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SF PERUSALS

August Wilson's

Gem of the Ocean

A Samuel French Acting Edition

SAMUEL FRENCH
FOUNDED 1830

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GEM OF THE OCEAN premiered at The Goodman Theatre (Robert Falls, Artistic Director; Roche Schulfer, Executive Director) on April 28, 2003 in Chicago, Illinois. The director was Marion McClinton and the consulting producer was Benjamin Mordecai with set design by David Gallo, costume design by Constanza Romero, lighting design by Donald Holder, sound design by Michael Bodeen and Rob Milburn, music and musical direction by Dwight Andrews. The Production Stage Manager was Joseph Drummond and the Stage Managers were Narda Alcorn and T. Paul Lynch. The cast was as follows:

ELI . . . . . Paul Butler
CITIZEN BARLOW . . . . . .Kenny Leon
AUNT ESTER . . . . . Greta Oglesby
BLACK MARY . . . . . .Yvette Ganier
RUTHERFORD SELIG . . . . . .Raynor Scheine
SOLLY TWO KINGS . . . . . Anthony Chisholm
CAESAR . . . . . Peter Jay Fernandez

The play was produced at Center Theatre Group's Mark Taper Forum (Gordon Davidson, Artistic Director; Charles Dillingham, Managing Director) on July 20, 2003 in Los Angeles, California. The director was Marion McClinton and the consulting producer was Benjamin Mordecai, with set design by David Gallo, costume design by Constanza Romero, lighting design by Donald Holder, sound design by Dan Moses Schreier, and music composition and arrangement by Kathryn Bostic. The cast was as follows:

ELI . . . . . Al White
CITIZEN BARLOW . . . . . John Earl Jelks
AUNT ESTER . . . . . .Phylicia Rashad
BLACK MARY . . . . . .Yvette Ganier
RUTHERFORD SELIG . . . . . .Raynor Scheine
SOLLY TWO KINGS . . . . . Anthony Chisholm
CAESAR . . . . . Peter Francis James

The play was produced at Huntington Theatre Company (Nicholas Martin, Artistic Director; Michael Maso, Managing Director) on September 24, 2004 in Boston, Massachusetts. It was presented by special arrangement with Sageworks. The director was Kenny Leon and the consulting producer was Benjamin Mordecai with set design by David Gallo, costume design by Constanza Romero, lighting design by Donald Holder, sound design by Dan Moses Schreier, original music composition and arrangement by Kathryn Bostic, fight direction by J. Allen Suddeth, and dramaturgy by Todd Kreidler. The Production Stage Manager was Narda E. Alcorn and the Stage Manager was Jason Rossman. The cast was as follows:

ELI . . . . . Eugene Lee
CITIZEN BARLOW . . . . . John Earl Jelks
AUNT ESTER . . . . . Phylicia Rashad
BLACK MARY . . . . . LisaGay Hamilton
RUTHERFORD SELIG . . . . . Raynor Scheine
SOLLY TWO KINGS . . . . . Anthony Chisholm
CAESAR . . . . . Ruben Santiago-Hudson

On December 6, 2004, this production of ***GEM OF THE OCEAN*** opened on Broadway at the Walter Kerr Theatre with the same cast and creative team. It was produced by Carole Shorenstein Hays and Jujamcyn Theaters, in association with Robert G. Bartner. The production supervisors were Neil A. Mazzella and Gene O'Donovan.

CHARACTERS

ELI – Aunt Ester's gatekeeper and longtime friend of Solly.

CITIZEN BARLOW – A young man from Alabama who is in spiritual turmoil. Late twenties/early thirties.

AUNT ESTER TYLER – A very old, yet vital spiritual advisor for the community.

BLACK MARY – Aunt Ester's protégé and housekeeper. Late twenties.

RUTHERFORD SELIG – A traveling peddler who is a frequent visitor of the house.

SOLLY TWO KINGS – Suitor to Aunt Ester, former Underground Railroad conductor. Sixty-seven.

CAESAR WILKS – Black Mary's brother and local constable. About fifty-two.

SETTING

The play is set in 1904, the Hill District, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, in the parlor of Eli, Aunt Ester and Black Mary's home at 1839 Wylie Avenue.

To my daughters:
Sakina Ansari
Azula Carmen Wilson,
May the circle be unbroken

PROLOGUE

(The lights come up on **ELI** *in the kitchen. It is late night. He is preparing to retire. He draws the shade and is preparing to put out the light when there is a knock at the door. The knock grows insistent.* **ELI** *finally goes and answers the door.* **CITIZEN BARLOW** *enters. He is agitated.)*

ELI. This a peaceful house.

