

The Miracle Worker

William Gibson

CHARACTERS

A Doctor
Kate
Keller

Helen
Martha
Percy
Aunt Ev

James
Anagnos (an ag' nōs)
Annie Sullivan
Viney

Blind Girls
A Servant
Offstage Voices

TIME. *The 1880's*

PLACE. *In and around the Keller homestead in Tuscumbia, Alabama; also, briefly, the Perkins Institution for the Blind, in Boston.*

ACT I

[It is night over the Keller homestead. Inside, three adults in the bedroom are grouped around a crib, in lamplight. They have been through a long vigil, and it shows in their tired bearing and disarranged clothing. One is a young gentlewoman with a sweet girlish face, KATE KELLER; the second is an elderly DOCTOR, stethoscope at neck, thermometer in fingers; the third is a hearty gentleman in his forties with chin whiskers, CAPTAIN ARTHUR KELLER.]

DOCTOR. She'll live.

KATE. Thank God.

[The DOCTOR leaves them together over the crib, packs his bag.]

DOCTOR. You're a pair of lucky parents. I can tell you now, I thought she wouldn't.

KELLER. Nonsense, the child's a Keller, she has the constitution of a goat. She'll outlive us all.

DOCTOR. *[Amiably]* Yes, especially if some of you Kellers don't get a night's sleep. I mean you, Mrs. Keller.

KELLER. You hear, Katie?

KATE. I hear.

KELLER. *[Indulgent]* I've brought up two of them, but this is my wife's first, she isn't battle-scarred yet.

KATE. Doctor, don't be merely considerate, will my girl be all right?

DOCTOR. Oh, by morning she'll be knocking down Captain Keller's fences again.

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, 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, KATE 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 him, 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 children are Negroes, 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 baffledly 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. HELEN 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 mamma, 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, 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 housewards. 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 oculist¹ 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?

KELLER. I've stopped believing in wonders.

KATE. [Rocks the cradle] I think the Captain will write to him soon. Won't you, Captain?

KELLER. No.

JAMES. [Lightly] Good money after bad, or bad after good. Or bad after bad—

AUNT EV. Well, if it's just a question of money, Arthur, now you're marshal you have this Yankee money. Might as well—

KELLER: Not money. The child's been to specialists all over Alabama and Tennessee, if I thought it would do good I'd have her to every fool doctor in the country.

KATE. I think the Captain will write to him soon.

KELLER. Katie. How many times can you let them break your heart?

KATE. Any number of times.

[HELEN meanwhile sits on the floor to explore the doll with her fingers, and her hand pauses over the face: this is no face, a blank area of towel, and it troubles her. Her hand searches for features, and taps questioningly for eyes, but no one notices.]

1. oculist (äk' yə list)n.: An old-fashioned term for an eye specialist.

She then yanks at her AUNT'S dress, and taps again vigorously for eyes.]

AUNT EV. What, child?

[Obviously not hearing, HELEN commences to go around, from person to person, tapping for eyes, but no one attends or understands.]

KATE. [No break] As long as there's the least chance. For her to see. Or hear, or—

KELLER. There isn't. Now I must finish here.

KATE. I think, with your permission, Captain, I'd like to write.

KELLER. I said no, Katie.

AUNT EV. Why, writing does no harm, Arthur, only a little bitty letter. To see if he can help her.

KELLER. He can't.

KATE. We won't know that to be a fact, Captain, until after you write.

KELLER. [Rising, emphatic] Katie, he can't.
[He collects his papers.]

JAMES. [Facetiously] Father stands up, that makes it a fact.

KELLER. You be quiet! I'm badgered enough here by females without your impudence.

[JAMES shuts up, makes himself scarce. HELEN now is groping among things on KELLER'S desk, and paws his papers to the floor. KELLER is exasperated.]

Katie.

[KATE quickly turns HELEN away, and retrieves the papers.]

I might as well try to work in a henyard as in this house—

JAMES. [Placating] You really ought to put her away, Father.

KATE. [Staring up] What?

JAMES. Some asylum. It's the kindest thing.

AUNT EV. Why, she's your sister, James, not a nobody—

JAMES. Half sister, and half—mentally defective, she can't even keep herself clean. It's not pleasant to see her about all the time.

KATE. Do you dare? Complain of what you can see?

KELLER. [Very annoyed] This discussion is at an end! I'll thank you not to broach it again, Ev.

[Silence descends at once. HELEN gropes her way with the doll, and KELLER turns back for a final word, explosive.]

I've done as much as I can bear, I can't give my whole life to it! The house is at sixes and sevens from morning till night over the child, it's time some attention was paid to Mildred here instead!

KATE. [Gently dry] You'll wake her up, Captain.

KELLER. I want some peace in the house, I don't care how, but one way we won't have it is by rushing up and down the country every time someone hears of a new quack. I'm as sensible to this affliction as anyone else, it hurts me to look at the girl.

KATE. It was not our affliction I meant you to write about, Captain.

[HELEN is back at AUNT EV, fingering her dress, and yanks two buttons from it.]

AUNT EV. Helen! My buttons.

[HELEN pushes the buttons into the doll's face. KATE now sees, comes swiftly to kneel, lifts HELEN'S hand to her own eyes in question.]

KATE. Eyes?

[HELEN nods energetically.]

She wants the doll to have eyes.

[Another kind of silence now, while KATE takes pins and buttons from the sewing basket and attaches them to the doll as eyes. KELLER stands, caught, and watches morosely. AUNT EV blinks, and conceals her emotion by inspecting her dress.]

AUNT EV. My goodness me, I'm not decent.

KATE. She doesn't know better, Aunt Ev. I'll sew them on again.

JAMES. Never learn with everyone letting her do anything she takes it into her mind to—

KELLER. You be quiet!

JAMES. What did I say now?

KELLER. You talk too much.

JAMES. I was agreeing with you!

KELLER. Whatever it was. Deprived child, the least she can have are the little things she wants.

[JAMES, very wounded, stalks out of the room onto the porch; he remains here, sulking.]

AUNT EV. [Indulgently] It's worth a couple of buttons, Kate, look.

