

PLAY Adapted from the short story
"The Country of the Blind," by H.G. Wells

The One-Eyed Man Is King

Characters

(main parts in boldface)

Narrators 1, 2, 3

Joseph Teasdale, English mountaineer

Martin Cruz, young American
mountaineer

Mountain guide

Eloise Teasdale, Joseph Teasdale's wife

Pedro

Manuel

Yacob

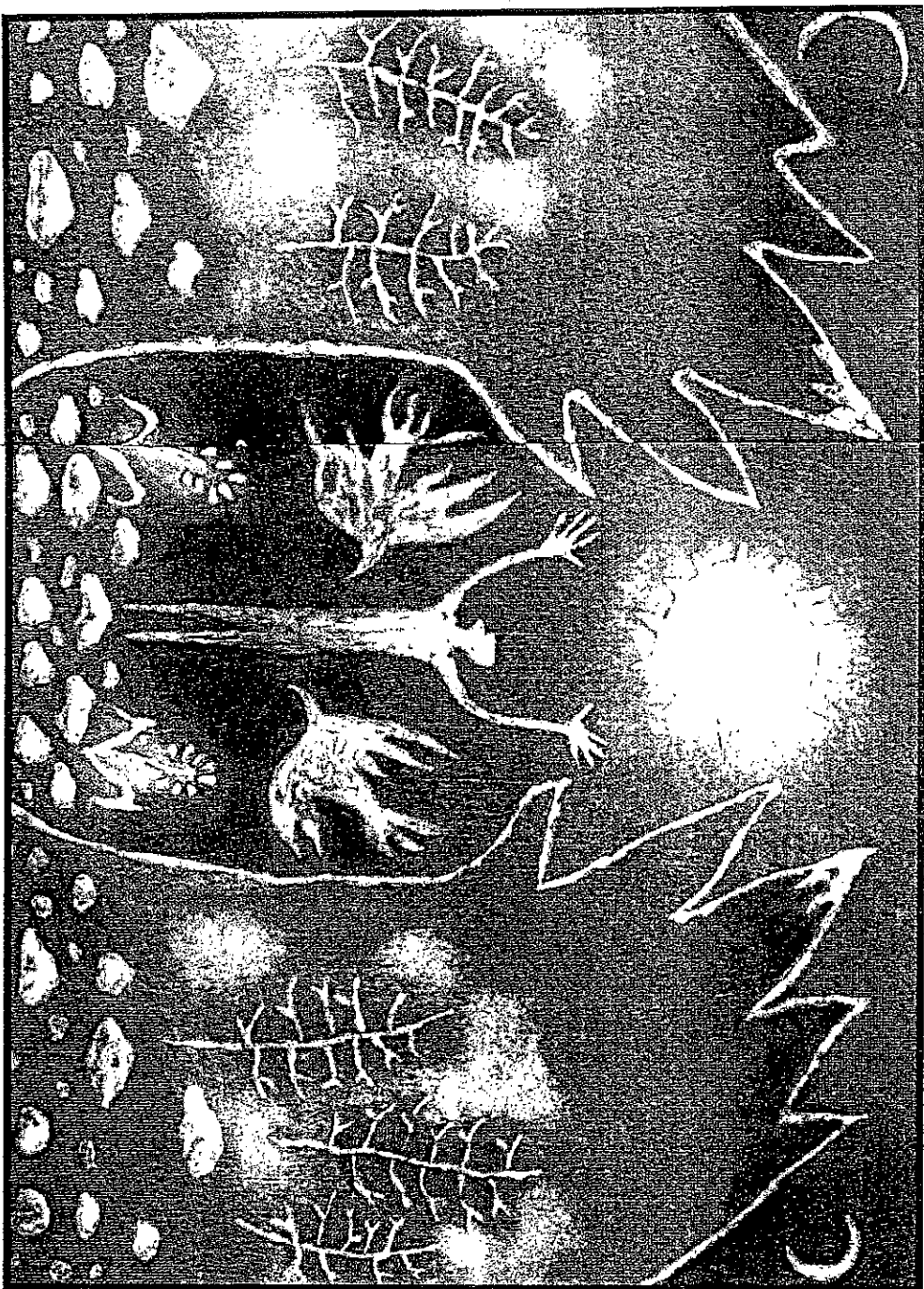
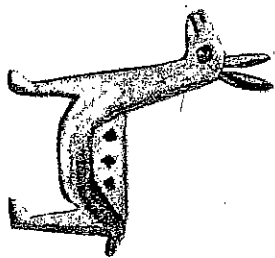
Melinda

Mountain climbers 1, 2

Time: The early 1900s

*Place: The remote wilds of the Andes
Mountains in South America*

He had stumbled on
the hidden valley of the
blind. Now he would
have unlimited power.



