doll.)*

AUNT EV. Why, this very famous oculist in Baltimore I wrote you about, what was his name?

KATE. Dr. Chisholm.

AUNT EV. Yes, I heard lots of cases of blindness people thought couldn't be cured he's cured, he just does wonders. Why don't you write to him?

KATE. And isn't there anything we should do?

KELLER. *(Jovial.)* Put up stronger fencing, ha?

DOCTOR. Just let her get well, she knows how to do it better than we do.

(He is packed, ready to leave.)

Main thing is the fever's gone, these things come and go in infants, never know why. Call it acute congestion of the stomach and brain.

KELLER. I'll see you to your buggy, Doctor.

DOCTOR. I've never seen a baby with more vitality, that's the truth.

(He beams a good night at the baby and KATE, *and* KELLER *leads him downstairs with a lamp. They go down the porch steps and across the yard, where the* DOCTOR *goes off-left;* KELLER *stands with the lamp aloft.* KATE, *meanwhile, is bent lovingly over the crib, which emits a bleat; her finger is playful with the baby's face.)*

KATE. Hush. Don't you cry now, you've been trouble enough. Call it acute congestion, indeed, I don't see what's so cute about a congestion, just because it's yours? We'll have your father run an editorial in his paper, the wonders of modern medicine, they don't know what they're curing even when they cure it. Men, men and their battle scars, we women will have to –

(But she breaks off, puzzled, moves her finger before the baby's eyes.)

Will have to – Helen?

(Now she moves her hand quickly.)

Helen.

(She snaps her fingers at the baby's eyes twice, and her hand falters; after a moment, she calls out loudly:)

Captain. Captain, will you come –

(But she stares at the baby, and her next call is directly at her ears:)

Captain!

(And now, still staring, she screams. **KELLER**, *in the yard, hears it and runs with the lamp back to the house.* **KATE** *screams again, her look intent on the baby and terrible.* **KELLER** *hurries in and up.)*

KELLER. Katie? What's wrong?

KATE. Look.

(She makes a pass with her hand in the crib at the baby's eyes.)

KELLER. What, Katie? She's well, she needs only time to –

KATE. She can't see. Look at her eyes.

(She takes the lamp from **KELLER**, *moves it before the child's face.)*

She can't *see*!

KELLER. *(Hoarsely.)* Helen.

KATE. Or hear. When I screamed she didn't blink. Not an eyelash –

KELLER. Helen. Helen!

KATE. She can't *hear* you!

KELLER. *Helen!*

(His face has something like fury in it, crying the child's name; **KATE**, *almost fainting, presses her knuckles to her mouth to stop her own cry. The room dims out quickly.)*

(Time, in the form of a slow tune of distant belfry chimes which approaches in a crescendo and then fades, passes; the light comes up again on a day five years later, on three kneeling children and an old dog outside around the pump. The dog is a setter named **BELLE**, *and she is sleeping. Two of the*

fade on ANNIE *show* KELLER *and* KATE *inside a suggestion of a garden house, with a bay-window seat toward center and a door at back.)*

KELLER. Katie, I will not *have* it! Now you did not see when that girl after supper tonight went to look for Helen in her room –

KATE. No.

KELLER. The child practically climbed out of her window to escape from her! What kind of teacher *is* she? I thought I had seen her at her worst this morning, shouting at me, but I come home to find the entire house disorganized by her – Helen won't stay one second in the same room, won't come to the table with her, won't let herself be bathed or undressed or put to bed by her, or even by Viney now, and the end result is that *you* have to do more for the child than before we hired this girl's services! From the moment she stepped off the train she's been nothing but a burden, incompetent, impertinent, ineffectual, immodest –

KATE. She folded her napkin, Captain.

KELLER. What?

KATE. Not ineffectual. Helen did fold her napkin.

KELLER. What in heaven's name is so extraordinary about folding a napkin?

KATE. *(With some humor.)* Well. It's more than you did, Captain.

KELLER. Katie. I did not bring you all the way out here to the garden house to be frivolous. Now, how does Miss Sullivan propose to teach a deaf-blind pupil who won't let her even touch her?

KATE. *(A pause.)* I don't know.

KELLER. The fact is, today she scuttled any chance she ever had of getting along with the child. If you can see any point or purpose to her staying on here longer, it's more than –

KATE. What do you wish me to do?

KELLER. I want you to give her notice.