CITIZEN. I come to see Aunt Ester.

ELI. You got to come back Tuesday. She don't see nobody till Tuesday.

CITIZEN. What you mean come back? The people say go see Aunt Ester. This 1839 Wylie ain't it?

ELI. Come back Tuesday.

*(***ELI** *starts to close the door.* **CITIZEN** *pushes his way in.)*

CITIZEN. I ain't going nowhere till I see Aunt Ester.

ELI. You got to come back Tuesday.

*(***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 I

Scene One

(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.

SELIG. If you need any more rocks you let me know. I can get you some cobblestones if you want.

ELI. Naw, I like the rocks.

SOLLY. Hey Selig. I see you got a new horse.

SELIG. Ain't she a beauty? Name's Sally. I got her from Jacob Herlich. He going up to New York to go in business with his brother.

SOLLY. Yeah, that's a nice-looking horse.

SELIG. I ain't had a speck of trouble out of her since I had her. I say get up and she go. Whoa and she stop. I feed her some oats and she carry me wherever I want to go. If everything go right I'm gonna get me a new wagon. See you next time, Black Mary. Tell Aunt Ester I asked about her.

BLACK MARY. Take care of yourself, Selig.

*(***SELIG** *exits.* **ELI** *crosses back over to the window.)*

ELI. Come on and help me build this wall.

SOLLY. Where you building a wall at?

ELI. Out back. I'm gonna take and build a wall around the side there.

SOLLY. You can get you some wood and build you a fence.

ELI. I want a wall.

SOLLY. I'll help you. When you wanna start?

ELI. Anytime you ready. We can start tomorrow.

SOLLY. All right.

ELI. I want a wall. See if I can keep Caesar on the other side. The way he going he gonna have everybody in jail.

BLACK MARY. Caesar's doing his job. That's what the people can't see.

SOLLY. Caesar's the kind of people I would want working for me. If I ever get me a plantation I'm gonna hire him to keep my niggers in line.

I got a letter from my sister. Hey, Black Mary…read this for me. *(hands her the letter)*

BLACK MARY. *(reads)* Dear Solomon,

I am writing to let you know the times are terrible here the most anybody remember since bondage. The people are having a hard time with freedom. I can't hold on here anymore. The white peoples is gone crazy and won't let anybody leave. They beat one fellow on the road so bad his mama say, "Who is he?" They killed some more and say the colored can't buy any tickets on the train to get away. Say they will sink the ferry if

any colored on it. I want to leave to come North but it is too bad. It is a hard time for everybody. Write and let me know what to do as I try to hold on but can't.

Your loving sister,

Eliza Jackson

SOLLY. I got to go back down there.

ELI. I would go with you but I got to take care of Aunt Ester.

SOLLY. I got to go back down there and get my sister. I'm gonna see if Jefferson Culpepper wanna go with me.

ELI. I'm surprised Jefferson Culpepper can walk old as he is. You talking about eight hundred miles. Eight hundred miles one way is eight hundred miles coming back. He need to go find him a rocking chair somewhere.

SOLLY. I believe I can make it back down there if I don't get sleepy. I get sleepy sometime and don't know if I got it mixed up with the time and it really be night even though it look like the daytime. A lot of things can fool you like that. A lot of things shine like gold ain't gold. A lot of brass shine like gold.

*(***AUNT ESTER** *enters.)*

AUNT ESTER. What you doing making all that noise out here? I smell pigfeet. Black Mary, put me on a pot of tea. Eli, see if you can get that stove in there to work. I don't know what it is. Seem like I be cold all the time.

ELI. You ain't getting sick is you?

AUNT ESTER. I ain't said I was sick I'm just cold. I don't know what it is.

*(***ELI** *exits into* **AUNT ESTER***'s room.)*

SOLLY. I brought you some pure.

AUNT ESTER. Black Mary, see what he got there.

SOLLY. I got a little bit of everything. Got some thirty-day. Got some sixty-day.

AUNT ESTER. See what it look like, Black Mary.

*(***BLACK MARY** *takes one of the bags and opens it and looks inside.)*

You can't tell nothing by looking at it. Bring it here! How you gonna be scared of dog shit? That's all it is.

BLACK MARY. I ain't said I was scared of it.

AUNT ESTER. Bring it here!

*(***BLACK MARY** *takes her the bag.* **AUNT ESTER** *breaks open a piece of pure and empties it in her hand.)*

Look at that. God made that! Ain't nothing in God's creation that ain't good. Look at that. See he ain't been eating nothing but bone. Give me some of this, Solly. What else you got?