Scene 1

Narrator 1: High in the Andes, a fierce storm rages. Howling wind whips curtains of stinging snow through the craggy, desolate peaks.

Narrator 2: The snow makes it impossible for one to see more than a few feet ahead. Unable to move farther, a small mountain-climbing party sets up camp on an icy rock shelf.

Narrator 3: Exhausted, several men and one woman in the party eat from their food tins in silence. Soon the food revives them, and they begin to talk.

Joseph Teasdale: This is a brutal storm. Unless the wind dies down, we could be stranded here in the middle of nowhere for days.

Martin Cruz: What of it?

There is something exciting about journeying into the unexplored wilds. To challenge nature, to stand where no one has stood before, that's what mountaineering is about: power!

Mountain Guide: You're wrong.

Martin: What do you mean?

Guide: We are not the first to travel this path. Long ago, people from a small village fled their evil ruler. They packed all their possessions on the backs of llamas and crossed these steep mountain peaks in search of freedom.

Joseph: Impossible!

Guide: Not according to legend. The story is told that they climbed for weeks through deep snow and killing storms until they came to a valley of sweet-tasting water, green pastures, and rich soil.

Martin: I have heard this foolish tale before. Yet this is my second climb into

these mountains, and I tell you, no such valley exists.

Guide: Oh, the valley exists. It is called "the country of the blind."

Narr 1: Martin laughs, but Joseph and some of the others are fascinated.

Eloise Teasdale: Why is it called the country of the blind?

Guide: Because of a strange illness that came upon people in the valley. It left everyone sightless. Even after the sickness passed, the blindness remained. For generation after generation, children there were born without sight.

Eloise: How horrible!

Martin: (amused) This is the end, Mrs. Teasdale, is something native people made up to entertain gullible tourists like you.

Guide: (continuing) Their eyes shrank away to nothing, until only empty sockets remained in their faces. In time, people no longer knew what it meant to see.

Joseph: (doubtfully) Why haven't others found this country? Why haven't these blind people ventured out of their valley?

Guide: One man did. That is how we know the story. But soon after, an avalanche closed off the mountain passage into the valley, forever shutting off the outside world.

Martin: Well, if such a land does exist, it would be a simple task to rule over it.

Joseph: Why do you say that?

Martin: There's an old saying that goes, In the country of the blind the one-eyed man is king.

Eloise: And what does that mean?

Martin: Power, Mrs. Teasdale. The man with even the slightest advantage over others—no matter how limited—controls them. Because we can see, we could be kings in that valley.

Narr 2: Martin stands and fights his way through the blowing snow to get to his tent several yards away.

Eloise: (to Joseph) Are all Americans so arrogant?

Scene 2

Narr 3: By morning, the wind has died down. The climbers emerge from their snow-covered tents and discover that Martin is nowhere to be found.

Narr 1: His tent is empty. His sleeping gear is unrolled but has not been slept in.

Narr 2: Joseph stands at the edge of the rock shelf, looking down. Markings in the snow indicate that a small avalanche during the night passed very close to Martin's tent and over the edge of the shelf.

Guide: It seems that our young American has been swept away by an avalanche.

Joseph: There is no sight of Martin. The avalanche seems to be the only explanation for his disappearance.

Eloise: Well, we must attempt to find him right away. Perhaps there is still hope that he is—

Guide: Alive? No one could survive a fall off the edge here. It is thousands of meters straight down.

Narr 3: The guide shakes his head sadly.

Eloise: But surely...

Joseph: He could be buried under 6 meters of snow, Eloise. We can't risk

our own lives for one that is almost surely lost.

