

A Wayne Scott • *LifeHouse* Production



Helen Keller

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

(In Order of Appearance)

Viney	A Servant
Rose	A Servant
Kate Keller	Helen's Mother
Aunt Ev Keller	Capt. Keller's Older Sister
Miss Susan Bourne	Teacher at the Perkins School for the Blind
Annie Sullivan	Helen's Teacher
Miss Mary C. Moore	Teacher at the Perkins School for the Blind
Michael Anagnos	Director of Perkins School for the Blind
Helen Keller	A seven-year-old deaf-blind girl
Captain Arthur Keller	Helen's Father
Frank Keller	Captain Keller's Older Brother
Grandma Adams	Kate's Mother
Fred Adams	Kate Keller's Brother
Beth	
Jackie	Neighbor Children
Jill	
Becky	

“HELEN KELLER”

By George Christison/Debra Brooks/Wayne R. Scott

SYNOPSIS OF SONGS

ACT I

Overture

1. “What Will Become of Her?”.....Kate Keller
2. “Trapped in Dark Silence”.....Capt. Keller
3. “Defective and Degenerate”.....Grandma Adams and Fred
4. “Can I Really Do This?”.....Annie Sullivan
5. “A Special Place for Helen”.....Aunt Ev Keller
6. “Obedience and Love”.....Annie Sullivan
“Can I Really Do This?” (Reprise).....Annie Sullivan

ACT II

Entr’acte

- “Reflection” (“Trapped” Reprise).....Capt. Keller
7. “What Is This?”.....Annie Sullivan & Children
“Obedience and Love” (Reprise).....Annie Sullivan
8. “The Sway of the Trees”.....Annie Sullivan
“I Can Really Do It” (Reprise).....Annie & Kate
“There is a Special Path” (“Special Place” Reprise).....Annie
- Finale: “What Will Become of Her?” (Reprise).....Cast Ensemble
“Obedience and Love” (Reprise).....Cast Ensemble

"Helen Keller"

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ACT I

Overture

SCENE 1: THE KELLER DINING ROOM, TUSCUMBIA, ALAMABAMA 1882

(The dining room is actually more of a common room with a table with two chairs, a sofa, and, in this scene, a crib. A servant, Rose, is sitting by the crib when a second servant, Viney, comes in)

Viney Is baby Helen asleep?
Rose Just did fall asleep. She woke up kinda fussy this mornin' so I brought her downstairs. Mrs. Keller, Miss Eveline and baby Helen got home from their trip late last night, and the missus' is sleepin' in today.
Viney Is the baby any different?
Rose Seems the same to me. Though you'd figger she must be somewhat better after bathin' for six weeks in the curin' waters of Eureka Springs.
Viney You'd figger. Maybe we'll see it more when she is fully awake. Come on over here and help me, child. *(Viney is doing some domestic chore at the table. Rose joins her at the table)*
Rose Didja notice – the whole time they were gone Captain Keller didn't seem to miss 'em much.
Viney Oh, he missed 'em in his own way. Captain Keller's a good man – but it's hard between him and the missus. There's a lesson there for a young girl like you – marry a man closer to your own age. There's nearly twenty years between them, and that puts them at different places in life. It's hard for them to see things the same way.
Rose It wasn't so bad between 'em before the baby got sick.
(Kate appears at the top of the stairs and begins to come down. She looks weary)
Viney *(To Rose)* Hush, child. *(To Mrs. Keller)* It's good to have you back, Mrs. Keller. We sure did miss you and little baby Helen.
Rose Baby Helen woke up kinda fussy, but I got her calmed down and she's asleep now.
Kate *(Weary but polite)* Thank you. Where's Captain Keller today?
Viney Out hunting with his friends.
Kate *(Looking away, with sad bitterness)* Where else would my husband be?
Viney Um.. Yes, ma'am – well, it was sure nice of his sister, Miss Eveline, to go with you to them special springs.
Kate Yes, I appreciated her presence greatly. *(Kate takes a seat near the crib)* She'll be coming over today and staying for dinner. I expect her shortly.
Viney It was curin' waters you took baby Helen to – weren't it?
Kate *(Looking at her baby)* Supposedly.
Rose Um... Well – did it work? I mean – can she see again – and hear again?
Kate *(Quietly)* No, Rose, I'm afraid she cannot.
Rose Oh. And I been prayin' so much for her too.
Kate *(Pained, straining to remain polite)* Thank you. I – uh – perhaps if you two could tend to the laundry –
Viney Oh – Yes, ma'am. *(Motions to Rose, who is a little slower to take the hint)* We'll get right to it. *(They exit together)*

(Kate's hand drifts from the crib to her face and she begins to quietly sob. Aunt Ev, a warm woman in her mid-forties, comes to the door and quietly lets herself in and pulls up a chair near Kate and touches her arm. Kate looks up)
(There's a quiet pause as both women look into the crib)

Ev You'd hoped for a miracle, didn't you Kate?
 Kate I was hoping for a cure. It seems so foolish now.
 Ev Foolish? No. Desperate, maybe. You'd already taken her to nearly every doctor in Alabama – why not try Eureka Springs?
 Kate Thank you for coming with me. Perhaps desperate is the right word. I have so desperately wanted to make it as if her illness had never happened. Her first nineteen months were the happiest I have ever known. She was so full of life and curiosity –
 Ev Getting into everything –
 Kate Already saying a few words – so bright...so... *(Her voice trails off)* I miss that child, Ev. I know this sounds awful to say, Ev, but that was the child I wanted, not...not...
 Ev This one. Deaf and blind.
 Kate And who knows what else? The doctors say the illness likely left her mentally defective as well. She has already lost almost all the words she used to say...she cries all the time...I am not even sure if she can tell who I am any more.
 Ev That's in God's hands, Kate – we'll just have to wait and see. To my eye, however, there is still a very bright child in there – I'm amazed at how she runs her hands and fingers so eagerly over everything – as if she is trying to get as much information as she can. And you've seen how she can sense the tiniest footstep or vibration.
 Kate I honestly don't know what would be worse for her – to be mentally defective, or to be very bright but trapped in a body that cannot see, cannot hear, cannot talk with those around her. Barely an hour goes by that I do not worry about what type of future my dear Helen will have to face.

SONG: "WHAT WILL BECOME OF HER?"

Kate What will become of her?
 I dread where her road goes;
 Each day my burden grows and grows...

She once was full of sparkle,
 Eyes dancing with delight,
 Each day brought new marvels,
 Her world was full and bright.
 But now she knows just darkness
 And silence we can't break.
 Oh how I fear
 The path that she must take.

Why? – do such things happen?
 Why? – this is wrong –
 Why? – are babies broken?
 Why? – is God gone?

Why did He stand aside?
 Where is His loving hand?
 I pray no longer;
 I just cry.

The world will not accept her;
 She'll need help every day;
 Who will stand beside her
 When we have passed away?
 Who will show compassion
 And sacrifices make?
 Oh how I fear
 The path that she must take.

What will become of her?
 I dread where her road goes;

Each day my burden grows and grows.

Ev *(Very gently)* Kate, God doesn't seem to answer many questions that start with "why", but He answers almost all that start with "how" – He will show us how to keep going, how to help Helen.
Kate I'm sorry, Ev. I'm so tired. All my faith is dried up.
Ev Then let my prayers count for both of us.
(Aunt Ev puts her arm around Kate and they bow their heads)

SCENE 2: PERKINS SCHOOL FOR THE BLIND, BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS, 1882

(Sixteen year old Annie Sullivan is seated at the classroom with her math teacher, Miss Bourn. Annie has had poor eyesight and clouded vision but is not fully blind. Miss B has just excused all of the children except Annie. Annie is clearly angry about having to remain behind)

Bourn *(Calling out to children who are off-stage)* Children, this will be a twenty minute recess. Please be sure to return promptly. *(Turning to Annie)* Annie, I asked you to stay in here every recess because it is clear that some of these concepts are difficult for you.

Annie What do you intend to do?

Bourn I simply wish to explain things more thoroughly and give you a chance to ask questions.

Annie What needs to be explained?

Bourn Well, the classification of triangles. Your answers in class indicate that this is still difficult for you. Here – *(Handing each to her one at a time, guiding Annie's hands to feel the pertinent characteristics of each, while Annie grows increasingly irritated with the lesson)* This is an equilateral triangle, which, as its name implies – "equi – ", same, "lateral –" – side, has three sides that are all the same length. And this is a right triangle, meaning that –

Annie *(Fed up)* Oh, please! What is the use of any of this?

Bourn As I have tried to make clear many times, Annie – the discipline of mathematics trains the mind and teaches self control – a virtue you would do well to cultivate.

Annie So how long have you been teaching it?

Bourn Several years; why do you ask?

Annie Because it does not appear to have trained your mind.

Bourn Now, see here, Annie Sullivan – your attitude is one that we do not tolerate here at Perkins School for the Blind! Not only are you rude, but you rarely show any interest in learning. I frankly wonder if there is any time that your brain is actually awake.

Annie Oh, there is a time – when I finally get to leave this class!

Bourn Well! - Then that is exactly what you will do – leave! – go sit on the steps outside and remain there while I report your impertinence to Mr. Anagnos! Really! This is intolerable!

Annie Intolerable – yes! That is exactly what this class is. You finally got something right!
(She exits before the furious Miss B has a chance to reply and sits on steps in a garden area outside the classroom. Miss Moore comes up to her)

Moore Sent to the steps again? You are here so often that some teachers are calling this "Annie's Steps."

Annie Is that you, Miss Moore? Tell them I don't care what they think about how many times I get told to leave class.

Moore *(Sitting near Annie)* Don't you? You should.

Annie Why?

Moore Because a few of us see your talent Annie, and we are fighting an uphill battle to keep you from being expelled from this school.

Annie The only talent I have is for getting into trouble.

Moore Well, your talent for that is rather remarkable, I must admit. But look how far you've come. Don't throw this all away. Just two years ago you came to us with bad eyes, dirty clothes, and no schooling whatsoever, and look at you now – you are nearly at grade level in most subjects and you are out-doing your peers in writing – except, of course, for your spelling.

Annie *(Softening)* I'm working on my spelling.

Moore I can tell.

Annie Oh, Miss Moore, I do appreciate your encouragement, but you know that no matter how well I do here, I am never going to fit in. All the rest of these children have families – and families with money. They all look down at me – I am just the poor orphan Irish girl. They despise me because of where I am from.

Moore I thought they did not know where you were before you came here.

Annie Well, they didn't exactly. Only Mr. Anagnos and a few of you teachers know I came from...from Tewksbury. I couldn't tell the others that. It is bad enough that they know I am very poor. If they also knew I had to live in the insane asylum –

Moore Tewksbury is not just for the insane. It is also for the crippled, the destitute, the orphaned –

Annie Or, like me, all three.

Moore Yes, but look at how fortunate you were to be in Boston, a city which acts on compassion and builds institutions like Tewksbury.

Annie Tewksbury is a Hell hole.

Moore I am sure that it has its share of problems – all such institutions do, Annie, but gratitude is still the most appropriate response to charity.

Annie Have you ever been there?

Moore Well, I – I have been by it. It is a fine looking place –

Annie Have you ever been on the inside?

Moore Well, no –

Annie Have you ever spent even one night in Tewksbury?

Moore Annie –

Annie One night with rats crawling under your cot, one night with the stench of the corpses in the Dead Room next door, one night holding your baby brother just before consumption takes him to be among corpses, one night being fed rancid food with maggots, one night where crazy, dirty men try to grab and hold you – one night – no, you've not even stepped inside! Well, I spent six years of nights there – and I say that it is a Hell Hole! And never, never, never, come to me and use the words "gratitude" and "charity" in the same breath as the word Tewksbury again!