KATE. I can't.

KELLER. Then if you won't, I must. I simply will not –

(He is interrupted by a knock at the back door. After a glance at KATE, *he moves to open the door;* ANNIE, *in her smoked glasses, is standing outside.* KELLER *contemplates her, heavily:)*

Miss Sullivan.

ANNIE. Captain Keller.

(She is nervous, keyed up to seizing the bull by the horns again, and she assumes a cheeriness which is not unshaky.)

Viney said I'd find you both over here in the garden house. I thought we should – have a talk?

KELLER. *(Reluctantly.)* Yes, I – Well, come in.

*(*ANNIE *enters and is interested in this room; she rounds on her heel, anxiously, studying it.* KELLER *turns the matter over to* KATE, *sotto voce:)*

Katie.

KATE. *(Turning it back, courteously.)* Captain.

KELLER. *(Clears his throat, makes ready.)* I, ah – wanted first to make my position clear to Mrs. Keller, in private. I have decided I – am not satisfied – in fact, am deeply dissatisfied – with the manner in which –

ANNIE. *(Intent.)* Excuse me, is this little house ever in use?

KELLER. *(With patience.)* In the hunting season. If you will give me your attention, Miss Sullivan.

*(*ANNIE *turns her smoked glasses upon him; they hold his unwilling stare.)*

I have tried to make allowances for you because you come from a part of the country where people are – women, I should say – come from who – well, for whom –

(It begins to elude him.)

KELLER. – allowances must – be made. I have decided, nevertheless, to – that is, decided I –
(Vexedly.) Miss Sullivan, I find it difficult to talk through those glasses.

ANNIE. *(Eagerly, removing them.)* Oh, of course.

KELLER. *(Dourly.)* Why do you wear them, the sun has been down for an hour.

ANNIE. *(Pleasantly, at the lamp.)* Any kind of light hurts my eyes.

(A silence; KELLER *ponders her, heavily:)*

KELLER. Put them on. Miss Sullivan, I have decided to – give you another chance.

ANNIE. *(Cheerfully.)* To do what?

KELLER. To – remain in our employ.

*(*ANNIE*'s eyes widen.)*

But on two conditions. I am not accustomed to rudeness in servants or women, and that is the first. If you are to stay, there must be a radical change of manner.

ANNIE. *(A pause.)* Whose?

KELLER. *(Exploding.)* Yours, young lady, isn't it obvious? And the second is that you persuade me there's the slightest hope of your teaching a child who flees from you now like the plague, to anyone else she can find in this house.

ANNIE. *(A pause.)* There isn't.

*(*KATE *stops sewing and fixes her eyes upon* ANNIE.*)*

KATE. What, Miss Annie?

ANNIE. It's hopeless here. I can't teach a child who runs away.

KELLER. *(Nonplussed.)* Then – do I understand you – propose –

ANNIE. Well, if we all agree it's hopeless, the next question is what –

KATE. Miss Annie.

(She is leaning toward ANNIE *in deadly earnest; it commands both* ANNIE *and* KELLER.*)*

I am not agreed. I think perhaps you – underestimate Helen.

ANNIE. I think everybody else here does.

KATE. She did fold her napkin. She learns, she learns, do you know she began talking when she was six months old? She could say "water." Not really – "wahwah." "Wahwah," but she meant water, she knew what it meant, and only six months old, I never saw a child so – bright, or outgoing –

(Her voice is unsteady, but she gets it level.) It's still in her, somewhere, isn't it? You should have seen her before her illness, such a good-tempered child –

ANNIE. *(Agreeably.)* She's changed.

(A pause, KATE *not letting* ANNIE*'s eyes go; her appeal at last is unconditional, and very quiet:)*

KATE. Miss Annie, put up with it. And with us.

KELLER. Us!

KATE. Please? Like the lost lamb in the parable, I love her all the more.

ANNIE. Mrs. Keller, I don't think Helen's worst handicap is deafness or blindness. I think it's your love. And pity.

KELLER. Now what does that mean?

ANNIE. All of you here are so sorry for her you've kept her – like a pet, why, even a dog you housebreak. No wonder she won't let me come near her. It's useless for me to try to teach her language or anything else here. I might as well –

KATE. *(Cuts in.)* Miss Annie, before you came we spoke of putting her in an asylum.

*(*ANNIE *turns back to regard her. A pause.)*