Narr 1: They turn away from the edge reluctantly, leaving Martin to his fate.

Scene 3

Narr 2: That fate, however, is not what they imagined. It is not what Martin imagined either. He remembers falling in the dark through the wind and snow like a bird without wings.

Narr 3: Now, half-conscious, Martin hears birds singing. He feels the sun's warmth on his face.

Narr 1: Moaning, he opens his eyes. From the position of the sun, he can tell it's afternoon. Suddenly he notices two men in hooded robes standing near him.

Pedro: It sounds hurt.

Narr 2: Their hoods shadow their faces, so Martin cannot see them clearly.

Martin: Who are you? Where am I?

Narr 3: Martin tries to get to his feet, but his leg is badly twisted and won't hold his weight. He groans loudly.

Manuel: It is hurt.

Pedro: It is a man, I think, or a spirit coming down from the rocks.

Martin: Of course I'm a man! And any fool can see that I'm injured.

Manuel: See? What does that word mean?

Pedro: Its words are strange. We must be careful; it might be evil.

Narr 1: Pedro and Manuel step toward Martin with arms outstretched. Startled, Martin tries to back away, but the two men grab him.



Martin: (*frightened*) What are you doing? Let me go!

Narr 2: Manuel's fingers lightly touch Martin's head.

Manuel: How coarse its hair is—like a llama's.

Martin: (*struggling*) Stop it!

Pedro: (*firmly*) Hold still!

Narr 3: Pedro's fingers press Martin's lips, then move up to Martin's fluttering eyelids.

Pedro: (*shocked*) Feel the round lumps on its face! They move! It is an evil spirit!

Martin: What? Are you insane?

Narr 1: Both men lean closer. Martin sees their faces more clearly. The part

of their faces where eyes should be are sunken pockets of flesh.

Martin: You—you have no eyes!

Pedro: Eyes?

Manuel: It speaks words I do not understand.

Narr 2: The two men help Martin to his feet and try to lead him forward. Pain shoots through his leg, and he stumbles.

Manuel: Its senses are not right. It cannot hear the path, so it falls.

Martin: Wh-where are you taking me? Who are you?

Manuel: (*ignoring Martin*) Jacob will know what to do with this evil intruder.



Narr 3: Manuel's words send a chill down Martin's spine. But with his leg badly injured, Martin knows he cannot escape. And even if he could escape, Martin thinks, where could he possibly go?

Scene 4

Narr 1: The two men lead Martin to a village of small stone huts. The huts have doors but no windows.

Narr 2: Children crowd around the stranger, touching his hands and sniffing his clothes.

Manuel: Stand back! It is an evil spirit

from out of the rocks!

Narr 3: Martin sees that the children also have only dark shadows where their eyes should be.

Martin: (*under his breath*) None of them have eyes.

Narr 1: Manuel pushes Martin toward the largest hut.

Pedro: Jacob! We have found an evil spirit in the rocks!

Narr 2: The two lead Martin inside the hut, where it is completely dark. Martin stumbles and falls at the feet of a man sitting cross-legged on the floor.

Manuel: The spirit is very clumsy, Jacob. It stumbled many times on the road.

Martin: (*angrily*) I fell because I'm hurt. I twisted my leg.

Narr 3: Martin looks around, his eyes adjusting now to the darkness. He can dimly make out the hooded shapes of a half dozen people.

Martin: Who is in charge? It's dark as night in here.

Jacob: Dark? What is dark?

Pedro: This spirit babbles strange words, Jacob. Is it evil?

Martin: (*shouting*) I am not evil! (*to Jacob*) And I am not an "it"! I'm a man! I must get word back to New York that I am alive.

Jacob: Who is New York?

Martin: (*surprised*) Why . . . it's where I'm from. It's a long way from here—beyond the mountains.

Jacob: There is no place but here. You came from the rocks.

Martin: (*frustrated*) I was climbing up the rocks—in the mountains! I fell.

Narr 1: Martin waves his hand over his head to show how he tumbled over the edge of the cliff.

Jacob: Why do you move your hand like that, New York?

Martin: I'm not New York. New York is a—(shocked) Wait a minute! The legend! It's true! This is the country of the blind!