(She storms out in anger, brushing past Mr. Anagnos on her way out. He comes up to Miss Moore)

Moore Oh, my. I'm afraid that didn't go very well.

Anagnos Expelled from class again. That makes three times this week. I don't know how much longer...

Moore Please be patient with her, Mr. Anagnos. I realize that she is very impertinent and full of temper, but look how far she has come in just two years.

Anagnos I understand that, but, as the director of this institution, I have to ensure we maintain order and decorum. We have become the premier school for the blind in Massachusetts – a model for the entire nation. Now what if that outburst had occurred when I was bringing the Governor on a tour?

Moore Are you thinking of forcing Annie to leave Perkins? Where would she go? Back to Tewksbury –

Anagnos I do not want Annie to leave. She has more spark and wit and intelligence than all of the other students combined. But it will be four more years before she has met our graduation requirements. Miss Moore, I simply cannot have four years of screaming outbursts in the courtyard and three classroom expulsions a week.

Moore It will get better.

Anagnos It has to. Keep working with her, will you? She listens to you and respects what you have to say. *(Looking in the direction Annie had exited)* Well, most of the time, that is. *(They exit)*

SCENE 3: KELLER HOUSE, 1886

(The lights come up on the full house, including the upstairs bedroom. Birthday decorations "Happy birthday Helen and Grandma Adams" decorate the dining room)

(Kate and Helen enter from the garden. Helen is now nearly seven years old and is dressed in a frilly party dress with hair ribbons)

(Throughout this whole scene Helen is a bundle of pent up frustration, irritation and angry energy)

(Kate picks up two rag dolls and hands them to Helen and pushes lightly on her shoulder, indicating to sit and play with the dolls. Helen sits but continues to hold Kate's skirts)

Kate Come in here and play with your dolls. I have to go upstairs for a bit. How do I get you to understand?

(Kate takes one of Helen's hands and places it on her own (Kate's) chest and then on the railing of the stairs, indicating that she is going upstairs. Helen touches her cheek and then points upstairs)

Kate Mother – go upstairs. Play with your dolls. Try not to make too much of a mess today. *(She then directs Helen's hands back to the dolls and pushes on her shoulder. Helen understands and reluctantly sits and begins playing with her dolls. Kate then goes upstairs and sits on the bed briefly)*

Kate At last! A few moments of peace! Lord – *(This is said more like talking out loud than like real praying)* - please – help me get through this birthday party today. No – please help my Helen to get through it without any outbursts! - And please, please keep my mother from making any of her nasty scenes. *(Pauses, then softer; more solemn)* Do you hear any of this, Lord? *(Kate sighs and begins to make the bed. While she has been upstairs, Helen played with her dolls only very briefly and then got up and began bouncing around the room, feeling everything, exploring with her hands knocking things over). Her hands come upon the stairway railing and she follows it upstairs and, feeling along the top of a table at the top of the stairs, she finds a key and smiles. She feels along the bedroom door until she finds the deadbolt keyhole and fits the key into it. She then quickly closes the door and turns the deadbolt, locking Kate inside. Helen then puts her back against the door and waits. Kate notices the door has closed)*

Kate What? Did Helen do that?
(Kate tries to open the door and finds it locked.) It's locked! *(She feels in her pockets)* Ah! I left the key on the hallway table! *(She begins pounding on the door. Helen, on the other side, is laughing and obviously enjoying the feel of the vibrations)*

Kate *(Shouting, furious)* Helen! Open this door! Open it at once! I know you can feel this *(Pounds all the harder)* Ahh!! *(Goes to bedroom window and shouts out into the yard)* Arthur! Arthur! Come here! Helen has locked me in this room!
(Captain K enters into the garden and runs into the house. He finds Helen grinning at the top of the stairs)

Kate Helen! Open this door! Arthur, hurry up!

Capt K Why you little devil! You locked your mother in, didn't you? *(Playfully)* And look at you all dressed up in your pretty party dress. Here, give me that key. *(He gently wrestles it from her hands and unlocks the door. Kate storms out)*
(Helen goes back downstairs and resumes her roaming about feeling and playing with things. She finds the box containing her doll clothes and begins to dress and undress her dolls by feel)

Kate Did you hear her? She was laughing! – She did that on purpose, Arthur!

Capt K She just likes the vibrations, Kate. She can't hear you screaming, she can't see the anger on your face – she has no idea that what she did was upsetting to you.

Kate That's not true. I saw it on her face. This time she should be punished, Arthur.

Capt K For what? In her mind she was simply creating a pleasant sensation for herself.

Kate She knowingly and willfully locked me in the room! She knows that she would not like to be locked into a room. She can be made to understand that it upset me – that it is wrong.

Capt K You do not know that with any certainty. You are letting your temper overrule your reason, Kate. Even Yankees will not punish a man for a crime he cannot understand.

Kate *(Furious)* You will not even let me try to get her to understand, will you?

Capt K No, Kate. I won't. It will only create confusion. Helen's world is painful and confused enough without us adding to it with misguided attempts at punishment.

Kate Misguided! Listen to what you are saying – you are saying that she has no hope – no hope for the future – no hope for even being civilized! As for me, I still hope she can be helped to become better than this!

Capt K Nonsense! Of course I have hopes for her. All I am saying, Kate, is that the road to the achieving of those hopes must not include unnecessary pain and confusion for her. I believe anyone could see the reasonableness of that.

Kate *(Speaks with steely, tautly controlled rage)* What I can see is that my words are given no weight in your decision making. Therefore I will cease to waste them upon you. *(She picks a book up off the hallway table and storms down the stairs, exiting into the garden, which is still blacked out. She sits on the bench, opens the books and "freezes" in a reading pose)*

(Capt Keller goes downstairs. Helen, sensing something, places both palms on the floor and "listens" as he comes down the stairs. She then goes over and feels him to see who it is)

Capt K Oh Kate, there is no sneaking up on you, is there? *(Helen moves on to other things in the room. Capt K picks up newspaper pages that had been scattered about by Helen in her earlier explorations. He sits with a sigh in his armchair and speaks as if to Helen)* Well, I believe I won't be speaking with your mother for a while. Last time it was nearly a week before she resumed speaking to me. Well, let's see what my competitors are printing in their papers.

(He sits and begins reading. She returns to him and burrows through the newspapers and sits on his lap, trying to figure out what he is doing as she sits between him and the newspaper he is holding up)

Capt K

What are you doing, sweetie?

(She then feels the paper and feels him and his face. She removes his glasses and puts them on herself and holds the newspaper the way he was holding it) Why, you're trying to do what I'm doing. You're trying to read the newspaper. Oh, Helen –

(She becomes increasingly frustrated as she can make no sense of these actions. She becomes angry and climbs out of his lap and sits on the floor crumpling the newspaper. He rescues his glasses from her face and regards her sadly)

Capt K

No glasses in the world can make a newspaper understandable to you. You are cut off from so much.

SONG: "TRAPPED IN DARK SILENCE"

Capt K

Trapped in dark silence,
There behind
The wall that is keeping you
From the sights and sounds
That all abound
But none can ever get through.
You reach out to me,
Eager fingers trying to hear and see,
But can you ever know
What is deep in my soul?
Little fingers – can you hear me?
Oh my girl,
Oh my sweet girl
How I wanted more for you.
My girl,
My poor girl
How I hate what you go through.

*(Helen reaches
up to him)*

(Talks to her fingers)

Wrapped in dark silence,
You know only what you can touch.
Oh, how I wish that I could break through
I would show you all that I love so much.
And my world
It could be your world,
We could walk through it this day!
I would show you
Clouds and sunsets,
And the crash of ocean spray!
Oh maybe,
Yes, just maybe,
Some new miracle will come,
So that my world
Can be your world
Lovely music,
And the rising sun!
(Brief interlude)
Who am I fooling?
We've done all we know how to do.
Is there nothing, nothing left to hope for
But to leave you
Trapped there behind your door?
But to leave you

Trapped there behind your door?

(As he finishes the song, Aunt Ev comes in, carrying some birthday presents)

Ev

May I come in?

Capt K

Oh Ev – of course. It is good to see you.

Ev

Thank you. I thought I'd come early and help with the preparations.

Kate

It's much appreciated.

Ev

You're certainly welcome.

(Helen, sensing her footsteps, feels for her, smells her dress and feels her face. Ev tries to hug Helen, but she squirms away and resumes crumpling and tearing the newspaper)

Ev

She's not in a very friendly mood, is she?

Capt K

Her usual these days, I'm afraid.

Ev

Has anyone else arrived?

Capt K

No, you are the first. Kate's brother Fred will be bringing their mother. She likes to come late so she can make an impressive entrance. I bet she's not pleased to be sharing her birthday celebration with someone else – especially Helen.

Ev

She's not very fond of Helen is she?

Capt K

She thinks Helen should be put away. I honestly think she believes Helen is some kind of beast. *(As they are speaking, Helen comes over to them. Ev and Capt K are standing, facing each other as they speak. Helen feels their faces and their lips as they talk, and frowns, trying to figure out what is going on. Aunt Ev and Capt K continue to talk while Helen's hands are in their faces)*

Ev

What is she doing?

Capt K

This started a few days ago. She realizes the moving lips must mean something, but she cannot figure out what. *(Helen, frowning, tries to imitate what they are doing by moving her own lips. She shakes her head and tries again, still feeling their lips, becoming increasingly upset and tearful)*

Capt K

(Pulling Helen's hand away and trying to hold it) It makes her very frustrated. *(Helen now "loses it", jerking her hand away from her father, crying, pounding first on him, then on the floor, and then she runs out into the garden)*

Ev

I'll say! *(Lights go down in the house as they exit)*

(Lights come up in the garden as Helen runs out into it, crying, angry, very upset. She does not see Kate sitting on the bench. With a musical underscore, Kate watches as her daughter buries her face in flowers and leaves in the garden, soothing herself, slowly becoming more calm. She comes last to the water pump where she pumps some water onto her hand and splashes her face and hair, enjoying the cool water as it runs down her face and dress. She finally sits near the pump and leans against it, pulling some flowers that were growing near it and caressing their petals. Kate had clear found something very interesting in the book she was reading. A few times while watching Helen's movements, Kate looks down into the book and looks back at Helen, pondering. Finally she pulls a ribbon out of her hair or off her dress and marks her place in the book. After Helen has become seated, the music finishes and Kate exits)

Lights go down in the garden and come back up in the Keller home where Ev and Viney are setting down a large cake onto the dining table. Kate enters carrying the book)

Kate

Ev – When did you get here!

Ev

Just a little bit ago.

Kate

You must see this. I've just been reading the most amazing account – *American Notes* by Charles Dickens.

(Capt K and his brother Frank (wearing a confederate army coat) enter)

Capt K

My what a wonderful cake! You have outdone yourself, Viney!

Viney

Why thank you, sir

Capt K

(To Frank) Even Kate's mother should like this!

Frank

Them Memphis folk are impossible to please. Always lookin' down on us here in Alabama. But you didn't see 'em complaining when it was the blood of Alabama's sons bein' spilt in the war. No sir! No state fought as hard or gave as much as we did – somehow they seem to forget that, don't they, sis?

Ev *(Taking Frank's coat, speaking gently)* And few in Alabama sacrificed as much as you did Frank. We all know that. But please, can we put the war aside long enough to give a seven year old girl and her grandmother an enjoyable birthday – please?