[HELEN now has the doll with eyes, and cannot contain herself for joy; she rocks the doll, pats it vigorously, kisses it.]

This child has more sense than all these men Kellers, if there's ever any way to reach that mind of hers.

[But HELEN suddenly has come upon the cradle, and unhesitatingly overturns it; the swaddled baby tumbles out, and CAPTAIN KELLER barely manages to dive and catch it in time.]

KELLER. Helen!

[All are in commotion, the baby screams, but HELEN unperturbed is laying her doll in its place. KATE on her knees pulls her hands off the cradle, wringing them; HELEN is bewildered.]

KATE. Helen, Helen, you're not to do such things, how can I make you understand—

KELLER. [Hoarsely] Katie.

KATE. How can I get it into your head, my darling, my poor—

KELLER. Katie, some way of teaching her an iota of discipline has to be—

KATE. [Flaring] How can you discipline an afflicted child? Is it her fault?

[HELEN'S fingers have fluttered to her MOTHER'S lips, vainly trying to comprehend their movements.]

KELLER. I didn't say it was her fault.

KATE. Then whose? I don't know what to do! How can I teach her, beat her—until she's black and blue?

KELLER. It's not safe to let her run around loose. Now there must be a way of confining her, somehow, so she can't—

KATE. Where, in a cage? She's a growing child, she has to use her limbs!

KELLER. Answer me one thing, is it fair to Mildred here?

KATE. [Inexorably] Are you willing to put her away?

[Now HELEN'S face darkens in the same rage as at herself earlier, and her hand strikes at KATE'S lips. KATE catches her hand again, and HELEN begins to kick, struggle, twist.]

KELLER. Now what?

KATE. She wants to talk, like—be like you and me.

[She holds HELEN struggling until we hear from the child her first sound so far, an inarticulate weird noise in her throat such as an animal in a trap might make; and KATE releases her. The second she is free HELEN blunders away, collides violently with a chair, falls, and sits weeping. KATE comes to her, embraces, caresses, soothes her, and buries her own face in her hair, until she can control her voice.]

Every day she slips further away. And I don't know how to call her back.

AUNT EV. Oh, I've a mind to take her up to Baltimore myself. If that doctor can't help her, maybe he'll know who can.

KELLER. [Presently, heavily] I'll write the man, Katie.

[He stands with the baby in his clasp, staring at HELEN'S head, hanging down on KATE'S arm.]

[The lights dim out, except the one on KATE and HELEN. In the twilight, JAMES, AUNT EV, and KELLER move off slowly, formally, in separate directions; KATE with HELEN in her arms remains, motionless, in an image which overlaps into the next scene and fades only when it is well under way.]

Without pause, from the dark down left we hear a man's voice with a Greek accent speaking.]

ANAGNOS. —who could do nothing for the girl, of course. It was Dr. Bell who thought she might somehow be taught. I have written the family only that a suitable governess, Miss Annie Sullivan, has been found here in Boston—

[The lights begin to come up, down left, on a long table and chair. The table contains equipment for teaching the blind by touch—a small replica of the human skeleton,

stuffed animals, models of flowers and plants, piles of books. The chair contains a girl of 20, ANNIE SULLIVAN, with a face which in repose is grave and rather obstinate, and when active is impudent, combative, twinkling with all the life that is lacking in HELEN'S, and handsome; there is a crude vitality to her. Her suitcase is at her knee. ANAGNOS, a stocky bearded man, comes into the light only toward the end of his speech.]

ANAGNOS. —and will come. It will no doubt be difficult for you there, Annie. But it has been difficult for you at our school too, hm? Gratifying, yes, when you came to us and could not spell your name, to accomplish so much here in a few years, but always an Irish battle. For independence.

[He studies ANNIE, humorously; she does not open her eyes.]

This is my last time to counsel you, Annie, and you do lack some—by some I mean *all*—what, tact or talent to bend. To others. And what has saved you on more than one occasion here at Perkins is that there was nowhere to expel you to. Your eyes hurt?

ANNIE. My ears, Mr. Anagnos.

[And now she has opened her eyes; they are inflamed, vague, slightly crossed, clouded by the granular growth of trachoma,² and she often keeps them closed to shut out the pain of light.]

ANAGNOS. [Severely] Nowhere but back to Tewksbury,³ where children learn to be saucy. Annie, I know how dreadful it was there, but that battle is dead and done with, why not let it stay buried?

2. trachoma (trə kō' mə)n.: A disease of the eyelid and eyeball.

3. Tewksbury: A town in Massachusetts, the location of an institution for the poor.

ANNIE. [*Cheerily*] I think God must owe me a resurrection.

ANAGNOS. [*A bit shocked*] What?

ANNIE. [*Taps her brow*] Well, He keeps digging up that battle!

ANAGNOS. That is not a proper thing to say, Annie. It is what I mean.

ANNIE. [*Meekly*] Yes. But I know what I'm like, what's this child like?

ANAGNOS. Like?

ANNIE. Well—Bright or dull, to start off.

ANAGNOS. No one knows. And if she is dull, you have no patience with this?

ANNIE. Oh, in grownups you have to, Mr. Anagnos. I mean in children it just seems a little—precocious, can I use that word?

ANAGNOS. Only if you can spell it.

ANNIE. Premature. So I hope at least she's a bright one.

ANAGNOS. Deaf, blind, mute—who knows? She is like a little safe, locked, that no one can open. Perhaps there is a treasure inside.

ANNIE. Maybe it's empty, too?

ANAGNOS. Possible. I should warn you, she is much given to tantrums.

ANNIE. Means something is inside. Well, so am I, if I believe all I hear. Maybe you should warn *them*.

ANAGNOS. [*Frowns*] Annie. I wrote them no word of your history. You will find yourself among strangers now, who know nothing of it.

ANNIE. Well, we'll keep them in a state of blessed ignorance.

ANAGNOS. Perhaps *you* should tell it?

ANNIE. [*Bristling*] Why? I have enough trouble with people who don't know.

ANAGNOS. So they will understand. When you have trouble.

ANNIE. The only time I have trouble is when I'm right.

[*But she is amused at herself, as is ANAGNOS.*]

Is it my fault it's so often? I won't give them trouble, Mr. Anagnos, I'll be so ladylike they won't notice I've come.