Pedro: Jacob, what is *blind*?

Narr 2: Jacob is not facing Maran, but he is listening carefully.

Yacob: We have many legends. New York, stories of how life began. First came the rocks and the trees: objects without the gift of touch.

Martin: This is incredible! Impossible to believe—you're all blind.

Yacob: (ignoring Martin) Then came llamas and a few wild creatures. And finally came people and angels.

Martin: Angels?

Manuel: They sing and make fluttering noises, but no one has ever been able to touch one.

Martin: Birds! You mean

birds! (to Yacob) Wait!

How did you know I

raised my hand just

now?

Yacob: I felt its wind, of course.

Pedro: I told you, Yacob. He is evil! He cannot feel or hear movement.

Yacob: No, he is not evil. His mind is not fully formed.

Martin: My mind isn't fully formed! I've got eyes. You do not.

Yacob: You came from the rocks to serve us. In time, New York, you will learn our legends and our wisdom.

Martin: Serve you? (laughing) Martin Cruz serves no one.

Yacob: (to Manuel) Lock him away until we can teach him.

Narr 3: Martin struggles, but the hooded men drag him away.

Scene 1

Narr 3: Martin sits on the floor inside the dark hut where his captors have locked him. He mutters to himself.

Martin: My mind not fully formed? Whom do they think they are speaking to? If it's true that the one-eyed man is king in the country of the blind, then they should serve me!

Narr 1: Martin leaps to his feet and pounds on the door.

Martin: Let me out! Let me out, you foolish, backward savages!

Narr 2: Suddenly, the door opens. Martin steps back as a young woman enters. She turns her head, following his motion, immediately identifying his location by the smell of his body.

Martin: (surprised) Who are you?

Melinda: I am Yacob's daughter, Melinda. I have brought you food.

Narr 3: She kneels with a bowl of food. Martin cannot take his eyes off her. She is not like the others.

Narr 1: Her eye sockets are smooth circles, not black and sunken holes like those of the others in the village. She has long eyelashes, something the others do not have.

Martin: Your eyes...

Melinda: My what?

Narr 2: Martin realizes that everything the guide has told him is true. The people do not understand what sight is. Light and darkness, day and night have no meaning.

Martin: Your face—it is beautiful.

Melinda: I am ugly. The others say so.

Martin: They can't see your beauty.

the way I can.

Melinda: Don't talk like a fool, New York. It is dangerous. You must learn to behave, or they won't let you stay here.

Martin: (sullenly) My name is not New York. It is Martin.

Melinda: Martin is a lovely name.

Martin: And I can come and go as I please. Do you know why? Because I have the power of sight. I can see.

Narr 3: Martin takes her hand and places it on his eyes. Terrified by the strange lumps, Melinda pulls her hand away and runs from the hut.

Martin: Wait! Melinda! Come back!

Narr 1: Martin yanks on the door, but it is locked once again.

Scene 2

Narr 2: Weeks pass.

Gradually, Yacob allows

Martin to spend more

time outside the hut.

Martin rests his leg, observing the villagers.

Narr 3: During the day, the time of warmth, they sleep. At

night, the time of coolness, they

work in the fields and spin llama wool into thick blankets and coats.

Martin: (softly, to himself as he watches them) They're more like animals than people. They cannot see, but they can hear the wings of a bird or the pounding of a man's heart.

Narr 1: The valley is hemmed in on three sides by sheer rock walls towering thousands of meters into the sky. To the east, the mountaintops are snow-capped.

Narr 2: To the west is a dense forest of pine trees. Martin notices that the people never enter the forest.

Narr 3: Each day, Melinda brings food

to Martin. With each visit she becomes less frightened of him.

Narr 1: Although she would never tell her father, she loves hearing the "fairy tales" Martin tells her of the world beyond the rocks.

Martin: (touching her cheek) Your face is so white. It is like snow.

Melinda: What is *white*?

Martin: A color.

Melinda: (smiling) What is *color*?

Martin: Color is... oh, how can I put it into words? I only wish you could see what I see—sunlight like diamonds in the snow, leaves dancing in the wind.

Melinda: We feel the wind, Martin. It's cool and sometimes wet and smells of pine. No one sees it.