Frank I reckon. *(Grandma Adams and Fred Adams enter)* Speakin' of –

Kate Mother! How are you? How was the trip down?

G-ma Bumpy, hard, long – same as always. At least I had Fred to keep me company. He's the only one in the family who ended up with any common sense.

Kate Please, sit down. Let me take your things. Viney – go out in the garden and fetch Helen, please.

Rose *(To another servant)* Rose – please get drinks for our guests.
Yes, ma'am.
(Rose begins to hand out drinks to be used for the birthday toast. Lights go up on the garden. Viney goes out to Helen, who is still sitting by the pump)

G-ma *(Muttering to Fred)* Just because she and I share the same birthday month, I don't see why I should have to share my birthday celebration with a defective half-wit.

Fred Bear up, Mother. How bad can it be? We'll just toast your health, have some cake, and then I'll take you over to a nice hotel in Sheffield where you can have some peace.

G-ma Bless you. I declare, you are the only one I can count on.

Viney *(Coming in from the garden, speaking to Kate)* She refuses to come in, ma'am.

Kate Please, try harder, Viney.

Viney But ma'am –

Kate Please, Viney – just – get her in here!

Viney Yes, ma'am! *(Viney exits back into the garden. She is joined by children who are carrying gifts, arriving for the party)* Oh good. Maybe you neighbor chillun can help me.

Jill Why is Helen outside?

Becky Look at her nice dress!

Beth Nice? She's gotten it all wet.

Viney Everyone's waitin' on her in the house and she's refusin' to come. *(She grabs Helen's arm and begins to tug on a stubbornly resisting Helen)* Never have I seen such a stubborn child – *(The children stand back, unsure of what to do)*

Capt K Where's Helen, Kate?

Ev She's in the garden. Viney is working on getting her to come in.

G-ma You mean I came all the way down here to share my birthday with her and she won't even come in the house?

Frank *(To Ev)* Can't say as I blame her.

Ev Shh!

Fred She's a half-wit, mother. She probably doesn't know what a birthday is.
(In the garden, Viney is tugging on one of Helen's arms as Helen is now face down, kicking and trying to grab things with her other arm)

Jackie Careful – you might hurt her.

Viney *(Fully exasperated)* Hurt her? It's my back that's getting hurt! And unless one or t'other of you help me, none of you will have much of a birthday party to come to today.
(Helen suddenly spins out of her grasp and runs off stage with the others in hot pursuit, presents flying everywhere)

Fred I say if she wants to stay in the garden, we should just start without her.

G-ma I would hope so. Kate – I am weary from my journey. Please begin.

Kate *(Harried, glancing out into the garden)* Yes, mother. Very well. Arthur, would you please do the toasts?

Capt K Well, I suppose. We should wait for Helen – but she can't hear anyway – *(He sighs and raises his glass)* We gather here today to toast the health and the happiness of two of our favorite ladies! First, to Mrs. Adams – may – uh – the coming year bring into your life as many joys and delights as you bring into ours!

All Hear, hear! *(They drink)*

Frank *(To Ev, with a sly grin)* I can drink to that! *(She steps on his foot)*

Capt K *(Raising his glass again)* And now, to little Helen, who – uh – will be here soon – to Helen, God's – special gift to us and our family – may...may – *(The room grows quiet, as it is clear he is becoming emotional, searching for words. Kate goes up and touches his arm in support)* ...may

this year bring you unexpected joys and...and new ways to touch and feel all of God's wonderful world around you.

(Just as the toast is finishing, Viney, Helen and the children re-enter the garden. Viney has Helen's downstage arm, Beth her upstage one. Helen's feet are dragging behind her. The other three children trail closely after, gathering up the presents. Helen's party dress, already wet, is now thoroughly soiled and disheveled and she is madder than a dozen hornets)

Beth
Viney
Becky

Are you sure we should be doin' this?

(Grimly) They want Helen in that party, so they're gonna get Helen in that party!

(To Jill) This'll be good!

(Helen and Viney burst in, followed by the children. Helen is bewildered by the smells and vibrations indicating many people in the room. With frenetic energy she begins exploring the room with her hands. She first finds the cake, which she samples as her hands destroy it. Now with frosting-encrusted face and fingers, she begins exploring the people in the room, finally finding Uncle Fred and smearing his face as she feels it, then bounding from him to Grandma Adams. Throughout this, some are shouting commands to her while others are reminding them that she cannot hear. She barrels into Grandma Adams who grabs her and shakes her)

G-ma

Kate! Look at this filthy, naughty beast of a girl! I am ashamed to have her in my family!

(Helen, squirming to get out of Grandma Adams grasp, finally reaches out and pinches her quite hard) Ow!! You little monster! *(Pushes her down and then rises)* *(To Viney)* Take that child out of this room this instant! And all the rest of these children! I've had enough! *(Viney rushes over and drags Helen out through the garden and they exit off stage with the other children following)*

Fred

Kate, I have never been so humiliated in my entire life! As far as I am concerned, that is no granddaughter of mine! That – *(Pointing in the direction Helen exited)* – that is just a...a – *(Also rising)* A savage! Or worse! That child needs to be committed and put away before she causes greater damage!

SONG: "DEFECTIVE AND DEGENERATE"

G-ma

His words are true, our visit's through –
My party is a mess!
But even worse – your beastly Helen's cursed –
She's got the best of you;
She's deaf and blind,
She's unrefined,

Fred
G-ma
Both

And we conclude she's without a mind;
Your plight is sad, but she is mad,
Defective and degenerate!

G-ma

Take our advice or pay the price
Of Helen's savage ways;
There must be someplace special where
This beast can spend her days;

Fred
Both

Mark my words, I declare,
Helen's more than a home can bear;
She's a case beyond compare:
Defective and degenerate!
Oh dear, we have a fear
We're falling on deaf ears;
We care enough to say, "beware!"
She cannot stay here!

Fred
G-ma
Fred
G-ma
Fred
G-ma
Fred
G-ma
Both

How can you be as blind as she?
You cannot tame this child
She's ruthless, violent as can be
She's wretched, wicked, wild!
You must face facts
There is no hope,
No magic cure
No way to cope
It's plain to see she will always be

Defective and degenerate
Defective and – – – degenerate!

Fred Mark my words! One day you will seriously regret not committing her to an institution where people like her belong!

Ev I have bit my tongue and tried to be civil, but can no longer contain myself! You roll in from Tennessee and watch this girl for five minutes and suddenly you know exactly what should be done with her! Well let me tell you, Fred Adams, that I have spent hours with this child and I know for a fact that she has far more sense and intelligence in her than you ever will have! (*Turns to the others in the room*) If only we can find a way to reach her mind.

G-ma The only mind she has is that of a beast. You may keep her in your house, if you like, Kate, but that – “child” – is never to be brought to my home in Memphis. Is that quite clear?

Kate Yes, mother.

G-ma Good. Fred, it is time for us to leave. Good-bye.

Fred (*Gathering her things*) Yes, mother. (*To rest*) Goodbye! (*They exit*)

Frank Good riddance! (*All slump to their seats. Kate begins to quietly sob*) There now, woman! What are you cryin’ fer? That was the finest entertainment I’ve had in years! What your darlin’ Helen did to them pompous Memphis folk is what everybody else in the room wanted to do, but didn’t have the courage – including me! (*Begins to laugh*) I am forever in her debt! I shall cherish to my grave the sight of prissy Fred Adams with frosting up his nose!

Kate (*Looking up, allowing herself a small smile*) That was a special moment, wasn’t it? (*Sighs*) I was just hoping Mother might see some of the spark that we see in Helen.

Capt K Oh, she saw plenty of spark, all right.

Ev (*Earnestly, gently*) Kate, forgive my plainness of speech, but the opinions of your mother are worse than worthless – they are poisonous sources of grief, and the more you dwell on them, the more they will sicken your very soul.

Frank (*Too loudly*) Amen!

Ev (*To Frank*) Shh!

Kate I appreciate your words – even yours, Frank. But my mother and brother did touch on one truth – unless we get more help for Helen she is going to stay wild. What if she is like this when she is in her teens?

Capt K Where do you propose we find more help? We have already been to every eye and ear doctor in Alabama; no school will take such a child –

Kate One might.

Aunt Ev What do you mean?

Kate (*Picks up her book*) I started to tell you, Ev, before the party – I was reading this book today – American Notes, by Charles Dickens – and I came across this account of a girl named Laura Bridgman he met during a visit to a special school in Boston. She had been deprived of sight, hearing and smell – but they had found a way to teach and help her. Listen to this description of her: (*Opens the book to the page she had placed a ribbon and begins to read*) “Her face was radiant with intelligence and pleasure. Her hair was braided by her own hands...Her dress, arranged by herself, was a pattern of neatness and simplicity; the work she had knitted lay beside her, her writing book was on the desk she leaned upon.”

(*Looks up to emphasize the point*) Her writing book! (*Continues to read*) “From this mournful ruin of such bereavement there had slowly rise up this gentle, tender, guileless, grateful-hearted being.” Can you imagine if we could one day say that about Helen?

Aunt Ev How did they do it?

Kate It doesn’t say how. It just says that the director of the school, a Dr. Samuel Gridley Howe, developed a method to teach her. Maybe he could help Helen.

Frank We don’t need no Yankee doctor comin’ and tellin’ us what to do.

Aunt Ev We do if that Yankee doctor knows something that will help Helen! What was the name of this school?

Kate (*Flips some pages*) The Perkins School for the Blind.

Capt K If that is the book I am thinking of – (*Gently*) Kate, may I see the book? (*She hands it to him and he looks up the publication date*) Kate, dear, this was published in 1842, 44 years ago. I remember this Dr. Howe – he was quite famous in his time. Honey, I also remember reading his obituary – he has been dead for at least ten years.

Kate Perhaps he taught someone else his methods before he died.

Capt K Blind-deaf children are so exceedingly rare – I doubt he would train teachers for children they would most likely never meet.

Kate He must have written his methods down. Maybe someone else could learn them from this writings and come down and help Helen.

Capt K Come from Boston to Tuscumbia Alabama? It seems like such a slim hope –

Ev We must still grasp it if we can.

Kate Arthur, if you do not write a letter to that school, I will. But I do believe it will be better received coming from you.

Capt K I will write it, Kate. There is really no harm in trying.

Frank I still hate the idea of askin’ a Yankee for anything.

Aunt Ev And you have a better idea?

Frank Well, no. *(He rises, stretches and grins)* I’ll tell you one thing, if Helen ever does learn to talk, I gotta be sure to tell her she made this one of the best birthday parties I’ve ever been to! I best be leaving before it gets too dark. Good night all!

Capt K *(Also rising)* I’ll help get your horse, Frank. *(They both exit)*

Kate What do you think of all this?

Ev I think you finding that book was no accident.

Kate What do you mean?

Ev God has a special purpose in this world for every child – even those with defects. I truly believe He wants more for Helen than what she has now. We must keep praying every day and pursuing every lead He places before us.

Kate All I know is that I want no “if only’s.”

Ev If only’s?

Kate When Helen is grown, I do not want to have to look at her and say, “if only.” “If only we had tried...” whatever. I will pursue any lead – whether God puts it in front of me or I stumble on it myself – I don’t care if the lead is forty-four years old and fifteen-hundred miles away – if it might help Helen, I will do it.

Ev I know you will.

Kate I’m glad you live so close by. I need someone to help me keep believing.

