

*(There is a knock on the door. Eli goes to answer it. Caesar Wilks enters. About fifty-two years old, he is the local constable and Black Mary's brother.)*

ELI: This a peaceful house.

CAESAR: These niggers gone crazy!

*(Caesar takes off his hat and hangs it up and goes and sits at the table.)*

They was over at the mill rioting. Busting out the goddamn windows. Talking about they ain't going to work. They had all kinds of chaos and confusion over there. Police had to arrest about two hundred people. I ain't never seen nothing like it. Want to bust out the goddamn windows! Running around like a pack of animals. Talking about they ain't going to work. You can't have that. The mill losing money. That's three days in a row they ain't went to work. They after me downtown to put a stop to it. I'll give them one more day. They don't go to work tomorrow there gonna be hell to pay.

*(Black Mary sets a bowl of beans in front of Caesar. Caesar notices Citizen.)*

There's another one come to get his soul washed. If I didn't know any better I'd think Aunt Ester was selling moonshine.

ELI: Citizen Barlow is helping me build a wall out back.

CAESAR: What you building a wall for? You don't need a wall. Somebody wanna come in they just climb over. That ain't nothing but a waste of time. You don't have to worry about a honest man. A thief ain't gonna let a wall stop him. He gonna climb over and keep climbing over until he find out crime don't pay. That's the way you stop a thief. A wall ain't gonna do nothing but make him mad. Hey, where you from?

CITIZEN: Alabama.

CAESAR: I don't want to catch you stealing nothing. I catch you stealing something I'm gonna put you in jail. How long you been up here?

CITIZEN: Four weeks.

CAESAR: Get you some shoes. This the city. You don't need them farming boots up here. Get you some shoes and stay out the saloons. You working? Where you working at?

CITIZEN: I'm looking for a job.

CAESAR: Go over to the mill. They got jobs over there. Go over to the mill and tell them I sent you. Either that or go to Philadelphia. They got jobs in Philadelphia. It's too crowded here. Too many niggers breed trouble. Move on down to Philadelphia. If you stay around here you stay out of trouble. My name's Caesar. I'm the boss man around here. What's your name?

CITIZEN: Citizen Barlow.

CAESAR: Are you a troublemaker, Citizen Barlow? You ever been in jail?

CITIZEN: I ain't never been in jail.

CAESAR: That's where you heading. You got to have visible means of support around here. If I see you standing around looking to steal something and you ain't got two dollars in your pocket you going to jail. You understand? Get you a job and stay out of trouble. Stay off the streets.

CITIZEN: I ain't looking to steal nothing.

CAESAR: That's my sister. Black Mary's my sister. I want you to stay away from her. I don't want you looking at her wrong.

BLACK MARY: Leave him alone, Caesar.

CAESAR: I'm just schooling him. I like him. I don't want to see him get in any trouble.

CITIZEN: My mama told me to stay out of trouble.

CAESAR: Your mama told you right. Where you living? You got a place to stay? You got money to pay your rent?

CITIZEN: I ain't got no place.

CAESAR: Come see me. I'll give you a place to stay. You got to pay the rent though. If you can't pay the rent you got to move

on let somebody else pay it. You know how to read? You know how to count money?

CITIZEN: I know how to count money good.

CAESAR: Here . . . here go a quarter. I'm gonna see what you do with that. These niggers take and throw their money away in the saloon and get mad when it's gone. I give one fellow a quarter and he turn around and give it to the candy man. I say he could have did something with that quarter. It wasn't much but it was twenty-five cents more than he had. He took and threw it away. He can't see past his nose. He can't see it's all set up for him to do anything he want. See, he could have took and bought him a can of shoe polish and got him a rag. If he could see that far he'd look up and find twenty-five dollars in his pocket. Twenty-five dollars buys you an opportunity. You don't need but five dollars to get in the crap game. That's five opportunities he done threw away. The candy man gonna get him a bigger wagon and another five pound of sugar. He gonna be digging a ditch the rest of his life. I'm gonna see what you do. You turn that twenty-five cents into five dollars and you come and see me and I'll give you a job.

*(Citizen shoves the quarter back across the table.)*

CITIZEN: I don't want nobody to give me nothing.

CAESAR: I can see you one of them hardheaded niggers. You have to bust you upside the head a couple of times. Then you straighten up. You watch yourself. See, 'cause you just got on my list. I told you I'm the boss man around here. Ask anybody. They'll tell you who Caesar is.

BLI: Best be getting back to work on that wall, Citizen. We got a lot of work to do.

*(Citizen exits.)*

CAESAR: Keep your eye on him. That's one you got to watch. Ain't nothing missing is there? He liable to steal the coffeepot.

BLACK MARY: Caesar, why don't you leave him alone.

CAESAR: I ain't saying nothing bad about him. I like him. He remind me of myself when I was a young man. But if I was you I'd keep my eye on him. I'd feed him in the yard.

*(He notices Solly's shoes.)*

I see you got a new pair of shoes, Solly.

SOLLY: I got a new coat too but I'm scared to wear it. People might think I'm a rich man like you.

CAESAR: Money ain't got nobody's name on it. It's floating out there go on and grab you some. I got a new coat too. I'm gonna wear it tomorrow.

SOLLY: If you wear yours I'll wear mine.

BLI: I hear tell Reverend Tolliver went downtown and tried to talk to the mayor.

CAESAR: What makes him think the mayor's gonna see him? The mayor ain't gonna see him. Wanna bury that damn fool out of his church. I told him not to do it. How he gonna get a Christian burial? Man killed himself. He steal a bucket of nails and then go run and jump in the river and stay there till he die. How he gonna get a Christian burial?

SOLLY: He say he didn't do it.

CAESAR: I'd say I didn't do it too if the law was after me. You arrest somebody for loitering and they'll swear they ain't standing there. That don't mean nothing to me 'cause he say he didn't do it. I had witnesses. Five hundred people standing around watching the man drown. I tried to break it up. Get them to go home. But they wanna stand around and watch a damn fool drown himself in the river. I tried to save him but he ain't had enough sense to save himself. People wanna blame me but I got to keep order. Just like them niggers wanna riot over a bucket of nails. Talking about they ain't going to work. Talking about closing the mill down. They don't understand the mill is what hold everything together. If you close down the mill the city would be in