Martin: I do! (loudly) I do!

Melinda: Shhh, Martin!

They will punish you if you do not learn the proper ways. They will stop me from being with you.

Narr 2: Melinda is Martin's only joy in this strange land. It infuriates him that Yacob would keep them apart.

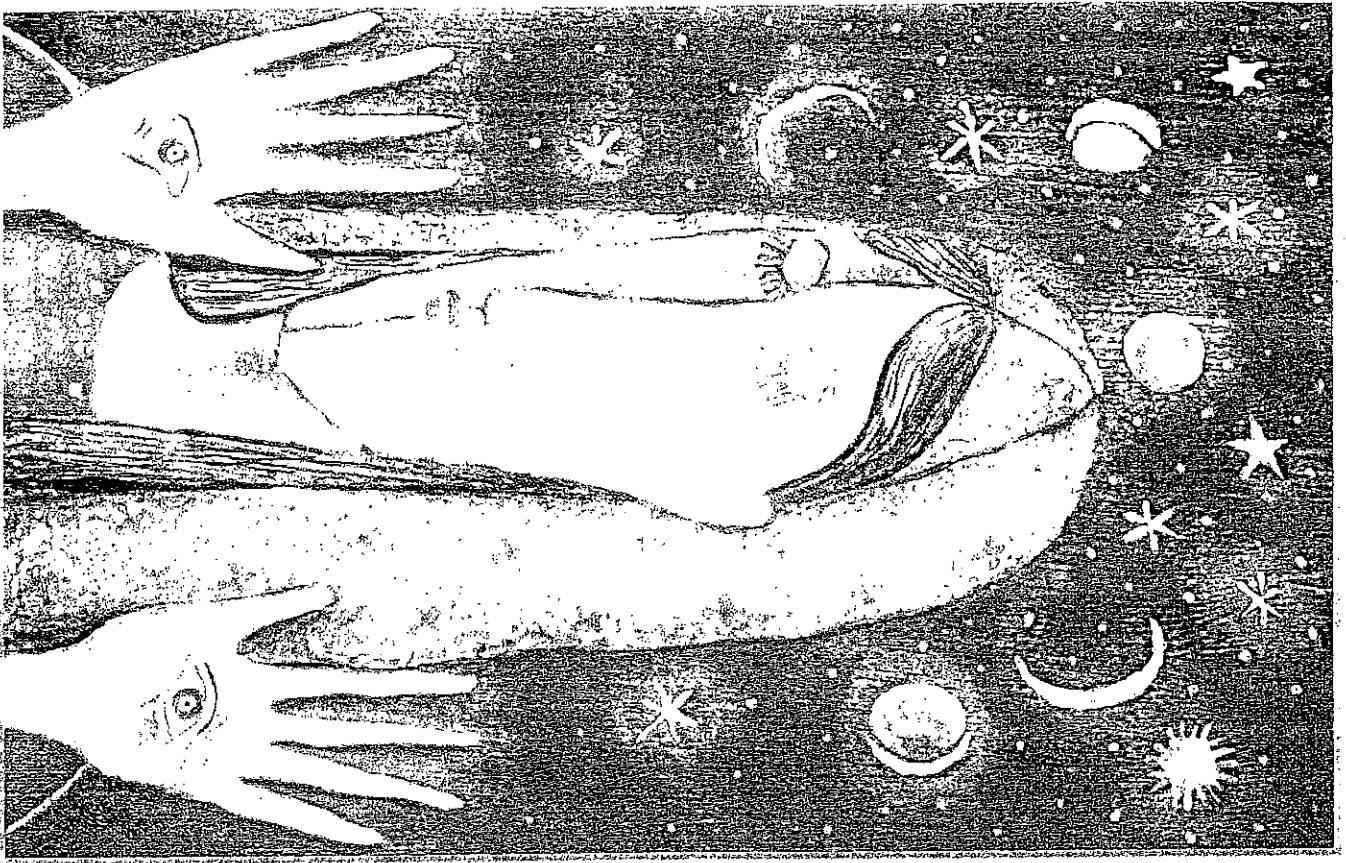
Martin: (bitterly) Your father demands that I serve him! I will never do it! He will serve me. I am... a... a king compared to him!