Ev We all do. *(Lights go down in the Keller home and come up in Perkins school)*

SCENE 4: PERKINS SCHOOL FOR THE BLIND

(Anagnos is seated at a desk. Miss Moore and Miss Bourn comes in holding a letter)

Anagnos Any luck?

Bourn None. We asked every one of our teachers. No one was interested. First of all, none of us here have ever worked with a deaf-blind child –

Anagnos But that shouldn’t hold anyone back – once a teacher has gone through Dr. Howe’s notebooks, she would know more than anyone on the planet about how to teach such a child.

Bourn I know, sir. The real problem is, quite simply, no one wants to leave everything they have here in Boston to spend – who knows? – perhaps years – in – where was it? *(Looks at letter again)* – Tuscumbia, Alabama.

Anagnos But we must send someone. This is too great of an opportunity to let pass by.

Moore Opportunity?

Anagnos Special cases like this create intense public interest – and that increases donations. The work that Dr. Howe did fifty years ago with Laura Bridgeman helped raise the funds that established this as a premier school.

Moore And I thought he was just trying to help a deaf-blind girl.

Anagnos Miss Moore – there is nothing wrong with both doing a good work and letting others know about it – so that they can help fund your efforts to do more good works.

Moore I see.

Anagnos *(Begins to pace)* We need someone who has few ties to Boston, an adventuresome spirit, who understands working with blind children –

Bourn Perhaps one of the other schools – in Pennsylvania or New York –

Anagnos No, no, she must be affiliated with us – Perkins teacher *(Snaps his fingers)* – Annie!

Moore Annie? Anne Sullivan?

Anagnos Yes, yes! Don't you see? Why, she'd be perfect! She has no family, she just graduated, she has no job, and her recent eye surgeries have nearly corrected her vision problems.

Bourn But not her emotional ones.

Anagnos You yourself have commented more than once on how much she has matured in the past four years.

Bourn Oh, I know – she has made tremendous improvement –

Anagnos And she graduated first in her class!

Bourn In a class of eight students.

Anagnos But recall the maturity and poise she showed in her valedictory address. The governor himself was in the audience and was quite impressed.

Bourn There is a huge difference between making a nice speech and successfully teaching a severely handicapped child. I have a class starting in a few minutes, so let me say this as plainly as I can: This is not the right job for Annie. Talk some sense into him, Mary. I have to leave. *(She exits)*

Moore Mr. Anagnos, there is no denying that Annie is very intelligent and has matured considerably in the past four years. Yet she is still a very young – and turbulent – woman. She has never taught anyone, and this child would challenge the most experienced teacher. I fear we would be sending her to face discouragement if not complete failure. Annie does not need that. Not for her first job. *(Annie enters the garden, walking slowly, reading a book. Anagnos spies her)*

Anagnos Perhaps we should let her decide that for herself. *(Calls out of the door)* Annie! Annie! Would you come here for a moment?

Annie What is it, Mr. Anagnos?

Anagnos Please, sit down. I thought we might have a little chat.

Annie About what?

Anagnos Well, I am always interested in the welfare of my graduates – always looking for things that may be of benefit to them – special opportunities that may arise –

Annie Mr. Anagnos, what is this about?

Moore Annie, it is about this. *(She hands Annie the letter)*

Annie *(Reading)* Someone is looking for a teacher for a deaf-blind girl in – Alabama? Sir, were you thinking that I should apply for this job?

Anagnos Not apply – be sent – as an official teacher from the Perkins School of the Blind. You would receive the wages and board offered by Mr. – uh – *(Looks at letter)* Keller, plus the full support of any and all resources our school could provide.

Annie Be a Perkins teacher? Sir, I don't know what to say –

Anagnos Say 'yes'! Annie, you are perfect for this job – You are intelligent, full of youthful energy –

Annie You mean my temper –

Anagnos No, I mean your drive, your persistence! And I have often seen you visiting Laura Bridgman in her apartment on the grounds.

Annie She is a fascinating woman.

Anagnos Have you learned the finger-spelling alphabet she uses to communicate with?

Annie Yes, we often spell into each other's hands.

Anagnos Don't you think you could teach that to someone else? To this deaf blind girl?

Moore Mr. Anagnos – Annie – it is not that simple. Not at all. I have read Dr. Howe's notes. The great challenge was not getting Laura to understand letters – it was getting her to understand the basic concept of words.

Annie What do you mean?

Miss Moore We take for granted the idea of words – that every object, every motion – everything has a separate label – a name for itself – a word – that we can use for communication. That whole idea was foreign to Laura – and it will be to this girl in Alabama.

Anagnos Yes, but Laura obviously came to understand the notion.

Miss Moore It took Dr. Howe many months to get that idea across to Laura – and Laura is quite intelligent. Annie, you need to decide what is best for you. Just be realistic about the challenge involved. We don't know what made this girl blind and deaf. She may have other defects. What are the chances she will be as intelligent as Laura? She may never be able to grasp the concept of words.

Annie In which case, she would be unteachable.

Miss Moore Nearly so. What can you learn without language and words?

Annie I see. In which case I will have wasted perhaps a year of my life –

Anagnos *(Interrupting)* Don't think of it as wasted, think –

Annie (*Interrupting back*) Yet if she is capable of grasping words, and no one goes to teach her, it is her entire life that will be wasted – a life locked out of all of the doors that only language can open.

Anagnos Yes – Yes! Well?

Miss Moore You do not have to decide right now, Annie – take your time and think it over.

Annie I appreciate your concern, Miss Moore, but I know that I could not walk away from this. I accept your offer, Mr. Anagnos.

Anagnos Splendid! Miss Moore – you are obviously quite familiar with Dr. Howe’s methods. How many weeks will it take to teach them to Annie? I need to give Mr. Keller an estimate of when she might arrive.

Miss Moore Not weeks, sir. Months. Four to six at a minimum. Mr. Howe left twelve notebooks of highly detailed descriptions. She should also study teaching theory and the latest ideas about how children develop mentally and psychologically.

Anagnos Yes, yes – of course. It wouldn’t make sense to send her without first preparing her as much as possible. May I entrust her preparation to you, Miss Moore?

Miss Moore If Annie finds that acceptable.

Annie Oh – yes! I would very much enjoy working with you.

Anagnos Splendid! Then it is all settled. (*Checks his pocket watch*) Now, I do not mean to be rude, but I am late for an important meeting...

Miss Moore We understand.

Anagnos Yes. Well, give me frequent updates on Annie’s progress, won’t you?

Miss Moore Yes sir. (*She and Annie exit into the garden and sit on the bench*) You made a hasty decision just now, Annie. You will likely have second thoughts. No one will think less of you if you change your mind. Think carefully about this.

Annie I will. But I doubt I will change my mind.

Miss Moore You have a great heart, Annie Sullivan. If this is truly what you want do to, I will do all I can to help you prepare for it.

Annie Thank you, Miss Moore. That means a lot to me.

Miss Moore Well, you might as well start with this. (*She hands Annie a small bound book she had been carrying*)

Annie (*Opening the book*) Photographs?

Miss Moore I volunteered to be the archivist for the school. I have been gathering photographs from the early years. Look – there is Dr. Howe. And there is Laura Bridgman about the time he was teaching her.

Annie She looks so young!

Miss Moore That was forty years ago.

Annie There she is, again – threading a needle.

Miss Moore Her lacework was among the finest. It sold throughout the country. Teaching her was one of Dr. Howe’s greatest accomplishments – and probably his greatest challenge. Think carefully about this, Annie. I’ll go gather up his notebooks and bring them to your room.

Annie Thank you Miss Moore. I won’t disappoint you.

Miss Moore You don’t have to prove anything to me, Annie. I’ll be by later this afternoon. (*She exits while Annie remains on the bench, looking at the photos*)

SONG: “CAN I REALLY DO THIS?”

Annie

Is this really so opportune?
 It seems like I’m reaching for the moon.
 Though deaf and blind, she has her mind;
 Can I help her cope? Will I bring hope?
 Doctor Howe learned what to do –
 Can I learn too?
 Can I really do this? Can I really teach her?
 Can I really do this? Can I really reach her?

I will try to do this – this is my decision now
 I will try to do it – this will be my mission now
 Each day I’ll study so I can find a way –
 And I will reach into Helen’s mind someday –

That is how I'll do it – somehow I will find the way
I'll be sticking to it – I'll keep working and I'll pray
Yes, that is how I'll do it – I will set my standards high
Deep inside I knew it – Knew that I would have to try;
Yes, I've got to do it –
For Helen, for Helen –
For Helen, I will try – – –

(After the song finishes, she exits, holding the book close to her chest. Lights go down in the garden and come up in the upstairs bedroom in the Keller home)

SCENE 5: THE KELLER HOME

(Viney is in the upstairs bedroom smoothing out the bedclothes. Rose comes up the stairs and into the room)

Rose There you are. Why are you doin' that? This bed was made just fine yesterday and nobody slept in it.

Viney I know that. But Miz Keller, she insisted I come up and double check things to make sure everything is just right for the teacher who's a –comin'.

Rose *(Helping tidy the room)* Is she comin' today?

Viney No one knows for sure. Cap'n got a telegram coupla days ago sayin' she was on her way, but nobody knows 'zactly which train she's on or when she'll get here. Miz Keller is over at the station now, waitin', just in case she's on today's train.

Rose This room's neat as a pin. Can you help me tidy up downstairs?

Viney Sure, child. *(They continue to talk as they go downstairs where they continue to tidy and clean things)*

Rose I heard 'em describin' the new teacher.

Viney Well?

Rose She's a Yankee girl, nought but twenty or twenty-one, and was blind herself once, but got her eyes fixed. Cap'n Keller said he was 'spectin' someone a little older, and his brother –

Viney Mr. Frank Keller can't abide nobody from the North.

Rose With what happened to him, can ya blame him?

Viney Guess not. And Miz Keller – what'd she have to say?

Rose Nothin' much. She just kept all quiet-like, ponderin' things. She worries an awful lot about that Helen.

Viney Wouldn't you? Speakin' of – where is that child anyway? She has such a knack for sneakin' off and gettin' into trouble.

Rose She's just standin' in the garden waitin' – she knows somethin' is happenin'.

Viney It's a wonder what that chile can figure out with nothin' to guide her but her smellin' and feelin'.

Rose I hear horses. I think somebody is comin'! We best check the kitchen window.

(Lights come up in the garden area. Capt Keller is on the bench, reading a newspaper and Helen is standing near the house and then goes inside. Annie and Kate enter on the downstage floor and make their way into the garden. Capt. Keller goes down to greet them. The heads of two neighbor girls (Jill and Becky) pop up over the fence (or around the tree or post) to watch)

Kate Right now the only way she can talk is through signs – but she is very clever and has made up dozens of signs for all sorts of things.

Annie Really? I'm sure that will be a help at first, but I hope they don't get in the way of her learning more versatile means of communicating.

(Capt K notices them and comes over to greet Annie)

Kate And this is my husband, Captain Arthur Keller.

Capt K *(Shaking her hand)* Miss Annie Sullivan! I can't tell you how much we have been looking forward to this day! Welcome to our humble plantation. We call it Ivy Green. We want you to feel perfectly at home here and if there is anything –

Annie Excuse me, but where is Helen?

Capt K Of course – eager to meet your young student! *(Looks around)* She was here a moment ago. She must have gone inside. Please, come in.

(Helen is in the dining room, squatting with both palms on the floor, “listening.” Annie enters first, followed by Capt Keller. As soon as Helen feels the vibration of Annie’s step, she sniffs the air and then rushes toward Annie with such force that Annie is knocked back into Capt Keller)

Annie

Oh, my – this is Helen?