ANAGNOS. Annie, be—humble. It is not as if you have so many offers to pick and choose. You will need their affection, working with this child.

ANNIE. [*Humorously*] I hope I won't need their pity.

ANAGNOS. Oh, we can all use some pity.

[*Crisply*]

So. You are no longer our pupil, we throw you into the world, a teacher. *If* the child can be taught. No one expects you to work miracles, even for twenty-five dollars a month. Now, in this envelope a loan, for the railroad, which you will repay me when you have a bank account. But in this box, a gift. With our love.

[*ANNIE opens the small box he extends, and sees a garnet ring. She looks up, blinking, and down.*]

I think other friends are ready to say goodbye.

[*He moves as though to open doors.*]

ANNIE. Mr. Anagnos.

[*Her voice is trembling.*]

Dear Mr. Anagnos, I—

[*But she swallows over getting the ring on her finger, and cannot continue until she finds a woebegone joke.*]

Well, what should I say, I'm an ignorant

opinionated girl, and everything I am I owe to you?

ANAGNOS. [*Smiles*] That is only half true, Annie.

ANNIE. Which half? I crawled in here like a drowned rat, I thought I died when Jimmie died, that I'd never again—come alive. Well, you say with love so easy, and I haven't loved a soul since and I never will, I suppose, but this place gave me more than my eyes back. Or taught me how to spell, which I'll never learn anyway, but with all the fights and the trouble I've been here it taught me what help is, and how to live again, and I don't want to say goodbye. Don't open the door, I'm crying.

ANAGNOS. [*Gently*] They will not see.

[*He moves again as though opening doors, and in comes a group of girls, 8-year-olds to 17-year-olds; as they walk we see they are blind. ANAGNOS shepherds them in with a hand.*]

A CHILD. Annie?

ANNIE: [*Her voice cheerful.*] Here, Beatrice.

[*As soon as they locate her voice they throng joyfully to her, speaking all at once; ANNIE is down on her knees to the smallest, and the following are the more intelligible fragments in the general hubbub.*]

CHILDREN. There's a present. We brought you a going-away present, Annie!

ANNIE. Oh, now you shouldn't have—

CHILDREN. We did, we did, where's the present?

SMALLEST CHILD. [*Mournfully*] Don't go, Annie, away.

CHILDREN. Alice has it. Alice! Where's Alice? Here I am! Where? Here!

[*An arm is aloft out of the group, waving a present; ANNIE reaches for it.*]

ANNIE. I have it. I have it, everybody, should I open it?

CHILDREN. Open it! Everyone be quiet! Do, Annie! She's opening it. Ssh!

[*A settling of silence while ANNIE unwraps it. The present is a pair of smoked glasses, and she stands still.*]

Is it open, Annie?

ANNIE. It's open.

CHILDREN. It's for your eyes, Annie. Put them on, Annie! 'Cause Mrs. Hopkins said your eyes hurt since the operation. And she said you're going where the sun is fierce.

ANNIE. I'm putting them on now.

SMALLEST CHILD. [*Mournfully*] Don't go, Annie, where the sun is fierce.

CHILDREN. Do they fit all right?

ANNIE. Oh, they fit just fine.

CHILDREN. Did you put them on? Are they pretty, Annie?

ANNIE. Oh, my eyes feel hundreds of per cent better already, and pretty, why, do you know how I look in them? Splendiloquent. Like a race horse!

CHILDREN. [*Delighted*] There's another present! Beatrice! We have a present for Helen, too! Give it to her, Beatrice. Here, Annie!

[*This present is an elegant doll, with movable eyelids and a momma sound.*]

It's for Helen. And we took up a collection to buy it. And Laura dressed it.

ANNIE. It's beautiful!

CHILDREN. So, don't forget, you be sure to give it to Helen from us, Annie!

ANNIE. I promise it will be the first thing I give her. If I don't keep it for myself, that is, you know I can't be trusted with dolls!

SMALLEST CHILD. [*Mournfully*] Don't go, Annie, to her.

ANNIE. [*Her arm around her.*] Sarah, dear, I don't want to go.

SMALLEST CHILD. Then why are you going?

ANNIE. [*Gently*] Because I'm a big girl now, and big girls have to earn a living. It's the only way I can. But if you don't smile for me first, what I'll just have to do is—

[*She pauses, inviting it.*]

SMALLEST CHILD. What?

ANNIE. Put you in my suitcase, instead of this doll. And take you to Helen in Alabama!

[*This strikes the children as very funny, and they begin to laugh and tease the smallest child, who after a moment does smile for ANNIE.*]

ANAGNOS. [*Then*] Come, children. We must get the trunk into the carriage and Annie into her train, or no one will go to Alabama. Come, come.

[*He shepherds them out and ANNIE is left alone on her knees with the doll in her lap. She reaches for her suitcase, and by a subtle change in the color of the light, we go with her thoughts into another time. We hear a boy's voice whispering; perhaps we see shadowy intimations of these speakers in the background.*]

BOY'S VOICE. Where we goin', Annie?

ANNIE. [*In dread*] Jimmie.

BOY'S VOICE. Where we goin'?

ANNIE. I said—I'm takin' care of you—

BOY'S VOICE. Forever and ever?

MAN'S VOICE. [*Impersonal*] Annie Sullivan, aged nine, virtually blind. James Sullivan, aged seven—What's the matter with your leg, Sonny?

ANNIE. Forever and ever.

MAN'S VOICE. Can't he walk without that crutch?

[*ANNIE shakes her head, and does not stop shaking it.*]

Girl goes to the women's ward. Boy to the men's.

BOY'S VOICE. [*In terror*] Annie! Annie, don't let them take me—Annie!

ANAGNOS. [*Offstage*] Annie! Annie?

[*But this voice is real, in the present, and ANNIE comes up out of her horror, clearing her head with a final shake; the lights begin to pick out KATE in the KELLER house, as ANNIE in a bright tone calls back.*]

ANNIE. Coming!