Narr 3: The smile fades from Melinda's face.

Melinda: There are no kings here. To wish to be king is evil. Long ago, my people ran away from such evil. We are free now. We rule ourselves.

Martin: But I am not free, Melinda. I am Yacob's prisoner. He controls every move I make. But I have two good eyes, and I intend to use them.

Narr 1: Martin stands. His injured leg is still slightly stiff, but he has made



up his mind. The time has come to take action.

Melinda: Martin, where are you going?

Narr 2: Martin ignores Melinda and pushes past her. He walks quickly toward the field, where he sees Pedro working with other villagers.

Melinda: Martin! Wait! Don't leave!

Narr 3: Melinda follows Martin.

Narr 1: Pedro hears Martin moving through the field of wheat. He does not need to ask who it is. He recognizes Martin by smell.

Pedro: What are you doing here?

Narr 2: Martin does not answer. Instead, he grabs Pedro's spade and swings it over his head.

Martin: (*shouting*) I am king of the blind! I am the one-eyed king!

Pedro: You crazy fool! You are worse now than when we found you!

Martin: I am not crazy! From now on, you will obey me!

Pedro: (*laughing*) Obey you? An idiot? **Martin:** Stop laughing! Stop laughing, or I'll hurt you!

Narr 3: The others gather in a wide circle around Martin.

Yacob: (*shouting*) New York! Put down that spade!

Martin: Stay away from me! I'll hurt you! I promise I will!

Narr 1: Pedro reaches for Martin, knowing from all his senses exactly where Martin is standing.

Narr 2: Martin swings. The tool strikes Pedro, knocking him to the ground.

Melinda: I smell blood! Martin! What have you done!

Narr 3: Martin stares in shock at Pedro, suddenly aware of what he has done. As the villagers close in on him, Martin drops the spade and runs toward the pine forest.

Scene 7

Narr 1: For two days, Martin wanders through the forest, searching for food. But he has no weapon—not even a snare to catch a wild rabbit.

Narr 2: When the frost falls at night, he tries to sleep beneath low-hanging pine boughs.

Narr 3: On the third day, fear fills him. Hungry and thirsty, Martin realizes he is trapped. In the forest or in the village, Martin is Yacob's captive.

Martin: (*sadly*) At least in the village there is food . . . and Melinda.

Narr 1: On the fourth day, Martin emerges from the forest and returns to the village.

Narr 2: The villagers seize him at once and take him to the circle of huts, where Yacob is waiting.

Yacob: Why did you act the way you did, New York?

Narr 3: Martin looks at Melinda. She seems more beautiful than ever. She waits anxiously for his answer.

Martin: I—I was insane. But that was because my mind is not fully formed. My senses are imperfect.

Yacob: That is better. And do you still believe there is such a thing as *seeing*? **Martin:** No. That was nonsense. The word means nothing.

Narr 1: Again, Martin looks at Melinda. Her face is sad.

Yacob: And what is overhead? **Narr 2:** Martin recites the lesson that Melinda has been teaching him.

Martin: Overhead, ten times the height of a man, there is a roof above the world.

Yacob: Of what is the roof made? **Narr 3:** Martin looks up at the blue sky and the fleecy clouds. He swallows.

Martin: Rock—smooth rock.

Yacob: (*pleased*) Very good.

Martin: (*pleading*) No more questions, please! I need some food, or I shall die!

Scene 8

Narr 1: In the following weeks, Martin does whatever Yacob says.

Narr 2: But some nights, just before dawn, Martin stands in the fields and watches the sun rising above the towering mountain peaks to the east.

Martin: (*to himself*) How could I have fallen from such a height? Maybe these people are right—there is no other world but this valley.

Narr 3: One night, as he goes to the fields, Martin sees Melinda sitting in the moonlight, spinning llama wool into cloth.

Narr 1: He stops for a few moments before Yacob can find him.

Martin: When I am with you, I don't care if I never go back to that other world beyond the rocks. Marry me, and I'll stay here forever.

Melinda: Father would never let us.

Martin: (*angrily*) Because he thinks I am a fool, isn't that so?

Melinda: Perhaps there might be a way we can be together. I've heard the medicine woman speaking to my father about your . . . your eyes.

