

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.)*