*(***BLACK MARY** *exits up the stairs.)*

SOLLY. There's a Great Dane up on Arcena Street. I been trying to get some of that but he don't never let him out. Great big old dog. Look like a small horse.

AUNT ESTER. They say that helps with tomatoes. But I'll be satisfied with this.

(She takes some coins out of a small purse and gives them to **SOLLY**.*)*

I don't know what got in that child. Seem like she don't want to learn nothing.

SOLLY. Black Mary stubborn. Her and Caesar just alike. Only she ain't got his evilness. But she got everything else. They say the apple don't fall too far from the tree. But sometime it fall far enough. That's the difference between her and Caesar. The apple fell and then it rolled a little bit.

*(***BLACK MARY** *enters carrying her purse.)*

BLACK MARY. I'm going shopping.

AUNT ESTER. I thought you was gonna do the laundry.

BLACK MARY. I got to go down on Logan Street.

AUNT ESTER. It ain't like it's gonna do itself. You got to plan better. I told you the key is to plan. You plan right you can unlock any door. You got to run down on Logan Street *and* do the laundry. You got to do both.

BLACK MARY. I ain't say I wasn't gonna do it. I said I'm going out now.

*(***BLACK MARY** *exits.)*

AUNT ESTER. She running down there to see *Percy* Saunders. I know where she going. She used to go see Percy Saunders and Robert Smiley. I done told her the people gonna throw stones at her.

SOLLY. You can't keep a man and a woman apart. They was made for each other. That's what I'm trying to tell you. Every time I see you it make me feel good.

AUNT ESTER. You tell that to all the women. They say you got one on every street. You must not have none on Wylie Avenue.

SOLLY. I got two! One for each arm. Everybody know that. But what they don't know is I don't want that no more. You the only one know that. You the only one need to know. I been blessed. You know how they say count your blessings? I can't count that far. I never did live my life for a woman. That's one blessing I ain't had. I'm never in one place long enough. If I lived life for a woman I couldn't live it for the people. The Bible say you can't serve two masters.

AUNT ESTER. Come on and let's get married. You always talking about getting married. I done had four husbands I might as well have five. I'm trying to catch up with Black Mary. She told me she had seventeen husbands.

SOLLY. Black Mary ain't had no husbands. She too stubborn.

AUNT ESTER. She had seventeen rings and I give her a dime for each one of them. That was in a dream I had about Black Mary before I known her. I had that dream and the next day Black Mary knocked on the door and

asked me if I had any laundry that needed washing. I told her to go upstairs and make up that bed 'cause anybody willing to do laundry was welcome to stay here. That's three years ago. She been here ever since. I had a dream about you last night.

SOLLY. My dreams won't stay in one place long enough for me to remember them.

AUNT ESTER. I dreamed you had a ship full of men and *you* was coming across the water. Had that stick and you was standing up in this boat full of men. You come and asked me what I was doing standing there. I told you I wanted to go back across the ocean. I asked you to take me. You said you had some work to do but that you would come back. Told me you had a magic stick and when you come back you would part the water so I could walk across. You come on back and all your men had drowned and the boat was sinking. You said you was going to get another boat and some more men. Said you would come back and smote the water. Then you walked off with that stick. Said you was going to Alabama.

SOLLY. I just got a letter from my sister today. I got to go! She say she can't hold on no more. Say the white people have gone crazy. I got to go back down there to get her. Eli say he staying here with you. But I got to go get my sister. This my last trip. I'm getting old. I can't do more than one more. I don't know what I'm gonna do then. I was thinking about living my life for you. But I got to go back down there and get my sister.

*(***ELI** *enters from* **AUNT ESTER***'s room.)*

ELI. I got that stove working. Just leave it set like it is. If it get too hot in there let me know.

*(***ELI** *goes to the coat rack to get his coat and hat.)*

Solly you ready to go down to Garret Brown's funeral?

*(***SOLLY** *goes to get his coat and hat.)*

AUNT ESTER. Come on back and get some of these pigfeet.

SOLLY. I want more than pigfeet. But I don't think you gonna give me none.

AUNT ESTER. Go on you old rascal you!

*(***SOLLY** *and* **ELI** *exit. The lights go down on the scene.)*

Scene Two

(The lights come up on the parlor. **CITIZEN BARLOW** *enters from the upstairs window. There is a knock on the door. No one answers. Another knock. Silence.* **CITIZEN** *enters from upstairs. Hungry, he heads straight for the kitchen and finds the bread box. He grabs a piece of bread, stuffs it in his mouth, grabs another piece, stuffs it in his pocket. He looks around for something else to eat when* **AUNT ESTER** *enters from her room.)*

AUNT ESTER. I didn't know that window was still open up there. No wonder I'm cold.