[*This word catches KATE, who stands half turned and attentive to it, almost as though hearing it. Meanwhile ANNIE turns and hurries out, lugging the suitcase.*]

The room dims out; the sound of railroad wheels begins from off left, and maintains itself in a constant rhythm underneath the following scene; the remaining lights have come up on the KELLER homestead. JAMES is lounging on the porch, waiting. In the upper bedroom which is to be ANNIE'S, HELEN is alone, puzzledly exploring, fingering and smelling things, the curtains, empty drawers in the bureau, water in the pitcher by the washbasin, fresh towels on the bedstead. Downstairs in the family room KATE turning to a mirror hastily adjusts her bonnet, watched by a Negro servant in an apron, VINEY.]

VINEY. Let Mr. Jimmy go by hisself, you been pokin' that garden all day, you ought to rest your feet.

KATE. I can't wait to see her, Viney.

VINEY. Maybe she ain't gone be on this train neither.

KATE. Maybe she is.

VINEY. And maybe she ain't.

KATE. And maybe she is. Where's Helen?

VINEY. She upstairs, smellin' around. She know somethin' funny's goin' on.

KATE. Let her have her supper as soon as Mildred's in bed, and tell Captain Keller when he comes that we'll be delayed tonight.

VINEY. Again.

KATE. I don't think we need say *again*. Simply delayed will do.

[*She runs upstairs to ANNIE'S room, VINEY speaking after her.*]

VINEY. I mean that's what he gone say. "What, again?"

[*VINEY works at setting the table. Upstairs KATE stands in the doorway, watching HELEN'S groping explorations.*]

KATE. Yes, we're expecting someone. Someone for my Helen.

[*HELEN happens upon her skirt, clutches her leg; KATE in a tired dismay kneels to tidy her hair and soiled pinafore.*]

Oh, dear, this was clean not an hour ago.

[*HELEN feels her bonnet, shakes her head darkly, and tugs to get it off. KATE retains it with one hand, diverts HELEN by opening her other hand under her nose.*]

Here. For while I'm gone.

[*HELEN sniffs, reaches, and pops something into her mouth, while KATE speaks a bit guiltily.*]

I don't think one peppermint drop will spoil your supper.

[*She gives HELEN a quick kiss, evades her*

hands, and hurries downstairs again. Meanwhile CAPTAIN KELLER has entered the yard from around the rear of the house, newspaper under arm, cleaning off and munching on some radishes; he sees JAMES lounging at the porch post.]

KELLER. Jimmie?

JAMES. [*Unmoving*] Sir?

KELLER. [*Eyes him*] You don't look dressed for anything useful, boy.

JAMES. I'm not. It's for Miss Sullivan.

KELLER. Needn't keep holding up that porch, we have wooden posts for that. I asked you to see that those strawberry plants were moved this evening.

JAMES. I'm moving your—Mrs. Keller, instead. To the station.

KELLER. [*Heavily*] Mrs. Keller. Must you always speak of her as though you haven't met the lady?

[*KATE comes out on the porch, and JAMES inclines his head.*]

JAMES. [*Ironic*] Mother.

[*He starts off the porch, but sidesteps KELLER'S glare like a blow.*]

I said mother!

KATE. Captain.

KELLER. Evening, my dear.

KATE. We're off to meet the train, Captain. Supper will be a trifle delayed tonight.

KELLER. What, again?

KATE. [*Backing out*] With your permission, Captain?

[*And they are gone. KELLER watches them offstage, morosely.*]

[*Upstairs HELEN meanwhile has groped for her mother, touched her cheek in a mean-*

ingful gesture, waited, touched her cheek, waited, then found the open door, and made her way down. Now she comes into the family room, touches her cheek again; VINEY regards her.]

VINEY. What you want, honey, your momma?

[HELEN touches her cheek again. VINEY goes to the sideboard, gets a tea-cake, gives it into HELEN'S hand; HELEN pops it into her mouth.]

Guess one little tea-cake ain't gone ruin your appetite.

[She turns HELEN toward the door. HELEN wanders out onto the porch, as KELLER comes up the steps. Her hands encounter him, and she touches her cheek again, waits.]

KELLER. She's gone.

[He is awkward with her; when he puts his hand on her head, she pulls away. KELLER stands regarding her, heavily.]

She's gone, my son and I don't get along, you don't know I'm your father, no one likes me, and supper's delayed.

[HELEN touches her cheek, waits. KELLER fishes in his pocket.]

Here. I brought you some stick candy, one nibble of sweets can't do any harm.

[He gives her a large stick candy; HELEN falls to it. VINEY peers out the window.]

VINEY. [Reproachfully] Cap'n Keller, now how'm I gone get her to eat her supper you fill her up with that trash?

KELLER. [Roars] Tend to your work!

[VINEY beats a rapid retreat. KELLER thinks better of it, and tries to get the candy away from HELEN, but HELEN hangs on to it; and when KELLER pulls, she gives his leg a kick. KELLER hops about, HELEN takes ref-

uge with the candy down behind the pump, and KELLER then irately flings his newspaper on the porch floor, stamps into the house past VINEY and disappears.

The lights half dim on the homestead, where VINEY and HELEN going about their business soon find their way off. Meanwhile, the railroad sounds off left have mounted in a crescendo to a climax typical of a depot at arrival time, the lights come up on stage left, and we see a suggestion of a station. Here ANNIE in her smoked glasses and disarrayed by travel is waiting with her suitcase, while JAMES walks to meet her; she has a battered paper-bound book, which is a Perkins report,⁴ under her arm.]

JAMES. [Coolly] Miss Sullivan?

ANNIE. [cheerily] Here! At last, I've been on trains so many days I thought they must be backing up every time I dozed off—

JAMES. I'm James Keller.

ANNIE. James?

[The name stops her.]

I had a brother Jimmie. Are you Helen's?

JAMES. I'm only half a brother. You're to be her governess?

ANNIE. [Lightly] Well. Try!

JAMES. [Eying her] You look like half a governess.

[KATE enters. ANNIE stands moveless, while JAMES takes her suitcase. KATE'S gaze on her is doubtful, troubled.]

Mrs. Keller, Miss Sullivan.

[KATE takes her hand.]

4. Perkins report: One of the annual reports by Dr. Samuel G. Howe, founder of the Perkins Institution, describing his methods for teaching blind and deaf children.