Kate

This is Helen.

(Helen eagerly feels Annie’s dress and face and finds her suitcase and takes it from Annie’s hand and sits on the floor, trying to open it, but finds it locked. She feels around and finds a keyhole and then looks up and makes a sign of turning a key and points at the suitcase)

Annie

Oh – she knows about keys and locks?

Kate

Oh, yes.

(Kate reaches down and tries to take the suitcase away from Helen, making signs indicating that it belongs to Annie (Helen’s sign for “possession” was to take Helen’s hand and touch the object, then touch the owner; and then have you nod your head)

Kate

Now, Helen, this belongs to Miss Sullivan.

(Helen does not want to release the bag and clutches it tightly, becoming increasingly angry as Kate tries to remove it. Annie steps in and pulls out a large pocket watch)

Annie

Here, Helen, look at this instead. *(She places the watch into Helen’s hand and Helen releases the bag to focus on the watch)* She’s a feisty one, isn’t she?

Kate

Oh, yes.

Capt K

She has plenty of spirit, I say!

Kate

We have a room for you upstairs –

Annie

I think it would be good if Helen comes up with me. She can help me unpack – she obviously is quite curious about what is in my suitcase. That might help us begin to get acquainted.

Capt K

Good idea! I’ll carry this up for you.

(He takes her suitcase and leads the way up the stairs with Annie and Helen following)

Kate

I’ll just be right down here if you need anything Annie. *(She sits down and picks up some knitting, casting worried glances upstairs from time to time)*

Capt K

There you are – best view in the house. Just make yourself at home.

Annie

Thank you, sir.

(Annie opens up her suitcase and Helen’s hands dive into it. Capt Keller goes downstairs and speaks to Kate)

Capt K

You know, I think this is going to work out just fine – just fine indeed! *(He pats her on the shoulder and exits.)*

(In the upstairs bedroom, Helen is curious about everything in the suitcase, and tries on Annie’s bonnet and some of her other things. From a special compartment in the suitcase, Annie takes out a doll)

Annie

Well, Helen this is for you – a gift from the blind girls at Perkins. Might as well use it to start teaching you about spelling and words.

(Annie hands Helen the doll. Helen becomes very excited and points at the doll, then at herself and nods. Annie takes Helen’s hand up to her (Annie’s) face and nods. She then takes Helen’s hand and fingerspells into it)

Doll. D-O-L-L. *(She then puts Helen’s hand on the doll. Helen looks puzzled so Annie repeats the finger-spelling and then touching Helen’s hand to the doll)* D-O-L-L.

(Helen looks intrigued, as if this is a new game. Annie holds Helen’s small hand into her larger one. Helen imitates the finger-spelling. As she concentrates on this, the doll slips from her grasp)

Very good! You learn fast! *(Annie picks up the doll)* Alright, one more time and you can have the doll back.

(Annie again holds Helen’s hand into hers, but this time Helen pulls away and begins frantically feeling for the doll. Finding it under Annie’s arm, Helen begins to tug on the doll to get it back, becoming increasingly angry)

Just one more time and you can have it. Here – I’ll help you –

(Annie takes Helen’s hand and tries to force her little fingers into the forms of the letters but Helen pulls away and begins to tantrum, pounding on the floor)

That’s no way to get what you want! Now you sit here and calm down! *(Annie forces Helen into a chair, but, instead of calming down, Helen becomes more angry, squirming as Annie desperately holds on to keep her in the chair. At that moment Kate (who had heard the ruckus) enters)*

Kate

Oh, my.

Annie *(Panting, still holding Helen, now with both arms wrapped around her to keep her in the chair)*
It's not as bad as it looks – really! She was beginning to learn to fingerspell and well – it's a long story – but she began throwing a fit so I put her in this chair to calm down – but she won't calm down – and – well – I'm not going to give in!

Kate Neither will she.

Annie Well – I –

Kate Maybe tonight neither of you have to give in. A diversion often works well. Let me go get something that I know will get her attention.

Annie Is it something that has a short name?

Kate Cake?

Annie Perfect!
(Kate goes quickly downstairs and grabs a piece of cake off the table and returns with it. She holds it close enough for Helen to smell and Helen relaxes, and reaches for it. Annie takes her hand and fingerspells)

Annie First this – C-A-K-E.
(Helen reaches for the cake) No, first you do the spelling. *(Annie pats her own hand with Helen's hand. Helen looks irritated but quickly imitates the finger-spelling)* C-A-K-E – Perfect, all right – here's your cake.
(She gives the cake to Helen who gobbles it up quickly as if expecting Annie to take it back any moment) It's amazing how easily she learned that.

Kate But – you don't think she knows what that finger-spelling means, do you?

Annie Oh, no. To her it is just a finger game – but she grasped what I wanted and also easily imitated the movements. There's a lot of intelligence in that girl. That's hopeful. Very hopeful.

Kate You think so?

Annie Absolutely. Look – she's finished her cake – let's try again with the doll. *(Annie brushes the cake off Helen's hands)* And one day we'll also have to teach you how to eat properly. *(Annie takes the doll and lets Helen touch it. When Helen reaches for it, Annie takes Helen's hand and pats her own hand. Helen gets the idea and begins to finger spell)*

Annie D-O-L – one more “L” – here I'll do it.
(Annie fingerspells “L” into Helen's hand and gives her the doll. Helen snatches it and runs downstairs and exits)

Annie Oh dear. I never imagined my first meeting with Helen would include a wrestling match!

Kate That's our Helen.

Annie She's nothing like Laura Bridgman!

Kate Do you know Laura Bridgman?

Annie Oh yes – she's in her fifties now and lives on the grounds. But she was a delicate, timid girl.

Kate Well, that's not Helen. Have you worked much with children who are stubborn and have fierce tempers?

Annie No – but I was one. And I'm hoping that, with me, Helen will have more than met her match. I'm hoping.

Kate Me too.
(Black out)

SCENE 6: THE KELLER HOME

(As the lights come up, Annie and Helen are sitting at the table, halfway through a noon meal. Helen is a mess, with food all over her hands and face and the front of her dress. She is eating completely with her fingers, with much smacking and wiping of her fingers on her dress and tablecloth. Rose is at her side, cleaning up the worst of it)

Rose Do you like your lunch, Miss?

Annie The food is excellent. I can't quite say the same for the company.

Rose Ma'am?

Annie Has Helen never learned to use a fork or spoon?

Rose No, ma'am. She always just eats with her fingers. Cuz she's blind. Cap'n feels finger-eatin' is safer than putting a fork and knife into her hands and lettin' her have at food that she can't see. 'Sides, it's so hard to make her understand what to do with stuff like a fork, her bein' deaf and all.

Annie I see. And what about the use of a napkin around her neck? Surely that poses no danger to her?

Rose Oh, no, ma'am. She just don't tolerate it. We done tried it lotsa times and she always just tears it off and throws it on the floor.

Annie And so you gave up.

Rose Yes'm. Seemed sensible.
(Suddenly Helen reaches over, quickly feels through all the food on Anne's plate and takes a piece and stuffs it into her mouth, all before Annie can respond)

Annie What!! My word! Look what she just did!

Rose Yes'm. She likes to do that. Guess she figures what other folks have is likely better than what's left on her plate.

Annie *(Pushing her plate away)* And those hands were just in her mouth. That's barbaric!

Rose Ma'am?

Annie Do you ever have company over?

Rose Not often –

Annie I can see why.

Rose Mostly just people like Miss Ev who are used to Helen's ways.

Annie Well, you will have to excuse me. I seem to have lost my appetite.

Rose Yes'm. Seems like Helen's 'bout done to.
(She wipes Helen's face with a cloth as neighbor children come to the door)

Jill Can Helen come out to play?

Rose *(To Annie)* Ma'am? – It's the neighbor chillun. Is it all right if I send Helen out to play with 'em? She always likes that. The oldest makes sure she don't get into no harm.

Annie Yes, that would be fine. Helen put in a good morning's work today, and I could use the time to think.

Rose *(To Helen)* Out you go. *(Directs her toward the children. Jackie takes her hand)*

Jackie Let's show her those flowers that just started bloomin'. She'll love the smells. *(The children exit off stage through the garden. Kate enters from the kitchen while Rose clears the table and exits)*

Kate Where's Helen?

Annie Outside, playing. She had a busy morning.

Kate Really? So it's going well?

Annie Fairly well, this being only my third day with her. I wanted to show you these. *(She goes over to a table and picks up sewing cards and strung beads)* These are beads Helen strung this morning – I set up a pattern: two wooden beads and then a glass one and so on. Helen caught on right away and quickly filled this up. Then she started others, and so on one string the knot was too small to hold the beads, so she slipped the cord through a bead and tied it. She is very clever.

Kate Helen did this?

Annie Yes, and these sewing cards as well – very quickly – and look at how neat her stitches are. Even more encouraging though – I thought I'd teach Helen the finger spelling for "card" while she was doing these. Well, no sooner had I finger spelled the C and the A into her hand, but she jumped up and made her sign for eating and pushed me toward the door – she wanted the cake!

Kate You mean she remembered –

Annie She remembered from three nights ago that the C and the A were associated with her getting cake!

Kate Why, that's remarkable!

Annie Really, Mrs. Keller, Helen is capable of much more than what you have asked of her. I've written some notes here. She –
(Capt Keller and Frank enter, at first not noticing the women, Capt K being in the middle of telling one of his famous stories)

Capt K Well, what he didn't know was that Sam had swapped the horses. He just mounts the horse that is in her stall without takin' hardly a second glance at her. My, but he was sitting so tall and feelin' so grand as he rode her onto the fairgrounds – seems he was the only one who didn't notice that his mount was as swaybacked as a hammock and had so few teeth that her tongue just slid right out of the front of her mouth!

Kate Arthur –

Capt K Oh – I'm sorry. I didn't see you two over there! How are you, Miss Sullivan?

Annie Quite well, thank you.

Kate Arthur – she was telling me what progress Helen has made in just a few days. Please, Annie – continue.

Annie Well, I was just saying that I believe that Helen has been very under-challenged so far. She is capable of much more than what you have required. For example, take the area of table manners. Right now she is allowed to eat like a – well, in a manner quite unbecoming of a lady. In fact, she grasps concepts quickly and has excellent finger control. She can – and should – be taught decent table manners.

Frank You're the girl from Boston, ain't ya?
Capt K Oh, I'm sorry – Frank – this is that special teacher who came to help Helen. Her name is Annie Sullivan. Miss Sullivan, this is my brother, Frank Keller.

Annie I am the teacher from Boston, yes.
Frank Well, we don't need Yankee "teachers" to come and teach us about manners! As if you had any sense of manners or breeding! It is a fact that no well-bred Southern woman would stoop to take a job as a teacher.

Annie And that must be why the Kellers had to send all the way to Boston to find someone qualified to help Helen!

Frank Well, you are not in Boston anymore. And here in Alabama, women still treat our men with respect – and that is somethin' you had better get used to doin'.