*(***CITIZEN** *is startled. He doesn't know what to do.)*

CITIZEN. I ain't gonna harm nobody.

AUNT ESTER. Eli gone out. He ain't coming back for a while. Black Mary gone shopping. Are you hungry? She got them pigfeet on but they ain't done yet. She gonna make up a pot of soup when she come back.

CITIZEN. I ain't no robber. You said to come back Tuesday. I can't wait till Tuesday. I can't wait. I have to see you now. They say you can help me. They say you wash people's souls.

AUNT ESTER. God the only one can wash people's souls. God got big forgiveness.

CITIZEN. The people say,"Go see Aunt Ester."

AUNT ESTER. You remind me of my Junebug. He was a nice-looking man like you. Had big hands. Do they call you Junebug? What's your name? My name is Ester Tyler. Some people call me Aunt Ester. What they call you?

CITIZEN. Citizen. They call me Citizen Barlow.

AUNT ESTER. Were you looking for money Mr. Citizen? I'd give you two dollars if I had my purse. Go in that room and get my purse and I'll give you two dollars. In the room there on the nightstand. You can go and get it and I'll give you two dollars.

CITIZEN. I ain't looking for no money. I ain't no robber. I come to see you.

AUNT ESTER. You remind me of my Junebug. He was the only one of my boys that caused me trouble. But I do believe he was a good boy. Just a rascal of a man. Is you a rascal, Mr. Citizen? I believes you is. Come sit down and keep me company. I get lonely sometimes. Do you ever get lonely? Being lonely is hard when there so many people around. I told myself I'm gonna die from loneliness. There was a man who ran and jumped in the river. They say he stole a bucket of nails. Did you hear about that? He died a lonely death. Wasn't nobody but him. All them people standing around watching and he was the only one who died.

CITIZEN. He could have come out the river.

AUNT ESTER. That's the only way he had to say he was innocent. It must have meant an awful lot for him to say that. He was willing to die to say that.

CITIZEN. I was standing there. I seen him. I thought he was gonna come out. I told myself he was gonna come out. The people was telling him to come on out then he just sunk down in the water. He kept saying he didn't steal the bucket of nails. Everything they say to him he just say he didn't steal the bucket of nails.

AUNT ESTER. Jesus Christ was falsely accused. He died a bitter death on the cross. This man was like Jesus. He say he would rather die innocent than to live guilty. You can go ahead and eat your bread, Mr. Citizen. Black Mary be back in a minute. I'll have her make up a pot of soup and some cornbread. You like cornbread? You look like you can eat a whole pan yourself.

CITIZEN. I like cornbread. Yeah.

AUNT ESTER. What you like best cornbread or biscuits? I can never make up my mind.

CITIZEN. I like cornbread but I like biscuits better.

AUNT ESTER. That was like my Junebug. I lost my Junebug Mr. Citizen. Oh that was a sad time. The darkest day I

ever did see was the day I lost my Junebug. You ever looked at a piece of rope, Mr. Citizen? God made that rope. It come right out the ground. You twist and weave it all together and you get a rope. Rope can help you do a lot of things. You tie it around a bucket and you can get water out of a well. You can tie things together with a piece of rope. God made the rope. It's man who sometimes gets in the way of God's creation and turns it over to the devil. Did you ever have love, Mr. Citizen? I've seen people have love and didn't know it. I had love and didn't know it. It's like money you can't ever have enough. You ever had enough money, Mr. Citizen? Some people ain't never had enough.

CITIZEN. I ain't got no money, Miss Tyler. I ain't never had none. Time I get it seem like it belong to somebody else. I owe the mill a lot of money.

AUNT ESTER. Where was you born, Mr. Citizen?

