

Act 4

Narrator: On New Years Day, the city is very quiet.

Mr. Walker: Charles, we are not opening the store today. My wife and I are going to visit relatives. Do not destroy the store while we are gone.

Charles: I won't, sir.

Narrator: Charles is very happy. He has a free day. Now he has time to make a new friend. He goes next door to the bakery to talk with the 15-year-old boy who works there.

Charles: Good morning. My name is Charles. I have a free day. Can I spend it with you?

Henry: Yes. I have a free day, too. But we do not have to stay here. Let's go some place fun.

Charles: Where do you want to go?

Henry: To the river!

Narrator: The boys talk while they walk to the river.

Henry: I have not seen the river since they brought me here.

Charles: Who—your parents?

Henry: My parents are still in Africa, I think.

Charles: You think? Don't you know where they are?

Henry: No. When the slave catchers caught me . . .

Charles: Slave catchers! Are you a slave?

Henry: Yes. Aren't you a slave, too?

Charles: No. When I am 16, I will be free to do anything I want.

Henry: I will have to run away in order to be free. But I don't know where to run.

Charles: There must be some place where you can be free.

Henry: I have given up on that dream. When I was in Salem . . .

Charles: Where is Salem?

Henry: It's in Massachusetts—north of New York. When they brought me to America, I was sold to a lady who lived in Salem. People said she was a witch. She promised to free me when she died.

Charles: A real witch?

Henry: No, she wasn't a witch, but she was a little crazy. People made up stories about her, because they were afraid of her.

Charles: I have never met a crazy person before.

Henry: Believe me, you do not want to. My mistress would spin wool for hours—day and night, night and day. You wouldn't believe the number of sweaters she made!

Charles: What did she do with the sweaters?

Henry: She sold them and made a lot of money. That is another reason why people didn't like her. She could take care of herself. But people thought that she should get a husband to take care of her.

Charles: She doesn't sound crazy to me.

Henry: Oh, she was! My mistress spun wool until blood dripped from her fingers.

Charles: That is crazy!

Henry: I would bring her meals. But many times Mistress forgot to eat them. She never took a holiday. Her only break came when she went to church on Sunday mornings.

Charles: What happened to her?

Henry: They killed her.

Charles: They killed her—for working hard?

Henry: People wanted her money. So they got rid of her.