Capt K Frank – (*He touches Frank's arm, but Frank twists away*)
Frank There's one thing you ought to know. If you are here to teach Helen – there is only one thing I want to know: what are you going to teach her about the war of Northern Aggression?
Annie You mean the civil war?
Frank I mean –
Kate Frank, please! She is here to teach Helen how to communicate, maybe even how to read and write. This isn't about the war. She's not here to teach history.
Frank And supposin' Helen does learn to communicate – ain't she gonna be givin' her lessons in all subjects then?
Kate Well, I suppose – I hadn't thought that far ahead yet.
Frank Well, maybe you should. Arthur, as an honorable Southern man, is it not your duty to find out if she'll be teachin' Yankee lies to your daughter?
Capt K (*Sighs*) Miss Sullivan, should the day come that you would be teaching history to Helen, I must ask you to tell me what you would teach her about the war between the states.
Annie The details of the war should be taught to her by you who know them so well. I promise you that I will limit myself to only the most basic of facts, that is, that the war resulted in the elimination of slavery from our land.
Kate Oh, dear.
Frank I knew it! – Arthur – I knew she'd be coming here and spreading her Yankee poison! That war was never about slavery, Miss Sullivan! That war was about a peaceful Southern culture deciding to separate itself from the intolerable interference of the North. And as a result we were subjected to the most horrific aggression imaginable – hundreds of thousands of our boys dead, entire cities burned, a whole way of life destroyed – when all we wanted was the right to be left alone to pursue our own ways and to live as peaceful neighbors.
Kate Frank, please – that's enough.
Frank Arthur, control your wife. It is not enough! Let me tell you one more thing little lady – if the man who shot Lincoln were still alive today, I would gladly pay a year's wages just to shake his hand – and I would consider the day I did it the finest day of my life.
Annie You're out of your mind!
Frank Am I? If I went into the center of town and spit I'd hit ten true Southern boys who feel exactly the way I do! And if you don't like that, perhaps you have come to the wrong place!
Annie Perhaps I have! (*She storms up the stairs into the bedroom and begins to pack her things*)
Kate Frank Keller! This time you have gone too far! You may have stripped Helen of her one chance for her future! And Arthur! You did not put a stop to it! There are times your Southern pride just turns my stomach! (*She rushes upstairs*)
Frank Why did you marry that woman Arthur?
Capt K Shut up, Frank! I went along with you in front of the women, but I will speak my mind now. For you to come into my home and question my loyalty to the South and at the same time jeopardize my daughter's future, is...is intolerable! I must ask you to keep a civil tongue in your head while you are in the presence of Miss Sullivan. Is that clear?

Frank (*He is quiet for a time*) Arthur, I do not know what effect living with a child like Helen may have on a man's mind. I can only assume that the effect is so great that it could cause my own brother to speak such words to me. I therefore will honor your request, and I will forgive you.

Capt K Thank you, Frank.

Frank I best be on my way. Good day, Arthur.

Capt K Good day. (*Frank exits out the front and Capt. K exits upstage through the house. Lights come up in the bedroom*)

Kate Annie – please – think about what you are doing. Think about Helen – she needs you. I need you.

Annie I came here willing to spend years trying to teach one child. I came here willing to face disappointment and severe challenges. But I am not willing to be treated with disrespect and to have my values belittled while absolutely abhorrent views are calmly held by all those around me. I cannot live in a place like this!

Kate Neither could I – if this were a place like that.

Annie But it is! You heard that man!

Kate That's just Frank. And yes, there are some others who speak like him, but not nearly as many as he would like to think. And Frank himself was not always this way. He is a very bitter man, Annie, and some would say with good cause.

Annie Nothing excuses his behavior.

Kate No, it doesn't excuse it, but it might explain it. Annie, Frank's wife died giving birth to their second son. Frank raised those two boys by himself and they grew up into strappin' fine young men. They were his whole world. He went to war with them. He lost both on the same day at Shiloh, not thirty miles from their farm. Every seventh of April for the past twenty-five years he has gone to the spot where he found their bodies side by side, blown apart by a Union shell. He wears that Confederate coat every day to honor their memory.

Annie I didn't know –

Kate Even knowing all this, for a long time I couldn't abide Frank. But then – I lost my own child –

Annie But, I thought Helen was your first child.

Kate My first child – my first Helen – could see and hear. And giggle. My first child could speak. But I lost that child. I have a very different Helen now. But I understand Frank better.

Annie (*Softly*) I don't know what it feels like to be a parent who loses a child, but I do know what it is like to be a child who loses a parent...and a brother.

Kate Oh, Annie – I didn't know –

Annie (*Looking far away*) Bitterness churns up into anger and then you say the most venomous things.

Kate That's Frank.

Annie That's also been me, too often.

Kate Annie, please stay.

Annie I know I can't bring back your first Helen.

Kate But you can help bring out all that is possible in this Helen. That's what I'm hoping for.

Annie I'm sorry I'm so hot-headed at times. I didn't come all the way down here only to be chased off by the ranting of one man. I'll stay – for you, for Helen.

Kate Thank you. (*They embrace*)

Annie My! All of this has given me a terrific headache. I think I'll go upstairs and freshen up before supper.

Kate I understand. I'll let you know when the food is ready.
(*Kate exits and goes wearily downstairs and finds Aunt Ev sitting at the table*)

Ev Ev! When did you get here?

Ev Just a bit ago. I ran into Arthur in the yard and he told me there had been quite a blow up between Frank and Annie.

Kate She was ready to leave, but I think I've smoothed things over for now.

Ev Oh, good.

Kate Oh, Ev, I feel like all my hopes and dreams are suspended right now by such a thin thread – Annie Sullivan. And to have that thread almost snapped by stupid, bull-headed comments by Frank – and arrogant silence by Arthur – (*She breaks off, unwilling to speak the words that are coming to her mind*)

Ev (*Gently*) Kate, our hopes for Helen don't rest on Miss Sullivan – ultimately. They rest on God. And He's coming through for you.

Kate I wish He didn't have to make it so hard! I'm sorry, Ev. I appreciate your words, really I do. I just –

Ev You're worn out. And that makes it hard to believe or hope in anything. *(Kate nods)* Look at what He's done so far: He's brought us a teacher all the way from Boston. And not just any teacher, but someone with enough spunk and fire that she just might be able to tame and teach Helen. Kate, I feel it deep in my soul – God has special plans for that child. 'Course, He does for every child – but I think it may even be more true for special ones like Helen.

SONG: "A SPECIAL PLACE FOR HELEN"

Ev There is a special place
In the heart of our dear Lord
For all children just like Helen;
These little lambs are so adored;
He knows their every plight,
They are precious in His sight;
How He loves these souls who need Him
And He holds them very tight;
All the blind, infirm and ill
Bear our Father's image still
He is there for our transgressions
Those little lambs are so sweet now
He knows their every plight
They are precious in His sight
All the blind, infirm and ill
Bear our Father's image still;
They are part of His creation;
Their longing hearts He loves to fill.
God is always at their side
And His arms are open wide;
For no matter who we are,
In His heart we all abide.

(Blackout)

SCENE 7: THE KELLER HOME

(Anne and Helen are seated at the table, over breakfast. Capt K is in his armchair reading and Kate is also seated, knitting)

Capt K Says here Mark Twain has come out with a new book – called "A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court." Apparently it's quite humorous. Somehow this Yankee finds himself...
(As he is speaking, Helen is eating eggs and grits with her hands. She reaches over to feel what is on Annie's plate)

Annie Not this time! *(She pushes Helen's hand away. Helen reacts with anger, repeatedly trying to feel Annie's food. As the tussle escalates, Helen begins to make raging sounds)*

Capt K Here now! What's making Helen so upset? *(He comes over to investigate)*

Annie I will not let her reach her hand into my food! *(The tussle continues)*

Capt K Miss Sullivan, Helen is used to doing that. Poor girl, taste is one of the few senses she has left. So we let her eat what she wants. *(All though the next few lines, Helen persists, tugging on Annie's hands and arms, which Annie has put as a barrier over her plate)*

Annie Not off my plate! How is she ever going to learn anything if you –

Capt K I fail to see how putting her into a temper over a piece of food improves her education, Miss S –

Annie *(Angrily interrupting)* There will be no education if she – *(Still fiercely fending off the increasingly wild Helen)* – never –

Kate *(Coming over to the table)* Arthur – Let's just let Annie try it her way for a bit.

Capt K All she's doin' is puttin' Helen into a rage, Kate – how is that helping – ?

Annie Please – I'll be fine on my own – let me try –

Kate Arthur, please. We can just step outside. She's a teacher. She knows what she's doing. *(She begins to maneuver him toward the exit)*

Capt K I suppose. *(As he exits)* But I'm a father – and I know a thing or two about bringing up children, and purposefully frustrating and aggravating a child with defects hardly seems – *(Exits with Kate)*
(Now alone with Annie, Helen continues to rage and fight. Annie forces her away from the table and Helen goes down onto the floor, kicking and screaming. Helen finds the newspaper on the floor and begins shredding it in her rage)

Annie 'She's a teacher – she knows what she is doing' – Do I? Is this really the way to teach this child? Oh, Helen, I wanted you to learn first of my love. But I see no other way. You must learn obedience. I cannot teach a defiant child. *(She locks the doors that exit from the room)* We will stay in here until you calm down, and then we'll try to make a new start on this day.
(Annie pulls her chair back up the table and pokes at her food as the fit continues. Helen, sensing the scraping of the chair on the floor, comes over, feels Anne and the chair, and grabs the chair legs and begins jerking the chair, trying to unseat Annie) You little beast! *(Annie pushes Helen away. Helen gets back up and tries again to feel Anne's plate. Annie pushes her hands away and Helen pinches her)* Ow! Where did you learn that? *(She slaps Helen's hand. It repeats a second time – the reach for Annie's food, Annie blocking it, Helen pinching her and Annie slapping her hand. Helen then stands at the table, furious, and the idea of getting her parents to help her in this battle with Annie comes to her. She goes to the armchair and then to her mother's chair, searching for her parents)* No, Helen – it's just you and me.
(Helen sits briefly on the floor, bewildered, and then gets up and goes over and sits in her own chair at the table and resumes eating her food with her fingers)

Annie Well, that's a start. Any child who can tie a knot around a bead by touch can certainly use a spoon! Here you are, young lady! *(She places a spoon in Helen's hand. Helen throws it to the floor)*
I suppose I should have expected that. But what you throw down, you must pick up.
(Annie forces Helen from the chair and squats down with her and puts Helen's hand on the spoon. Helen angrily shakes her head and jerks away, pushing against Annie, who falls back into a seated position on the floor. Helen leaps up and bolts for the door to the garden and is furious at finding it locked. Note: If the set has any other doors leading out from this room, she must check those also and find them previously locked by Annie. Helen throws herself on the floor again and begins to tantrum again) There is no going out until you obey. This morning it is your stubbornness versus my stubbornness. My stubbornness will win. *(Helen goes back to the garden door and begins to repeatedly yank on it. Annie picks up the spoon and makes Helen feel it, then feel Annie nod, then feel the garden door)* Use the spoon – yes – then you can go out. *(Annie repeats the signs. Helen knocks the spoon from her hand and falls to the floor, raging)* No more wrestling matches. You know what you need to do. We will just stay here until you do it. *(Helen finally relents and slinks over to the table. Annie stands behind her and puts the spoon into her hand and guides Helen's hand in the use of it. Helen grasps this quickly and takes several quick mouthfuls using the spoon. She then puts the spoon down and twists away as if to leave the table)* Not so fast, my uncivilized one. Use this first. *(She hands Helen her napkin. Helen hastily and angrily wipes off her face and starts to throw the napkin onto the floor, thinks better of it, and puts it on to the table)* Good. *(Annie loosens her grip and Helen twists and goes to the garden door and begins again to yank on it)* Very well. Out into the sunshine you go. *(She unlocks the door)* I really do care about you, you know. *(She tries to give Helen a little affectionate squeeze, but Helen pushes her brusquely away, opens the door and runs into the garden)*

Annie *(Sighs and calls into the garden)* Viney – I'm going to let Helen run in the garden for a bit. Will you keep an eye on her?