CITIZEN. Alabama. I only been up here four weeks. When I left Alabama they had all the roads closed to the colored people. I had to sneak out. Say they didn't want anybody to leave. Say we had to stay there and work. I told my mama I was going and she say okay. Told me, "There a big world out there." I kissed her. She told me she loved me and I left. I almost got caught a couple of times. I had to go out the back way and find my own roads. Took me almost two weeks. There was some other people out on the road and we helped each other. Me and a fellow named Roper Lee went over to the mill. They say they was paying two dollars a day but when we got there they say a dollar fifty. Then they say we got to pay two dollars room and board. They sent us over to a place the man say we got to put two dollars on top of that. Then he put two men to a room with one bed. The fellow I was with want to fight about it. I'm just starting out I don't want no trouble. I told him I would sleep on the floor. I wasn't planning on sleeping there long. I'm just starting out sleeping there. I asked one fellow what board meant. He say they supposed to

give you something to eat. They ain't give us nothing. I say okay. I can't make them give me nothing. What I'm gonna do? I got to eat. I bought a loaf of bread for a dime. A bowl of soup cost ten cents around the corner. I wasn't desperate. I had sixty-five cents to make it to payday. I ate half the bread and say I would get a bowl of soup tomorrow. Come payday they give me three dollars say the rest go on my bill. I had to give the man what own the house two dollars. What I'm gonna do, Miss Tyler? I told the people at the mill I was gonna get another job. They said I couldn't do that 'cause I still owed them money and they was gonna get the police on me. I was gonna go to another city but then before I had a chance I killed a man. I don't know, Miss Tyler. I feel like I got a hole inside me. People say you can help me. I don't want to go to hell, Miss Tyler. My mama cry every time something bad happen to me.

AUNT ESTER. It all will come to stand in the light, Mr. Citizen. Everything and everybody got to stand in the light. Jesus Christ stood in the light. The people saw him standing there and they killed him. But the Judgment ain't with the people. The Judgment with God. He the Big Master. God don't never lie. The people liable to do anything. They lie and cheat. That's why God didn't leave the Judgment with the people. Say, "I am the beginning and the end." The people can't say that. They know they gonna come to an earthy grave. The end is already writ for them.

*(***CITIZEN** *has fallen asleep in the chair.* **AUNT ESTER** *begins to sing a lullaby:)*

GO TO SLEEP, MY CHILD
YOU DON'T KNOW THE WORLD YET
GO TO SLEEP, MY CHILD
THE WORLD IS NOT EASY
GO TO SLEEP, MY CHILD
I AM HERE WATCHING OVER YOU
THE WORLD IS NOT EASY.

*(***BLACK MARY** *enters from the street carrying groceries.* **AUNT ESTER** *puts her finger to her lips.)*

AUNT ESTER. Ssshhh… Go upstairs and make up that bed in the spare bedroom. Mr. Citizen is gonna stay and help Eli with that wall.

*(***BLACK MARY** *exits upstairs.)*

You on an adventure, Mr. Citizen. I bet you didn't know that. It's all adventure. You signed up for it and didn't even know it.

(The lights go down on the scene.)

Scene Three

(The lights come up on **ELI** *and* **BLACK MARY** *in the kitchen.)*

ELI. I still don't know how he got in the house. I ain't known Aunt Ester to answer a door in twenty-five years.

BLACK MARY. He ain't said too much. I fixed that bed up and he ain't said too much.

ELI. I believe he come in through that hall window up there. Knocked some of that paint off the window. I don't know why she want him to stay in the house. I put him to work on that wall. He out there now busting up them rocks. You got to keep your eye on him.

(There is a knock on the door. **ELI** *goes to answer it.* **SOLLY** *enters.)*

Hey Solly come on in.

SOLLY. They had a riot over at the mill. The people said they wasn't going to work and the police tried to make them. They threw bottles at the police and started busting out the windows. The police charged the crowd arresting everybody they could get their hands on. They couldn't arrest them fast enough. The horses trampling the people. Ran right over the top of one fellow. He liable to be crippled for life. They having another meeting down at the church tonight. They say they ain't going to work tomorrow either. Reverend Tolliver told them not to go. Told them the hand of justice was at the gate but the people still had to open it.

*(***SOLLY** *hands* **BLACK MARY** *the newspaper.)*

Here, Black Mary read this.

BLACK MARY. *(reads)* "Garret Brown of Louisville, Kentucky departed this life September 30, 1904, at Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, at midday, in the midst of a life of usefulness and in the fullness of his powers. He was born of slave parents June the 29th 1862, in

Charleston, South Carolina. At an early period in his life, interested parties hurried the mother and three children northward, without the protection of a husband and father, to begin a long siege of poverty. Mr. Brown leaves to mourn his unfinished life, a wife and four children, and a host of family and friends."

(There is a long silence. Then life continues.)

ELI. I got somebody to help us with that wall. He out there now busting up them rocks. Aunt Ester say he supposed to stay here till the wall is built.

SOLLY. Hey Black Mary, I need you to help me write a letter to my sister.

ELI. What Jefferson Culpepper say?

*(***BLACK MARY** *gets a pen and paper.)*

SOLLY. Jefferson Culpepper got the consumption. His doctor say he can't go. It don't look like he got much time left.