KATE. [Simply] We've met every train for two days.

[ANNIE looks at KATE's face, and her good humor comes back.]

ANNIE. I changed trains every time they stopped, the man who sold me that ticket ought to be tied to the tracks—

JAMES. You have a trunk, Miss Sullivan?

ANNIE. Yes.

[She passes JAMES a claim check, and he bears the suitcase out behind them. ANNIE holds the battered book. KATE is studying her face, and ANNIE returns the gaze; this is a mutual appraisal, southern gentlewoman and working-class Irish girl, and ANNIE is not quite comfortable under it.]

You didn't bring Helen, I was hoping you would.

KATE. No, she's home.

[A pause. ANNIE tries to make ladylike small talk, though her energy now and then erupts; she catches herself up whenever she hears it.]

ANNIE. You—live far from town, Mrs. Keller?

KATE. Only a mile.

ANNIE. Well. I suppose I can wait one more mile. But don't be surprised if I get out to push the horse!

KATE. Helen's waiting for you, too. There's been such a bustle in the house, she expects something, heaven knows what.

[Now she voices part of her doubt, not as such, but ANNIE understands it.]

I expected—a desiccated⁵ spinster. You're very young.

ANNIE. [Resolutely] Oh, you should have

5. **desiccated** (des' i kät' id): Dried up.

seen me when I left Boston. I got much older on this trip.

KATE. I mean, to teach anyone as difficult as Helen.

ANNIE. I mean to try. They can't put you in jail for trying!

KATE. Is it possible, even? To teach a deaf-blind child half of what an ordinary child learns—has that ever been done?

ANNIE. Half?

KATE. A tenth.

ANNIE. [Reluctantly] No.

[KATE's face loses its remaining hope, still appraising her youth.]

Dr. Howe did wonders, but—an ordinary child? No, never. But then I thought when I was going over his reports—

[She indicates the one in her hand.]

—he never treated them like ordinary children. More like—eggs everyone was afraid would break.

KATE. [A pause] May I ask how old you are?

ANNIE. Well, I'm not in my teens, you know! I'm twenty.

KATE. All of twenty.

[ANNIE takes the bull by the horns, valiantly.]

ANNIE. Mrs. Keller, don't lose heart just because I'm not on my last legs. I have three big advantages over Dr. Howe that money couldn't buy for you. One is his work behind me, I've read every word he wrote about it and he wasn't exactly what you'd call a man of few words. Another is to be young, why, I've got energy to do anything. The third is, I've been blind.

[But it costs her something to say this.]

KATE. [*Quietly*] Advantages.

ANNIE. [*Wry*] Well, some have the luck of the Irish, some do not.

[*KATE smiles; she likes her.*]

KATE. What will you try to teach her first?

ANNIE. First, last, and—in between, language.

KATE. Language.

ANNIE. Language is to the mind more than light is to the eye. Dr. Howe said that.

KATE. Language.

[*She shakes her head.*]

We can't get through to teach her to sit still. You *are* young, despite your years, to have such—confidence. Do you, inside?

[*ANNIE studies her face; she likes her, too.*]

ANNIE. No, to tell you the truth I'm as shaky inside as a baby's rattle!

[*They smile at each other, and KATE pats her hand.*]

KATE. Don't be.

[*JAMES returns to usher them off.*]

We'll do all we can to help, and to make you feel at home. Don't think of us as strangers, Miss Annie.

ANNIE. [*Cheerily*] Oh, strangers aren't so strange to me. I've known them all my life!

[*KATE smiles again, ANNIE smiles back, and they precede JAMES offstage.*]

The lights dim on them, having simultaneously risen full on the house; VINEY has already entered the family room, taken a water pitcher, and come out and down to the pump. She pumps real water. As she looks offstage, we hear the clop of hoofs, a carriage stopping, and voices.]

VINEY. Cap'n Keller! Cap'n Keller, they comin'!

[*She goes back into the house, as KELLER comes out on the porch to gaze.*]

She sure 'nuff came, Cap'n.

[*KELLER descends, and crosses toward the carriage; this conversation begins offstage and moves on.*]

KELLER. [*Very courtly*] Welcome to Ivy Green, Miss Sullivan. I take it you are Miss Sullivan—

KATE. My husband, Miss Annie, Captain Keller.

ANNIE. [*Her best behavior*] Captain, how do you do.

KELLER. A pleasure to see you, at last. I trust you had an agreeable journey?

ANNIE. Oh, I had several! When did this country get so big?

JAMES. Where would you like the trunk, father?

KELLER. Where Miss Sullivan can get at it, I imagine.

ANNIE. Yes, please. Where's Helen?

KELLER. In the hall, Jimmie—

KATE. We've put you in the upstairs corner room, Miss Annie, if there's any breeze at all this summer, you'll feel it—

[*In the house the setter BELLE flees into the family room, pursued by HELEN with groping hands; the dog doubles back out the same door, and HELEN still groping for her makes her way out to the porch; she is messy, her hair tumbled, her pinafore now ripped, her shoelaces untied. KELLER acquires the suitcase, and ANNIE gets her hands on it too, though still endeavoring to*]

live up to the general air of propertied manners.^{6]}

KELLER. And the suitcase—

ANNIE. [Pleasantly] I'll take the suitcase, thanks.

KELLER. Not at all, I have it, Miss Sullivan.

ANNIE. I'd like it.

KELLER. [Gallantly] I couldn't think of it, Miss Sullivan. You'll find in the south we—

ANNIE. Let me.

KELLER.—view women as the flowers of civilization—

ANNIE. [Impatiently] I've got something in it for Helen!

[She tugs it free; KELLER stares.]

Thank you. When do I see her?

KATE. There. There is Helen.

[ANNIE turns, and sees HELEN on the porch. A moment of silence. Then ANNIE begins across the yard to her, lugging her suitcase.]

