

*(Citizen tries to go around Eli, who grabs him and shoves him toward the door. They knock over a lamp and Citizen's hat falls off as Eli tussles with him. Aunt Ester enters from her room. Her presence has an immediate calming effect on Citizen. Aunt Ester picks up Citizen's hat, brushes it off, and hands it to him.)*

**AUNT ESTER:** Didn't he say Tuesday, baby? Go on I'll see you on Tuesday.

*(Citizen takes his hat and goes out the door. Aunt Ester turns around and goes back into her room. The lights go down on the scene.)*

## Act One

### SCENE I

*The lights come up on Eli and Black Mary in the kitchen. They have just finished breakfast. Eli stands at the window looking out.*

**ELI:** He still standing there. He been standing there since he left out of here yesterday. Aunt Ester told him she'd see him on Tuesday and he went and stood across the street there. I don't know what he want to see her about. He went right out there and stood across the street. If he go somewhere he come right back. He been out there every time I look.

**BLACK MARY:** Who is he?

**ELI:** He didn't say. He just say he wanted to see Aunt Ester. He look like he just come up here. He still wearing clodhoppers.

**BLACK MARY:** If he been standing over there he must not have nowhere to go.

**ELI:** He can go somewhere and sit down. Today's Saturday. Tuesday's a long way to go. Unless he gonna sleep standing up.

BLACK MARY: He waiting to see if Aunt Ester come out.

ELI: He gonna have a long wait. I ain't know her to leave the house in the past twenty years.

BLACK MARY: He probably go down under the Brady Street Bridge to sleep. They got a whole bunch of people sleeping down there.

ELI: They gonna have some more the way Caesar keep evicting people. He put out two more families yesterday. He charging by the week. They get one week behind and he put them out. He don't ask no questions. He just gather up what little bit of stuff they got and sit it out on the street. Then he arrest them for being out there. What Aunt Ester say?

BLACK MARY: She say no. I asked her if she wanted to get up she say no. I asked her if she was sick she say no.

ELI: It's going on four days now. I ain't never know her to sleep that long. Long as I known her.

BLACK MARY: I asked her did she want anything to eat she say no.

*(There is a knock on the door. Eli goes to answer it. Rutherford Selig enters. He is carrying a frying pan and a can of kerosene.)*

ELI: Hey Selig, come on in.

SELIG: Hey Eli. Here's your kerosene. I got your rocks on the wagon. Say Black Mary I got you that frying pan.

*(Black Mary takes the frying pan and looks at it.)*

That's good iron. You can't get iron like that every day. That's high-grade iron. The bottom's nice and flat.

BLACK MARY: How much you gonna charge me? I paid too much for that coffeepot.

SELIG: I'll let you have it for two dollars. That's a three-dollar frying pan. For you it's two dollars. I would charge you fifty cents more but that's my last one like that and I'll be glad to

get rid of it . . . get me a new order. You want the fourteen-inch? I'll have that next week.

BLACK MARY: I paid too much for that coffeepot. I don't want to pay too much for this frying pan.

SELIG: Well, how about dustpans? I'll let you have a dustpan with it for two dollars and twenty-five cents.

*(Black Mary hesitates.)*

I'll tell you what. Make it the two dollars and I'll just give you the dustpan.

*(Black Mary gives him two dollars.)*

Say Eli, I come from upriver. I see where they got the mill shut down.

ELI: They had a man named Garret Brown who jumped into the river. Caesar chased him and he jumped in and wouldn't come out. They say he stole a bucket of nails. He said he didn't do it. They having his funeral today.

SELIG: I seen the people standing around down at the church. They got a bunch of people standing around down there. I was wondering what they standing around there for.

ELI: They gonna bury him this afternoon. They gonna bury him out of Reverend Tolliver's church. They was supposed to bury him yesterday out of Reverend Flowers' church but Caesar stopped them. He went up to Reverend Flowers and told him it was against the law. The Christian law. Man ain't set foot in a church for thirty years talking about the Christian law. Caesar's just mad at him 'cause he didn't get a chance at him.

BLACK MARY: He could have come out of the water.

ELI: They couldn't get him to come out. Caesar told him he wasn't gonna arrest him. Told him he'd give him a bowl of soup and some dry clothes. He told Caesar to go to hell. Told his whole family to go to hell. He talking about you, Black Mary.



**SELIG:** You can't stay in there but so long. That cold will get to you and shut your body down.

**ELI:** He just treading water. Holding on to the barge. Caesar see he wasn't gonna come out he tried to beat him over the head with a two-by-four. Talking about he wasn't gonna do nothing to him. I believe he would have killed him right on the spot if he came out.

**BLACK MARY:** He wouldn't have done nothing but arrest him and the judge give him thirty days.

**ELI:** Well, as it is he dead.

**SELIG:** If he jumped in the river and didn't come out I'd have to believe he didn't do it. They had a man down in Kentucky was accused of stealing a horse. He said he didn't do it. Turned him into an outlaw. Made him the biggest horse thief in Kentucky. He lived to steal horses. He must of stole five hundred horses. And every one he sent back word: I stole that one but I didn't steal the first one. I stole that one but I didn't steal the first one. They never did catch him. He died and the horse thieving stopped. My daddy told me about it.

*(There is a knock on the door. Eli goes to answer it. Solly enters singing "I Belong to the Band." He is sixty-seven years old. He wears a long coat and a battered hat. He carries a basket and a stick.)*

**SOLLY** *(Singing):*

I belong to the band  
I belong to the band  
I belong to the band, oh yes I do  
Talking about that Railroad Band.

**ELI:** Hey Solly, come on in.

**SOLLY:** The people say they ain't going back to work at the mill. They lining up for the funeral down at the church. They lining up all around the block. Look like every Negro in Pittsburgh down there.

**ELI:** Reverend Tolliver's gonna get rich. The people appreciate him opening up his church.

**BLACK MARY:** Why don't you leave that basket outside? I told you leave it out there.

**SOLLY:** I'm afraid somebody's gonna run off with it.

**BLACK MARY:** Who's gonna steal a basket of dog shit?

**SOLLY:** It's pure! It's called pure! They got pure collectors all over the world. People been collecting pure for four hundred years.

**BLACK MARY:** I don't care what it's called. Who would want to steal it.

**SOLLY:** Anybody would steal it. Look here. *(Pulls some money out of his pocket)* Where you think this come from? It come from this basket of pure. People will kill people over money. You know if they kill somebody over money they will steal anything that ain't nailed down.

**BLACK MARY:** Talking about somebody stealing a basket of dog shit.

**SOLLY:** A lot of people get confused by this pure. They don't know the shoemakers use it to work the leather. I had one old gal tell me, "Get on away from me you smell like dog shit." I showed her that two dollars I got from Butera and she told me come and go home with her. Cooked me up a whole pan of cornbread. I went on back up there and she was gone. I don't know what happened to her.

**SELIG:** There is a lot of them like that. Where you don't know what happened with them.

**SOLLY:** I do have my Special Rider though. She up on Webster. I'd marry her if I wasn't in love with somebody else.

**BLACK MARY:** Here, Selig. I baked you a loaf of bread.

**SELIG:** I thank you Black Mary. That way I won't have to stop by Caesar's bakery. I got to get on. I'll unload them rocks out back.

*(Selig gets up to leave. Eli hands him two dollars.)*

**ELI:** Thanks, Selig.