ELI. You know I'd go with you if I didn't have to stay and take care of Aunt Ester. It'd be like old times.

SOLLY. I'm going if I have to go by myself.

BLACK MARY. What you want the letter to say?

SOLLY. "Dear Eliza, it is a hard time here for everybody too. Hold on the best you can till I get there…" You got that?

BLACK MARY. You want to tell her when you coming?

SOLLY. "I promise the fall will not pass before you see me… Pretend to go along with everything as it is." Tell her… "The best faith is in yourself even though God do have a hand in it." That's all.

BLACK MARY. How you want to sign it?

SOLLY. "Your brother, Two Kings."

*(***AUNT ESTER** *enters and goes and sits in her chair.)*

AUNT ESTER. I thought that was you out here. Where's Mr. Citizen?

ELI. He out back. I got him working on that wall.

AUNT ESTER. See if he want something to eat.

*(***ELI** *exits out back.)*

Black Mary, you got something for Mr. Citizen to eat? When you leaving, Solly?

SOLLY. I went down to see Butera and got me some new boots. Jefferson Culpepper can't go. He got the consumption. Soon as I break in these boots I got to go.

*(***ELI** *and* **CITIZEN** *enter.* **CITIZEN** *and* **BLACK MARY** *stare at each other.)*

AUNT ESTER. Good morning, Mr. Citizen. Did you sleep all right?

CITIZEN. I slept good. Yeah.

AUNT ESTER. I want you to meet somebody. That there is Solly. That's Citizen Barlow. Mr. Citizen remind me of my Junebug.

*(***AUNT ESTER** *and* **BLACK MARY** *exit out back.)*

SOLLY. My name is Two Kings. Used to be Uncle Alfred. The government looking for me for being a runaway so I changed it.

CITIZEN. My mama named me Citizen after freedom came. She wouldn't like it if I changed my name.

SOLLY. Your mama's trying to tell you something. She put a heavy load on you. It's hard to be a Citizen. You gonna have to fight to get that. And time you get it you be surprised how heavy it is. I used to be called Uncle Alfred back in slavery. I ran into one fellow called me Uncle Alfred. I told him say, "Uncle Alfred dead." He say, "I'm looking at you." I told him, "You looking at Two Kings. That's David and Solomon." He must have had something in his ear 'cause all he heard is Solomon. He say, "I'm gonna call you Solly." The people been calling me Solly ever since. But my name is Two Kings. Some people call me Solomon and some people call me David. I answer to either one. I

don't know which one God gonna call me. If he call me Uncle Alfred then we got a big fight.

CITIZEN. You got that stick. My daddy used to carry a stick like that. My daddy carried a stick everywhere he went. If you see my daddy he'd have his stick.

SOLLY. Lots of people carry sticks. Ain't you never heard that "sticks and stones can break my bones but names can never hurt me." This a bone breaker. I tried carrying stones but they was too heavy. I seen a hundred men carry sticks. My daddy carried a stick. He had to fight to carry it. I don't know if them hundred men had to fight but they was carrying them just the same. Why don't you carry one?

CITIZEN. I got my knife.

SOLLY. I got a knife too. Knives is for killing. I thank God I ain't never had to kill nobody. I come close a couple of times. This old gal took a liking to me and her man come after me one time. That's as close as I ever come to killing somebody. I busted him up pretty bad with my stick and she asked me to stop 'cause he was paying her rent and she needed that. Get you a stick and it'll save you a lot of trouble. Where you from?

CITIZEN. Alabama. Down around Opelika.

SOLLY. I'm from Alabama too. They got some good people down there. I been to Opelika. I been all over. I been clear down to the Gulf of Mexico. All through Louisiana and up into Canada. I first set foot in Canada in 1857. I'm going down to Alabama to get my sister. You ought to come and go to Alabama with me. I need a strong man like you. Get you one of these bone breakers and let's go down there and help the people get away.

CITIZEN. I just left. If I go back with you I'll just have to turn around and come back. I'm up here looking for a job. Ain't no jobs down there.

SOLLY. The people think they in freedom. That's all my daddy talked about. He died and never did have it. I say I got it but what is it? I'm still trying to find out. It ain't never been nothing but trouble.

ELI. Freedom is what you make it.

SOLLY. That's what I'm saying. You got to fight to make it mean something. All it mean is you got a long row to hoe and ain't got no plow. Ain't got no seed. Ain't got no mule. What good is freedom if you can't do nothing with it? I seen many a man die for freedom but he didn't know what he was getting. If he had known he might have thought twice about it.