KELLER. [Sotto voce^{7]} Katie—

[KATE silences him with a hand on his arm. When ANNIE finally reaches the porch steps she stops, contemplating HELEN for a last moment before entering her world. Then she drops the suitcase on the porch with intentional heaviness, HELEN starts with the jar, and comes to grope over it. ANNIE puts forth her hand, and touches HELEN'S. HELEN at once grasps it, and commences to explore it, like reading a face. She moves her hand on to ANNIE'S forearm, and dress; and ANNIE brings her face within reach of HELEN'S

fingers, which travel over it, quite without timidity, until they encounter and push aside the smoked glasses. ANNIE'S gaze is grave, unpitying, very attentive. She puts her hands on HELEN'S arms, but HELEN at once pulls away, and they confront each other with a distance between. Then HELEN returns to the suitcase, tries to open it, cannot. ANNIE points HELEN'S hand overhead. HELEN pulls away, tries to open the suitcase again; ANNIE points her hand overhead again. HELEN points overhead, a question, and ANNIE, drawing HELEN'S hand to her own face, nods. HELEN now begins tugging the suitcase toward the door; when ANNIE tries to take it from her, she fights her off and backs through the doorway with it. ANNIE stands a moment, then follows her in, and together they get the suitcase up the steps into ANNIE'S room.]

KATE. Well?

KELLER. She's very rough, Katie.

KATE. I like her, Captain.

KELLER. Certainly rear a peculiar kind of young woman in the north. How old is she?

KATE. [Vaguely] Ohh— Well, she's not in her teens, you know.

KELLER. She's only a child. What's her family like, shipping her off alone this far?

KATE. I couldn't learn. She's very close-mouthed about some things.

KELLER. Why does she wear those glasses? I like to see a person's eyes when I talk to—

KATE. For the sun. She was blind.

KELLER. Blind.

KATE. She's had nine operations on her eyes. One just before she left.

KELLER. Blind, good heavens, do they expect one blind child to teach another? Has she

6. the general air of propertied manners:

Atmosphere of refinement and wealth.

7. sotto voce (sät' ò vō' chē): In a low voice.

experience at least, how long did she teach there?

KATE. She was a pupil.

KELLER. [Heavily] Katie, Katie. This is her first position?

KATE. [Bright voice] She was valedictorian—

KELLER. Here's a houseful of grownups can't cope with the child, how can an inexperienced half-blind Yankee schoolgirl manage her?

[JAMES moves in with the trunk on his shoulder.]

JAMES. [Easily] Great improvement. Now we have two of them to look after.

KELLER. You look after those strawberry plants!

[JAMES stops with the trunk. KELLER turns from him without another word, and marches off.]

JAMES. Nothing I say is right.

KATE. Why say anything?

[She calls.]

Don't be long, Captain, we'll have supper right away—

[She goes into the house, and through the rear door of the family room. JAMES trudges in with the trunk, takes it up the steps to ANNIE'S room, and sets it down outside the door. The lights elsewhere dim somewhat.]

Meanwhile, inside, ANNIE has given HELEN a key; while ANNIE removes her bonnet, HELEN unlocks and opens the suitcase. The first thing she pulls out is a voluminous shawl. She fingers it until she perceives what it is; then she wraps it around her, and acquiring ANNIE'S bonnet and smoked glasses as well, dons the lot: the shawl swamps her, and the bonnet settles down

upon the glasses, but she stands before a mirror cocking her head to one side, then to the other, in a mockery of adult action. ANNIE is amused, and talks to her as one might to a kitten, with no trace of company manners.]

ANNIE. All the trouble I went to and that's how I look?

[HELEN then comes back to the suitcase, gropes for more, lifts out a pair of female drawers.]

Oh, no. Not the drawers!

[But HELEN discarding them comes to the elegant doll. Her fingers explore its features, and when she raises it and finds its eyes open and close, she is at first startled, then delighted. She picks it up, taps its head vigorously, taps her own chest, and nods questioningly. ANNIE takes her finger, points it to the doll, points it to HELEN, and touching it to her own face, also nods. HELEN sits back on her heels, clasps the doll to herself, and rocks it. ANNIE studies her, still in bonnet and smoked glasses like a caricature of herself, and addresses her humorously.]

All right, Miss O'Sullivan. Let's begin with doll.

[She takes HELEN'S hand; in her palm ANNIE'S forefinger points, thumb holding her other fingers clenched.]

D.

[Her thumb next holds all her fingers clenched, touching HELEN'S palm.]

O.

[Her thumb and forefinger extend.]

L.

[Same contact repeated.]

L.



[She puts HELEN'S hand to the doll.]

Doll.

JAMES. You spell pretty well.

[ANNIE in one hurried move gets the drawers swiftly back into the suitcase, the lid banged shut, and her head turned, to see JAMES leaning in the doorway.]

Finding out if she's ticklish? She is.

[ANNIE regards him stonily, but HELEN after a scowling moment tugs at her hand again, impertious. ANNIE repeats the letters, and HELEN interrupts her fingers in the middle, feeling each of them, puzzled. ANNIE touches HELEN'S hand to the doll, and begins spelling into it again.]

JAMES. What is it, a game?

ANNIE. [Curtly] An alphabet.

JAMES. Alphabet?

ANNIE. For the deaf.

[HELEN now repeats the finger movements in air, exactly, her head cocked to her own hand, and ANNIE'S eyes suddenly gleam.]

Ho. How bright she is!

JAMES. You think she knows what she's doing?

[He takes HELEN'S hand, to throw a meaningless gesture into it; she repeats this one too.]

She imitates everything, she's a monkey.

ANNIE. [Very pleased] Yes, she's a bright little monkey, all right.

[She takes the doll from HELEN, and reaches for her hand; HELEN instantly grabs the doll back. ANNIE takes it again, and HELEN's hand next, but HELEN is incensed now; when ANNIE draws her hand to her face to shake her head no, then tries to spell to her, HELEN slaps at ANNIE'S face. ANNIE grasps HELEN by both arms, and swings her into a chair, holding her pinned there, kicking, while glasses, doll, bonnet fly in various directions. JAMES laughs.]

JAMES. She wants her doll back.

ANNIE. When she spells it.

JAMES. Spell, she doesn't know the thing has a name, even.

ANNIE. Of course not, who expects her to, now? All I want is her fingers to learn the letters.

JAMES. Won't mean anything to her.