Martin: You do believe me, don't you? You know I can see!

Melinda: Martin, what I believe means nothing. The medicine woman says the fluttering "orbs" in your head rub against your brain. That is the cause of your madness, she claims.

Narr 2: Martin stares at Melinda, horrified at what she might be suggesting.

Martin: (*coldly*) And what does the

medicine woman say is the cure?

Melinda: I would never ask it of you. Never! But it is the only way my father would allow us to marry.

Martin: Lose my sight?

Melinda: Once those orbs are removed, you will be normal, Martin.

Martin: No! I can't!

Scene 9

Narr 3: For weeks, Martin is unable to sleep. During the warm sunlit hours while the others sleep, he sits brooding outside Yacob's hut.

Martin: (*softly*) If I give up my sight, the world will vanish for me. The sky truly will be rock.

Narr 1: But then Martin thinks of Melinda. Losing his sight would make him a citizen instead of a servant.

Melinda would be his.

Narr 2: Finally, Martin makes up his mind. He approaches Yacob.

Martin: I will do it.

Narr 3: Yacob nods solemnly.

Yacob: Tomorrow it will be done.

Scene 10

Narr 1: On his last day with sight, Martin watches the sunrise.

Narr 2: He stares too at the mountains seeing gorges and rock gullies that he had not taken time to notice before.

Narr 3: Suddenly he sits up and stares more closely at the rock walls.

Martin: (*softly to himself*) That gully—it leads to that narrow chimney passage between the rock walls. A good climber might be able to wedge himself up the passage and come out on those

rock ledges way up there.

Narr 1: Martin is so busy studying the route up the cliffs that he is not aware of Melinda's approach.

Melinda: (*gently*) Martin? It is time.

Narr 2: He sees that the villagers have assembled outside Yacob's hut. The medicine woman waits, a sharp knife hanging from her belt.

Melinda: If a woman's heart can repay you for what you are about to do, I promise you, Martin, I will.

Narr 3: As she takes his hand and they walk to the hut, Martin looks back at the cliffs and the chimney passage.

Martin: It's amazing that I never saw that before.

Yacob: In a few minutes, you will speak no more of seeing. You'll be one of us.

Narr 1: The medicine woman places a firm hand under his chin and raises her knife.

Martin: (*screaming*) No! No!

Narr 2: Martin pushes the medicine woman's hand away, knocking the knife to the ground. He picks the knife up and faces the villagers.

Yacob: Seize him!

Martin: Melinda! I cannot do this! Not even for you. I must go back to my world.

Melinda: Martin, wait!

Narr 3: But Martin, running, does not look back.

Yacob: (*angrily*) He defied us! Capture him and bring him back.

Narr 1: Sniffing for Martin's trail and listening for the sound of his footsteps, the villagers pursue Martin.

Narr 2: Gasping, Martin reaches the slope and climbs up among the boulders.

Martin: (*shouting*) Stop or I'll call down thunder and cause the sky to fall!

Yacob: Do not listen to him!

Manuel: Only a god can make thunder.

Martin: I warned you.

Narr 3: Martin leans against a large boulder and sends it crashing down the incline. The motion of the large rock loosens other boulders. Martin pushes them too.

Pedro: Yacob! The air is filled with thunder!

Manuel: Truly, the rock sky is falling on us.

Yacob: Do not fear this madman!

Martin: (*shouting*) Do not pursue me! I return to where only gods are allowed.

Narr 1: Panting but triumphant, Martin watches the villagers scatter. Finally, Yacob turns away as well.

Scene 11

Narr 2: In a tiny inn overlooking the mighty Andes, Martin sits alone by a fireplace. Two mountain climbers glance at him, then talk to one another.

Mountain Climber 1: He's the one, I tell you—back from the dead after many months. He was lost in an avalanche.

Mountain Climber 2: Impossible! No one can survive that long in the Andes.

Climber 1: He babbles to himself, saying he is the one-eyed king . . . claims he discovered a country of the blind, where people helped him see.

Climber 2: (*laughing*) Fool's talk! That's only a local fable natives tell to entertain tourists. I've climbed these mountains. Believe me, there is no country of the blind. ■