*(***BLACK MARY** *enters.)*

BLACK MARY. You want a bowl of beans, Solly?

SOLLY. What kind is they? I had a couple of old gals try and poison me. With this one gal the doctor told me I was lucky. Say if I had eaten another bite I would have died. Good thing she couldn't cook. I was just eating to be polite.

BLACK MARY. They baby lima beans cooked up with some ham hocks.

SOLLY. I can't eat no lima beans. They belly busters. But I can eat baby lima beans. They agree with me a little better.

*(***BLACK MARY** *sets a bowl of lima beans in front of* **SOLLY**.*)*

ELI. When I was a boy we used to say a little rhyme.

Beans beans the musical fruit
The more you eat the more you toot
The more you toot the better you feel
So have those beans at every meal.

SOLLY. Them big lima beans tell the truth about that. Hey Black Mary I got another pair of pants and a shirt that needs washing. I ain't got but a dime.

BLACK MARY. Where's all these dollars you be getting from selling that dog shit. Come in here the other day bragging about it.

SOLLY. I'll give you fifteen cents. I just bought a new pair of shoes.

*(***BLACK MARY** *sets a bowl of lima beans and cornbread in front of* **CITIZEN**.*)*

SOLLY. If I had the fifteen cents I'd give it to you. I try to do the right thing. I always wanna be on the right side. But sometimes I don't know what side that is. They say "God have planned but the devil have planned also."

BLACK MARY. God ain't never wrong.

SOLLY. God say different things. Say "I will smite my enemies." Then he tell you to "turn the other cheek." That don't get you nothing but two broke jaws.

BLACK MARY. You wanna be like God. Everything that's for him ain't for you. That's why God threw Lucifer out of heaven.

SOLLY. That's what I'm saying. Lucifer was God's enemy. God ain't turned the other cheek. He picked Lucifer up and threw him down into hell.

BLACK MARY. The Bible say "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you."

SOLLY. God ain't done that! He didn't want Lucifer to throw *him* out of heaven. He wanted Lucifer to bow down and pledge obedience. That's what he would have Lucifer do unto him. He wasn't gonna bow down and pledge obedience to Lucifer.

(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 oft beans in fironf 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.

ELI. 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.

ELI. 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 chaos. The city needs that tin. They need that tin in Philadelphia. They need it in Detroit and Cincinnati. Industry is what drive the country. Without industry wouldn't nobody be working. That tin put people to work doing other things. These niggers can't see that. They ought to be glad the mill is there. If it wasn't for the mill these niggers wouldn't have no way to pay their rent. Close down the mill and wait and see what happen then. I'll tell you. A hundred niggers is going to jail for trying to steal something. That's what's gonna happen. A hundred niggers is going to jail for loitering. A hundred niggers is going to jail for disturbing the peace after they get mad and start fighting each other. Five hundred babies is gonna go hungry. You

gonna have a hundred new prostitutes. People gonna be living on the streets begging for a dime. And all because some damn fool took it upon himself to steal a bucket of nails and run and jump in the goddamn river. You close down the mill you ain't got nothing. Them niggers can't see that. Want to blame me. You know whose fault it is. I'll tell you whose fault it is. It's Abraham Lincoln's fault. He ain't had no idea what he was doing. He didn't know like I know. Some of these niggers was better off in slavery. They don't know how to act otherwise. You try and do something nice for niggers and it'll backfire on you every time. You try and give them an opportunity by giving them a job and they take and throw it away. Talking about they ain't going to work.

SOLLY. Eli, I got to go. Tell Aunt Ester I'll see her later.

BLACK MARY. I'll have your laundry ready by Thursday Solly.

CAESAR. I see you still carrying that stick.

SOLLY. Yeah, I still got it. I'm gonna carry it up the hill to the graveyard.

CAESAR. Well now they got laws against that now. I told you that. This ain't the country. This ain't Alabama. This is Pittsburgh. They got laws against carrying a stick in Pittsburgh. That's a weapon.

SOLLY. This a walking stick! Abraham Lincoln carried a walking stick. General Grant carried a walking stick. You didn't arrest him. Go tell General Grant he can't carry a walking stick!

CAESAR. It's against the law to carry a weapon.

SOLLY. The law can go to hell if you telling me I can't carry a walking stick!

*(***SOLLY** *exits.)*

CAESAR. There must be five hundred thousand different jobs a man can have. Now you tell me how somebody come to picking dog shit up off the street.

ELI. Let me get on back to that wall.

