

(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?

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, blank area of towel, and it troubles her. Her hand searches for features, and taps questioningly for eyes, but no one notices. 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.)