[ANNIE gives him a look. She then tries to form HELEN'S fingers into the letters, but HELEN swings a haymaker instead, which ANNIE barely ducks, at once pinning her down again.]

Doesn't like that alphabet, Miss Sullivan. You invent it yourself?

[HELEN is now in a rage, fighting tooth and nail to get out of the chair, and ANNIE answers while struggling and dodging her kicks.]

ANNIE. Spanish monks under a—vow of silence. Which I wish you'd take!

[And suddenly releasing HELEN'S hands, she comes and shuts the door in JAMES'S face. HELEN drops to the floor, groping around for the doll. ANNIE looks around

desperately, sees her purse on the bed, rummages in it, and comes up with a battered piece of cake wrapped in newspaper; with her foot she moves the doll deftly out of the way of HELEN'S groping, and going on her knee she lets HELEN smell the cake. When HELEN grabs for it, ANNIE removes the cake and spells quickly into the reaching hand.]

Cake. From Washington up north, it's the best I can do.

[HELEN'S hand waits, baffled. ANNIE repeats it.]

C, a, k, e. Do what my fingers do, never mind what it means.

[She touches the cake briefly to HELEN'S nose, pats her hand, presents her own hand. HELEN spells the letters rapidly back. ANNIE pats her hand enthusiastically, and gives her the cake; HELEN crams it into her mouth with both hands. ANNIE watches her, with humor.]

Get it down fast, maybe I'll steal that back too. Now.

[She takes the doll, touches it to HELEN'S nose, and spells again into her hand.]

D, o, l, l. Think it over.

[HELEN thinks it over, while ANNIE presents her own hand. Then HELEN spells three letters. ANNIE waits a second, then completes the word for HELEN in her palm.]

L.

[She hands over the doll, and HELEN gets a good grip on its leg.]

Imitate now, understand later. End of the first les—

[She never finishes, because HELEN swings the doll with a furious energy, it hits ANNIE squarely in the face, and she falls back

with a cry of pain, her knuckles up to her mouth. HELEN waits, tensed for further combat. When ANNIE lowers her knuckles she looks at blood on them; she works her lips, gets to her feet, finds the mirror, and bares her teeth at herself. Now she is furious herself.]

You little wretch, no one's taught you any manners? I'll—

[But rounding from the mirror she sees the door slam, HELEN and the doll are on the outside, and HELEN is turning the key in the lock. ANNIE darts over, to pull the knob; the door is locked fast. She yanks it again.]

Helen! Helen, let me out of—

[She bats her brow at the folly of speaking, but JAMES, now downstairs, hears her and turns to see HELEN with the key and doll groping her way down the steps; JAMES takes in the whole situation, makes a move to intercept HELEN, but then changes his mind, lets her pass, and amusedly follows her out onto the porch. Upstairs ANNIE meanwhile rattles the knob, kneels, peers through the keyhole, gets up. She goes to the window, looks down, frowns. JAMES from the yard sings gaily up to her:]

JAMES.

Buffalo girl, are you coming out tonight,
Coming out tonight,
Coming out—

[He drifts back into the house. ANNIE takes a handkerchief, nurses her mouth, stands in the middle of the room, staring at door and window in turn, and so catches sight of herself in the mirror, her cheek scratched, her hair disheveled, her handkerchief bloody, her face disgusted with herself. She addresses the mirror, with some irony.]

ANNIE. Don't worry. They'll find you, you're not lost. Only out of place.

[But she coughs, spits something into her palm, and stares at it, outraged.]

And toothless.

[She winces.]

Oo! It hurts.

[She pours some water into the basin, dips the handkerchief, and presses it to her mouth. Standing there, bent over the basin in pain—with the rest of the set dim and unreal, and the lights upon her taking on the subtle color of the past—she hears again, as do we, the faraway voices, and slowly she lifts her head to them; the boy's voice is the same, the others are cracked old crones in a nightmare, and perhaps we see their shadows.]

BOY'S VOICE. It hurts. Annie, it hurts.

FIRST CRONE'S VOICE. Keep that brat shut up, can't you, girlie, how's a body to get any sleep in this damn ward?

BOY'S VOICE. It hurts. It hurts.

SECOND CRONE'S VOICE. Shut up, you!

BOY'S VOICE. Annie, when are we goin' home? You promised!

ANNIE. Jimmie—

BOY'S VOICE. Forever and ever, you said forever—

[ANNIE drops the handkerchief, averts to the window, and is arrested there by the next cry.]

Annie? Annie, you there? Annie! It hurts!

THIRD CRONE'S VOICE. Grab him, he's fallin'!

BOY'S VOICE. Annie!

DOCTOR'S VOICE. [A pause, slowly] Little girl.

Little girl, I must tell you your brother will be going on a—

[But ANNIE claps her hands to her ears, to shut this out; there is instant silence.]

As the lights bring the other areas in again, JAMES goes to the steps to listen for any sound from upstairs. KELLER re-entering from left crosses toward the house; he passes HELEN on route to her retreat under the pump. KATE re-enters the rear door of the family room, with flowers for the table.]

KATE. Supper is ready, Jimmie, will you call your father?

JAMES. Certainly.

[But he calls up the stairs, for ANNIE'S benefit.]

Father! Supper!

KELLER. [At the door] No need to shout, I've been cooling my heels for an hour. Sit down.

JAMES. Certainly.

KELLER. Viney!

[VINEY backs in with a roast, while they get settled around the table.]

VINEY. Yes, Cap'n, right here.

KATE. Mildred went directly to sleep, Viney?

VINEY. Oh yes, that babe's a angel.

KATE. And Helen had a good supper?

VINEY. [Vaguely] I dunno, Miss Kate, somehow she didn't have much of a appetite tonight—

KATE. [A bit guilty] Oh. Dear.

KELLER. [Hastily] Well, now. Couldn't say the same for my part, I'm famished. Katie, your plate.

KATE. [Looking] But where is Miss Annie?

[A silence]

JAMES. [Pleasantly] In her room.

KELLER. In her room? Doesn't she know hot food must be eaten hot? Go bring her down at once, Jimmie.

JAMES. [Rises] Certainly. I'll get a ladder.

KELLER. [Stares] What?