Viney *(From offstage)* Yes, ma'am.

Annie Oh, my aching head! *(Holding her head, she wearily climbs the stairs to her room, closes the door, and throws herself on the bed and briefly weeps. She then sits up, wiping her eyes)* Oh, Helen; what a fighter you are. But I think you are finally learning the most important things.

SONG: "OBEDIENCE AND LOVE"

Annie

If I'm to help her find her way
She needs to learn how to obey
There must be a way I can get through
Somehow I will find what I should do

To help her trust in me –

Obedience and love
Is all she needs
If she's to start this new path
Though long, I know she will succeed

I'll guide her on this road
If she lets me
If she's to learn, she must go obediently

What can I do? I've tried so hard to reach this girl
To teach this special girl how to behave...
She needs my love, but there is more that I must do
For this girl I've been brought to
Must change her ways

Obedience and love will open doors
They are the keys that she needs
To find new worlds to explore
Though she can't understand the reasons why
I'll persevere for her sake and she'll learn by...
My loving hand...

(During the song, Helen re-enters the house, feels around the downstairs, finds some food on Annie's plate and stuffs it into her mouth, realizes no one is downstairs, goes upstairs, and finds Annie's door closed. Helen feels on the hallway table and finds the key and locks Annie in. Helen then hides the key, returns to the door and places her back against it and waits)

Annie *(Looking at her pocket watch)* One o'clock! Well, I expect things to go a bit better this afternoon – it can't go much worse! *(She goes to open her door and finds it locked)* That's odd. It must be stuck. *(Annie jiggles the handle and pushes on the door. Helen, on the other side, laughs out loud)* Is that Helen? *(She pushes and jerks on the door some more and Helen laughs all the more)* It is Helen! *(She pounds on the door)* Helen – the door is stuck – help me! *(Helen continues to laugh. Annie pauses)* Wait a minute! This door is not stuck – it's locked! – locked from that side – and Helen knows how to work a lock and key – you little beast! *(Pounds all the harder)* Open this door! Open it this instant! I'm trapped! She locked me in – ! That little beast! *(Annie looks out the bedroom window)* Wait – there's Mrs. Keller. *(Shouts out the window)* Mrs. Keller! Mrs. Keller! Up here! Please! Helen has locked me in!

Kate *(From offstage)* Oh, dear, not again!

Annie Again? *(Shouts through the door toward Helen)* You've done this before?! *(Kate rushes in and finds Helen at the top of the stairs)*

Kate Just a minute, Annie – I just need to get the key from Helen. *(She looks in Helen's hands and finds nothing)* Where is it? Where is the key? *(Kate pats down Helen, searching her clothes)* *(To Helen, using hand signs)* Where is it, where have you put it?

Annie Oh, great!
(Kate uses hand motions and signs to signify key and searching. Helen smiles grimly and shakes her head 'no')

Kate No! What do you mean 'no'?! *(Kate takes Helen's hand and forces it into a nodding, 'yes' motion and then takes Helen's hand and does the 'key' motion)* Yes – key – find key – now! *(Helen shakes her head angrily, 'no' and breaks away from her mother and starts to run down the stairs. She plows into Capt K who had heard the noise and is coming up. Helen squirts past him and darts downstairs, picks up some of her dolls and sits in the armchair to play with them)*

Capt K Easy there Helen! What's all the ruckus?

Kate Helen did it again! She's locked Miss Sullivan into the bedroom. Only this time she's hidden the key – I can't find it anywhere!

Capt K And I thought you said this teacher knew what she was doing! Helen looks just as wild this afternoon as she was this morning, and meanwhile her “teacher” is hiding up here, gettin’ herself locked into her room! (*Annie reacts to his words*)

Kate Arthur! She can hear every word you’re sayin’.

Capt K Well, I mean every word I’m sayin’. Are you sure you’ve looked everywhere for that key? (*He begins to search*)

Kate Everywhere I could think of.

Capt K (*Straightening up*) And it’s not in her clothes somewhere?

Kate No. I searched her carefully.

Capt K Well, I can’t get the locksmith out here until tomorrow. The pins in these hinges are painted and probably rusted tight to boot. I hardly see how that teachers’ foolishness warrants bustin’ down a perfectly good door. (*Scratching his head*) I figure all I can do right now is fetch a ladder up to her window and let her climb down. (*He heads downstairs and out into the garden*)

Annie Oh, wonderful.

Kate Annie, Arthur is going to fetch a ladder over to your window.

Annie I heard. I wasn’t hiding up here – I just came up here to take a short rest. We had quite a – long – morning.

Kate Oh, I understand. Helen can be very tiring.

Annie Very.

(*Capt K appears at the window*)

Capt K Here you are Miss. I’ll go down behind you to be sure you don’t slip.

Annie I’m much obliged.

(*Annie awkwardly and with considerable embarrassment maneuvers out the window. While this is happening, Kate goes downstairs and takes Helen’s hand and they exit*)

(*Lights go down inside the house and come up in the garden. The neighbor children are watching what is happening*)

Jill I betcha comin’ down on a rope would be more fun.

Beth How’d she get stuck in that room in the first place?

Jill Must not be too bright.

Jackie Oh – Look – part of her skirt’s got caught on a nail or somethin’.

Becky (*Grinning*) Look at poor Captain Keller doin’ everything he can to hold the ladder but not look up into her skirts!

Jackie Oh my, I think it tore.

Becky Ol’ Tom Saunders’ woulda looked up her skirts, sure as spit.

Beth Now you shush! You shouldn’t be talkin’ about such things. Here she comes. (*Annie comes around with Capt K into the garden*)

Annie Thank you again. If you don’t mind, I’d like a little time to collect myself out here.

Capt K Of course. Good day, Miss Sullivan. (*He exits*)

Annie (*She notices the children*) Children, I would appreciate some time to myself.

Beth Oh, sure, Ma’am – we were just leavin’.

Becky (*She begins to motion the other children out*) We didn’t see nothing –

Beth Shush!

(*They exit. Annie sits wearily on the bench*)

Annie Maybe he’s right. What if I’m going about it all wrong?

SONG: “CAN I REALLY DO THIS?” (Reprise)

Annie

Can I really do this? I don’t think I’m able;
 Can I really do this? She is so unstable!
 So now I might as well pack my bags today,
 And board a train that will take me far away;
 From this girl –
 This girl I’ve tried so hard to reach
 I’ve sacrificed to teach through love each day
 Deep from my heart I’ve given everything I had
 But they can’t understand how hard I’ve tried
 Is this goodbye – – –?

(Black out)

End of ACT ACT II

Entr'acte

SCENE 1: THE KELLER DINING ROOM

(Capt and Mrs. Keller are seated for breakfast, being served by Viney. Capt K is reading a newspaper and Kate is reading a book as they eat. Annie comes down the stairs, looking haggard but determined)

Capt K Why, Miss Sullivan – good morning! – You are up earlier than usual.
Annie Yes – I wanted to get up before Helen awoke. There is something I must discuss with you both.
Kate Oh?
Capt K Nothing serious, I trust?
Annie Yes. Yes, actually it is. (She sits at the table. Viney pours her some coffee) Thank you, Viney. I – I hardly slept at all last night, thinking about how to talk to you about this. The truth is – I just cannot continue with the present arrangement here. It's not working.
Kate You mean you're leaving?
Capt K What's not working?
Annie No – I don't want to leave – but neither do I want to fail here. And I will fail – unless –
Capt K Unless what?
Annie Well, unless I am allowed to work with Helen without any interference.
Kate Interference?
Capt K Who's interferin'?
Annie Well, you are – you both are – but perhaps especially you, Mr. Keller.
Capt K Excuse me?!
Annie (To herself) Oh, that came out badly. (To Capt K) You have every reason to be upset. Sometimes the truth is upsetting.
Capt K What truth?
Annie The truth is that Helen is a tyrant, to put it plainly. She acts like a tyrannical queen and you act more like her subjects than her parents. She can have anything she wants, do anything she wants, anything to keep her from getting upset.
Capt K She lives in a world that is so small, so cut off. There's no harm in trying to make that world as pleasant as possible for her.
Annie Unless by doing so you are ruining any chance of her world getting any bigger.
Capt K Now see here, Miss Sullivan!
Kate Arthur, please. I want to hear what Miss Sullivan has to say. Please continue, Annie.
Annie I'm sorry. I know you love Helen and you are doing what you feel is best for her. But unless she learns to obey *me*, she will not be able to be taught.
Capt K Just what are you proposing?
Annie I believe I need to separate Helen from you for a time – a few weeks at least – so that she can no longer go and get you to say 'yes' when I have already said 'no'. So that she will learn it is no use to fight against every command I give – it is best to simply obey. I don't see any other way. Otherwise, I will not be able to teach her.
Kate Separate her from us? Where would you take her?
Annie Well, I am not sure – maybe some space could be rented in town for a month –
Capt K That is out of the question. It would be neither right nor reasonable for us to hand our daughter over to live in town with someone we have known for only a week.
Anne I see. Well, in that case –
Kate Arthur –
Capt K Kate, do you believe that she is right about this?

Kate She is certainly right about Helen being a tyrant. Whether Annie's plan is best, I do not know, but I do know that if we don't make some kind of changes, Helen will just stay as she is. I think we should let her try, Arthur.

Capt K (*Upset, gets up and paces*) But to move her to town – ! Kate, how would we know what she was doing to Helen? Meaning, no disrespect, Miss Sullivan, but you must see the enormity of what you are asking. (*Looks into garden, and an idea dawns*) I tell you what I can agree to – you and Helen can move into our guest house in the garden. I could have it ready by tonight.

Kate Now, there's an idea.

Capt K There you will have her all to yourself, but I – and Kate – can look in through the window to monitor what is happening. As her parents, that is our responsibility.

Annie I appreciate the offer, but we would still be too close. Helen could just run back to the main house.

Capt K This is impossible! (*Appeals first to his wife then turns back to Annie*) Kate – now, see here, Miss Sullivan – I have tried to be –

Kate Wait a minute – We can make it so Helen doesn't realize that she is still in her own yard.

Capt K How?

Kate Take Helen on a long ride in the buggy first and then pull up to the guest house from the back. She won't even realize she is back on our property.

Annie She'll think she is far away, even though she's not. Yes, yes – I believe that just might work. It's at least worth a try.

Capt K I still don't see what's wrong with teaching her right here in her own house, in rooms she is familiar with –

Kate Arthur –

Annie Thank you again, Mr. Keller. I'll be getting things ready and I'll try to get across to Helen that she will be taking a trip today. (*She exits upstairs*)

Kate Thank you, Arthur.

Capt K I still don't like it. I tell you, I'm going to be keeping a close eye on that woman. It is one thing to come here and teach our daughter. It truly is another to come and tell us we are raising her all wrong.

(*Capt K exits. Viney enters and starts clearing the table*)

Kate I know you were listening to that whole thing, Viney –

Viney Now, ma'am –

Kate So, you might as well tell me your opinion. What do you think of those plans?

Viney Well, I don't know if Miss Sullivan is right or wrong, but I do know one thing – I would not want to be in her shoes once Miss Helen figgers out she ain't goin' home tonight!

Kate I believe you are right about that, Viney.

SCENE 2: THE KELLER GARDEN

(*Lights rise on Capt K, who is reflecting on his decision*)

SONG: “REFLECTION” (“Trapped” Reprise)

Capt K Helen – oh my dear Helen –
 How can I give you to this girl?
 Is this how – could this be somehow
 The way to reach into your world?

