

The Miracle Worker

ACT ONE

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.