JAMES. I'll need a ladder. Shouldn't take me long.

KATE. [Stares] What shouldn't take you—

KELLER. Jimmie, do as I say! Go upstairs at once and tell Miss Sullivan supper is getting cold—

JAMES. She's locked in her room.

KELLER. Locked in her—

KATE. What on earth are you—

JAMES. Helen locked her in and made off with the key.

KATE. [Rising] And you sit here and say nothing?

JAMES. Well, everyone's been telling me not to say anything.

[He goes serenely out and across the yard, whistling. KELLER thrusting up from his chair makes for the stairs.]

KATE. Viney, look out in back for Helen. See if she has that key.

VINEY. Yes, Miss Kate.

[VINEY goes out the rear door.]

KELLER. [Calling down] She's out by the pump!

[KATE goes out on the porch after HELEN, while KELLER knocks on ANNIE'S door, then rattles the knob, imperiously.]

Miss Sullivan! Are you in there?

ANNIE. Oh, I'm in here, all right.

KELLER. Is there no key on your side?

ANNIE. [*With some asperity*] Well, if there was a key in here, I wouldn't be in here. Helen took it, the only thing on my side is me.

KELLER. Miss Sullivan, I—

[*He tries, but cannot hold it back.*]

Not in the house ten minutes, I don't see how you managed it!

[*He stomps downstairs again, while ANNIE mutters to herself.*]

ANNIE. And even I'm not on my side.

KELLER. [*Roaring*] Viney!

VINEY. [*Reappearing*] Yes, Cap'n?

KELLER. Put that meat back in the oven!

[*VINEY bears the roast off again, while KELLER strides out onto the porch. KATE is with HELEN at the pump, opening her hands.*]

KATE. She has no key.

KELLER. Nonsense, she must have the key. Have you searched in her pockets?

KATE. Yes. She doesn't have it.

KELLER. Katie, she must have the key.

KATE. Would you prefer to search her yourself, Captain?

KELLER. No, I would not prefer to search her! She almost took my kneecap off this evening, when I tried merely to—

[*JAMES reappears carrying a long ladder, with PERCY running after him to be in on things.*]

Take that ladder back!

JAMES. Certainly.

[*He turns around with it. MARTHA comes skipping around the upstage corner of the*

house to be in on things, accompanied by the setter BELLE.]

KATE. She could have hidden the key.

KELLER. Where?

KATE. Anywhere. Under a stone. In the flower beds. In the grass—

KELLER. Well, I can't plow up the entire grounds to find a missing key! Jimmie!

JAMES. Sir?

KELLER. Bring me a ladder!

JAMES. Certainly.

[*VINEY comes around the downstage side of the house to be in on things; she has MILDRED over her shoulder, bleating. KELLER places the ladder against ANNIE's window and mounts. ANNIE meanwhile is running about making herself presentable, washing the blood off her mouth, straightening her clothes, tidying her hair. Another Negro servant enters to gaze in wonder, increasing the gathering ring of spectators.*]

KATE. [*Sharply*] What is Mildred doing up?

VINEY. Cap'n woke her, ma'am, all that hollerin'.

KELLER. Miss Sullivan!

[*ANNIE comes to the window, with as much air of gracious normality as she can manage; KELLER is at the window.*]

ANNIE. [*Brightly*] Yes, Captain Keller?

KELLER. Come out!

ANNIE. I don't see how I can. There isn't room.

KELLER. I intend to carry you. Climb onto my shoulder and hold tight.

ANNIE. Oh, no. It's—very chivalrous of you, but I'd really prefer to—

KELLER. Miss Sullivan, follow instructions! I will not have you also tumbling out of our windows.

[ANNIE obeys, with some misgivings.]

I hope this is not a sample of what we may expect from you. In the way of simplifying the work of looking after Helen.

ANNIE. Captain Keller, I'm perfectly able to go down a ladder under my own—

KELLER. I doubt it, Miss Sullivan. Simply hold onto my neck.

[He begins down with her, while the spectators stand in a wide and somewhat awe-stricken circle, watching. KELLER half-misses a rung, and ANNIE grabs at his whiskers.]

My neck, Miss Sullivan!

ANNIE. I'm sorry to inconvenience you this way—

KELLER. No inconvenience, other than having that door taken down and the lock replaced, if we fail to find that key.

ANNIE. Oh, I'll look everywhere for it.

KELLER. Thank you. Do not look in any rooms that can be locked. There.

[He stands her on the ground. JAMES applauds.]

ANNIE. Thank you very much.

[She smooths her skirt, looking as composed and ladylike as possible. KELLER stares around at the spectators.]

KELLER. Go, go, back to your work. What are you looking at here? There's nothing here to look at.

[They break up, move off.]

Now would it be possible for us to have supper, like other people?

[He marches into the house.]

KATE. Viney, serve supper. I'll put Mildred to sleep.

[They all go in. JAMES is the last to leave, murmuring to ANNIE with a gesture.]

JAMES. Might as well leave the l, a, d, d, e, r, hm?

[ANNIE ignores him, looking at HELEN; JAMES goes in too. Imperceptibly the lights commence to narrow down. ANNIE and HELEN are now alone in the yard, HELEN seated at the pump, where she has been oblivious to it all, a battered little savage, playing with the doll in a picture of innocent contentment. ANNIE comes near, leans against the house, and taking off her smoked glasses, studies her, not without awe. Presently HELEN rises, gropes around to see if anyone is present; ANNIE evades her hand, and when HELEN is satisfied she is alone, the key suddenly protrudes out of her mouth. She takes it in her fingers, stands thinking, gropes to the pump, lifts a loose board, drops the key into the well, and hugs herself gleefully. ANNIE stares. But after a moment she shakes her head to herself, she cannot keep the smile from her lips.]

ANNIE. You devil.

[Her tone is one of great respect, humor, and acceptance of challenge.]

You think I'm so easily gotten rid of? You have a thing or two to learn, first. I have nothing else to do.

[She goes up the steps to the porch, but turns for a final word, almost of warning.]

And nowhere to go.

[And presently she moves into the house to the others, as the lights dim down and out, except for the small circle upon HELEN solitary at the pump, which ends the act.]