God help me trust her
 She may be just what Helen needs
 Oh Lord, is she the answer
 That we have prayed for
 Have you now heard our plea?

Helen – oh my sweet Helen –
 Because I love you so
 I will let you go...

SCENE 3: KELLER GUEST HOUSE

(In the guest house is a small table, two chairs and a bed. Viney and Rose are finishing the cleaning and preparations as Kate and Annie enter)

- Kate** Let me show you inside while Arthur is taking Helen around in the buggy. Look at this place! I can't believe what you girls have done in just one day.
- Viney** Thank you, ma'am.
- Rose** It was mostly just real dusty.
- Kate** *(Smiles with nostalgia)* This was our honeymoon cottage. It was a happy time. *(Sighs)* It seems so very long ago.
- Rose** *(Whispers to Viney)* Ain't gonna be no honeymoon for Miss Annie!
- Annie** *(Playfully catching Roses' eye)* I'm sure you're right, Rose. But I didn't come here for a honeymoon, you know.
- Kate** It's only two rooms. Helen can sleep in here. In the next room – *(She points offstage)* – is a stove and little kitchen.
- Viney** We put up a cot in there for you, Miss Annie. I'm sorry. It was all we had.
- Annie** I'm sure it will be fine.
- Kate** Helen is bringing a suitcase of her clothes. You let me know if you need anything. Oh – here they are now! *(Capt K and Helen enter. She is wearing a cloak and he is carrying a suitcase)*
- Capt K** Well, here we go, little one. We've had our supper, gone for a nice ride, and this is where you'll be spending the night. *(He hands Helen her suitcase. She takes it for a moment, looks puzzled, and then throws it down. She frowns, puts out her hands and begins at once to investigate her surroundings. Kate and the servants dodge her)*
- Annie** Thank you, Mr. Keller.
- Rose** I think we best be leavin' now. *(She and Viney exit)*
- Kate** Good luck Annie. I'll be praying for you.
- Annie** I'll need it. *(Kate exits)*
- Capt K** Now, I'll just be checkin' in on things in the mornings and the evenings, through this window. I appreciate you keepin' the curtains open.
- Annie** I understand. *(Capt K exits) (Locking the door)* Well, my little Helen, it's just you and me now. *(Helen has continued throughout to frenetically explore all things she can touch, throwing some things down as she goes. Annie takes out a box)* Here's some dolls and toys for you. *(She hands them to Helen. As Helen sits to explore the box, Annie opens Helen's suitcase)* So what did they bring you? Here are your nightclothes; oh – and here are some nice dresses. Yes, this will do fine. *(She lays out a set of clothes on the table)* This will be what you will wear in the morning. But now, it's time for bed. *(Annie takes Helen away from the toys, undresses her, gets her into her nightgown, and puts Helen into the bed. At each and every step along the way, Helen resists and fights against what is happening, becoming increasingly agitated and upset. She completely refuses to remain in the bed and finally Annie has to lay on top of her to get her to stay in. Throughout this scene, Annie will be ad-libbing comments appropriate to the action. Eg. Oh, no you don't...not this time...sorry little Helen, but you've got to learn who's boss, etc)* Finally, *Helen's cries turn to whimpers and then to silence as she falls asleep)*
- Annie** At last! Well, my little queen, it seems your grip on the throne is slipping. Perhaps tomorrow we can break your hold of it all together. *(She stands)* Oh, my aching head! *(She exits to her room)* *(Lights go down in the guest house and come up in the Keller dining room)*

SCENE 4: KELLER DINING ROOM

(Kate is seated at the table with a list in front of her, but she is staring off into space. Ev knocks and comes in, carrying a basket)

- Kate** Oh – good morning, Ev!
- Ev** I brought you these berries. I thought you were going into town today.
- Kate** Oh, I am – I just got a little distracted, that's all.
- Ev** I saw Arthur in the yard. He told me about Miss Sullivan and Helen moving to the guest house. How is it going so far?
- Kate** Well, it just started last night. *(She looks out the window)* And the guest house is still standing – I guess that's a good sign.
- Ev** I'm surprised Arthur agreed to it.

Kate Well, he's not happy about it. And he says he's going to be "checking up" on her through the window. Course, who knows what he'll do if he sees something he doesn't like – I guess that's why I haven't gone to town – I am afraid he and Annie are going to have a big blow up – and we could lose her.

Ev He cares so much about Helen –

Kate But he expresses it by spoiling her!

Ev I'll tell you what – Rate you're going, you are never going to finish that big quilt you've been working on. Why don't you let me sit here and work on it today for you and I can be keeping an eye on things between Arthur and Miss Sullivan.

Kate Would you? This is a terrible thing to say, but I believe he listens to you more than he does to me.

Ev Men are proud creatures, Kate – and most of 'em would rather take advice from a big sister than from a wife. It's just the way they're built. Now, off with you! Mrs. Bartlett is heading to town too and I happen to know she has her eye on that same fabric you were wanting.

Kate Very well – thanks again – *(As she is rising and preparing to leave)* – the quilting material is in the bag by the sofa –

Ev I know, I know – I saw you working on it the other day. Now scoot – and don't you worry about a thing. I can handle Arthur.

Kate You're an angel. *(Hugs her and exits)*

Ev *(Picking up the quilting materials and sitting on the sofa)* Well, I don't know about that... *(Lights go down in the Keller main house and go up in the guest house)*

SCENE 5: THE KELLER HOUSE

(Helen is just waking up, looking particularly disheveled. Annie is seated, drinking coffee, at the table. Helen's clothes are laid out for her)

Annie Good morning, sleepyhead. *(Helen feels her bed and looks confused. She then rapidly feels all the things in the room including Annie. She goes to the door and finds it locked)* No, it is still just you and me in the little house. *(Helen sits, bewildered, in the middle of the floor. She looks sad and touches her cheek; her sign for mother and shakes her head. Annie goes over to comfort her)* I know you miss your mother and I wish this weren't necessary – *(Helen angrily shoves Annie away. Helen then gets up and begins to feel the top of the table and finds some biscuits. Annie takes them from her)* *(Annie acts this out for Helen, touching Helen's hand first to the clothes and then to the table. Helen reacts angrily, throwing the clothes to the floor. She reaches again for the biscuit)* This morning we do things my way. First clothes, then food. *(She repeats the signs. Helen tantrums on the floor. Annie returns to her chair at the table and munches on a biscuit)* Ranting will do you no good, my little princess. And knowing your appetite, I doubt that you will go without eating for long. *(Helen sits in her night gown in an un-combed, sad/angry heap in the middle of the floor angrily playing with her dolls. Lights go down in the guest house and come up in the garden area. Capt K is talking with Viney)*

Capt K And see to those chickens we got from Tom Sanders yesterday.

Viney Yes, sir.

Capt K *(Looking at his pocket watch)* It's already ten o'clock. Has Rose milked the cows?

Viney I believe so, Sir.

Capt K Well, you go check on her. Yesterday it was after noon before they got milked and that'll ruin 'em.

Viney Yes Sir. *(She exits)*

Capt K Me, I'm gonna go check up on that Miss Sullivan. *(He looks into the window and is shocked by what he sees)* I knew it! I knew it! *(He starts to enter the guest house, restrains himself and heads toward the main house)* Kate has got to see this for herself. *(He enters the main house where Ev is working on the quilt)*

Capt K Where's Kate?!

Ev Gone into town. You knew she was going there today.

Capt K Oh that's right. Ev! You have got to come with me to see this!

Ev *(Calmly, not moving)* To see what, Arthur?

Capt K To see what a terrible state Helen is in! I have a great mind to send that Yankee girl back to Boston! It is ten o'clock in the morning and do you know what I just saw? I saw my daughter sitting on the floor – in her nightgown! – hair uncombed, looking so miserable – while her breakfast sits on the table and Miss Sullivan will not allow her to eat it!

Ev Now, Arthur – I know things look bad right now, but that Annie is going to be Helen’s salvation.
 Capt K How can you say that?
 Ev Helen must learn obedience and Annie is the perfect person to teach it to her.
 Capt K But it just don’t seem right Ev – withholding food from a child – especially a child like Helen – !
 Ev Helen is not going to starve. Let’s just let them be. I’ll go with you this evening. We’ll check on them together.
 Capt K You really think she’s going to be Helen’s salvation?
 Ev I really do, Arthur – unless you scare her off. God brought her to us all the way from Boston.
 Now – she knows what she’s doing – just let her be.
 Capt K I hope you’re right Ev. I hope you’re right. *(He exits)*
(Lights go down in the main house and back up in the guest house. Helen is still in a sad heap on the floor, no longer playing with her dolls. She miserably reaches over and finds her dress and brings it to herself and changes from her nightgown into her dress while Annie watches. Annie then comes over and brushes her hair and Helen does not fight it. Finally Annie hands Helen a biscuit and Helen crawls up into Annie’s lap to be held as she sadly chews her biscuit)
 Annie Oh, my little Helen – I think you will find it so much nicer to be a learned princess than an ignorant Queen. And today you have taken the first steps in that direction. Here – have some milk with that.
(Blackout)

SCENE 6: THE KELLER DINING ROOM

(Rose and Viney are snapping the ends off of green beans as they sit at the table)
 Rose ...So I went into that little house this morning’ to collect the breakfast things and there was Helen sittin’ so calm and pretty – just stringing a sewing card – not runnin’ around –
 Viney Not breakin’ things –
 Rose Not screamin’ or terrible fussin’. How long she been this way?
 Viney Since just after you left to care for your mother. ‘Bout two week now, she’s been a diff’rent chile.
 Rose It shore is a wonder. How long is Helen and Miss Sullivan gonna stay in the little house?
 Viney Only one more week. Cap’n Keller is firm about it – says it has served its purpose and three weeks is long enough. Meantime, he makes Miss Sullivan give him reg’lar reports on how Helen is doin.’ *(Looks out the window)* Here they come now. We best move to the kitchen. By the by – have you milked the cows yet?
 Rose *(Gasps)* The cows! *(She runs out. Viney gathers up the beans and exits. Annie, Kate and Capt K enter. Annie is carrying some papers. They sit at the table)*
 Annie She’s making progress – but it is slow. I’ve made a list of the words she knows by fingerspelling. *(Hands them a piece of paper)* She recognizes all of these when I spell them into her hand.
 Kate This is good progress, Annie.
 Capt K I count twenty-one words here – so she understands all of these?
 Annie No. She recognizes all of these – but I really don’t think she understands them yet – to her it is just a finger game in her hand.
 Capt K But surely that’s close to the same thing!
 Annie But it is not real language. It is still just a finger game to her. She doesn’t yet know that these are so much more than amusing finger patterns – these are words – names – and everything has a name – and once you know those names you can talk and learn anything – the whole world opens up to you. But she doesn’t understand that yet.
 Capt K Well, how do you teach her that?
 Annie It is not clear. Dr. Howe had the same problem with Laura Bridgman. It seems she just gradually caught on. But his notes are not at all clear about what he did to help move the process along.
 Kate You know, I’m not sure Helen is that far away from grasping the concept. Before you came she had over sixty different signs for things – aren’t those a kind of words?
 Capt K And for a long time she even kept saying one word –
 Kate Yes – wa-wa for “water”. I’d forgotten about that.
 Capt K You keep at it, Miss Sullivan. Helen will soon catch on, I’m sure.
 Annie I hope so. Well – *(Looks out the window)* – I left her out playing with some children. I better go check up on her. *(Annie exits into the garden and the dining room goes dark as Capt and Mrs. Keller exit)*