(**ELI** *exits.*)

CAESAR. And you got him walking around talking about, "Caesar's sister does my laundry." How that make me look? My sister a washerwoman. Why don't you come back to work for me at the bakery? You sitting up here under Aunt Ester just watching time go by. Aunt Ester ain't got no time. She got both feet in the grave just waiting for the body to follow.

BLACK MARY. You don't know nothing about Aunt Ester. She give me more than most other people. I never been so at peace with myself since I been here. I don't want to hear that. You can say whatever you want but I don't want to hear that.

CAESAR. I told you I can help you. You a young woman.

BLACK MARY. I'm doing just fine. You selling magic bread and overcharging rent. Putting people out in the street. I don't want no part of it.

CAESAR. I give good value for my services. I got clean rooms. Quite naturally if you don't pay the rent somebody else will. I try to tell these niggers this the city. This ain't the country. I can't wait till the crop come in. It's taking them a while but they learning. Yeah, I sell magic bread. Got a big sign say you only have to eat half as much to get twice as full. And I charge one and a half times for it. You don't understand I give the people hope when they ain't got nothing else. They take that loaf of bread and make it last twice as long. They wouldn't do that if they didn't pay one and a half times for it. I'm helping the people.

BLACK MARY. Caesar, I done told you I'm satisfied right where I'm at. I don't want to be part of that.

CAESAR. Now…see… I remember when you was part of it. You was selling hoecakes with me. You was running the bakery. Why can't it be like old times? I miss having you work with me. I remember when we was working together. It wasn't about Caesar or Black Mary. It was about the Wilks family.

BLACK MARY. That was before you killed that boy.

CAESAR. He was a thief! He was stealing. That's about the worse thing you can do. To steal the fruits of somebody else's labor. Go out and work for it! That's what I did. I ain't never stole nothing in my life. That's against the law. Stealing is against the law. Everybody know that.

BLACK MARY. It was a loaf of bread, Caesar. He was stealing a loaf of bread.

CAESAR. I gave him an opportunity to stop. I told him he was under arrest. He started running! With the loaf of bread under his arm! I had to shoot him. You can't do nothing like that and get away with it.

People don't understand the law is everything. What is it not? People think the law is supposed to serve them. But anybody can see you serve it. There ain't nothing above the law. That's what I try and tell these niggers. Everything come under the law. You got to respect the law. Unless you dead. That's the only way you ain't got to respect the law.

BLACK MARY. I remember a time when you would have laughed at him for stealing a loaf of bread. What happened to that, Caesar?

CAESAR. I took an oath to uphold the law. See, you try and be like your mother. I don't know why your mother never liked me. She tried to poison you against me and you let her.

BLACK MARY. See you killing that boy over a loaf of bread ain't got nothing to do with my mother. You always try and hide behind that.

CAESAR. I got to play the hand that was dealt to me. You look around and see you black. You look at the calendar. Slavery's over. I'm a free man. I can get up whatever time I want to in the morning. I can move all over and pick any woman I want. I can walk down the street to the store and buy anything my money will buy. There ain't nothing I can't have. I'm starting out with nothing so I got to get a little something. A little

place to start. You look and see the race you got to run is different than somebody else's. Maybe it's got more hills. It's longer. But this is what I got. Now what to do with it?

I look around and see where niggers got to eat and niggers got to sleep. I say if I had some bread I'd be a rich man. I got some bread. In the valley of the blind the one-eyed man is king. I started selling hoecakes off the back of a wagon. I'd cook them over the coals. I got me some beans. Selling them right out the pot. I even put a little pork in them. Police ran me off the corner. Say I needed a license. It took me a while but I got me a license. I had to pay six or seven people but I got me a license.

Niggers say my bowls was too small. I got bigger bowls. Say I didn't put enough pork in the beans. I put in more pork. I got me some chickens. I charged extra for the big ones and the people got mad. One man told me the chickens had big feet but they didn't have big wings. I seen I was in the wrong business. Said I was gonna let niggers eat on their own and give them a place to sleep. Only I didn't have no money to buy no property.

Went down to the bank to borrow some money. They told me I needed some collateral. Say you need something to borrow money against. I say all right, I'll get me some collateral. I opened me up a gambling joint in the back of the barbershop. Sold whiskey. The police closed it down. I had to put some bullet holes in a couple of niggers and the police arrested me. Put me on the county farm. I had to bust a couple of niggers upside the head for trying to steal my food. A couple tried to escape. I caught them. That don't do nothing but make it harder on everybody. They out there enjoying their freedom ducking and dodging the law and everybody else on half rations and got to make up their work.

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