

MANGOES FOR THE FREIGHT TRAIN

Written by

Susana Darwin

btpp.darwin@gmail.com

773.531.9588

© 2026 Burmese Tiger Trap Productions v.20260904

US Library of Congress Registration Pending (Case #1-15253902001)

1 **EXT. ST. PETERSBURG STREET, OLD NORTHEAST - NIGHT** 1

November 1914. LEROY, a lithe white 22-year-old, sprints along a brick street. He reaches a dimly lit cottage and heads through the CREAKING SIDE GATE into the back yard.

2 **EXT. LEROY'S BACK YARD - CONTINUOUS** 2

NELL, 41 and slender as her son, appears at the back door.

NELL
Leroy? You all right?

Near the back fence LEROY SPITS AND PANTS, hands on knees.

LEROY
Yep. Go on back inside.

NELL
(turning back inside)
I'll make some tea.

LEROY
(muttering)
Rather have a whiskey.

3 **EXT. DINGHY ON LAKE MAGGIORE - NIGHT** 3

SARAH, 19, wraps her younger twin sisters tightly in a quilt. Both tremble uncontrollably. Eight other Black people are with them, and two other heavily loaded small craft bob on the water nearby. All eyes rest on the shoreline, beyond which fires blaze and SHOUTS RISE.

One of the twins WHIMPERS. SARAH SHUSHES HER TENDERLY.

4 **INT. LEROY'S HOUSE - LATER** 4

Leroy leans on his elbows at the kitchen table, still and ashen, as Nell crosses with two mugs and sits down, too.

NELL
(offering the sugar bowl)
You look pale. Did you see a ghost?

Leroy glances at her askance and lifts the mug.

LEROY
There's no such thing, Momma. Just
a very dead dead man.

Nell stares at Leroy, her smile vanishing. THE SOUNDS OF HER SPOON DROPPING AND HER CHAIR SCRAPING BACK pierce the quiet.

NELL

You were downtown.

She stares at Leroy, as frozen as he, then leaves the room. Leroy's eyes remain on the table as tears streak his face.

5

INT. SHADY GROVES HOTEL OFFICE - MORNING

5

Nell's desk is tidy: its few papers organized, the adding machine squared precisely, the Royal typewriter idle on its side shelf. She has a newspaper open and is reading, consternation clouding her features.

Portly pink-pated hotel owner CLIVE sails into the office.

CLIVE

(oppressively jovial)

Gonna be bad news if your face gets stuck that way, Nell.

NELL

Have you read the papers?

CLIVE

You on about last night? He had it coming.

NELL

Not like that, he didn't, surely.

CLIVE

Saved us all a load of trouble.

Clive pauses to scrutinize Nell, then closes his office door. His conventionally pretty secretary RUBY studies Nell.

RUBY

(aping Clive's expression)

You saw what happened to the wife.

NELL

What they say happened to the wife. Don't believe everything you read in the papers, Ruby.

Ruby purses her lips in disdain at Nell.

INT. PRINT SHOP - DAY

Leroy crouches beside a press, a toolbox by his knee. With him is JUNIOR, a Black man about his age. They work together smoothly, nearly telepathically. GENE and MORRIS, large white men in their 30s, "snoopervise" nearby.

JUNIOR
One more twist.

LEROY
...Tight enough?

JUNIOR
Yep. It's secure.

LEROY
Thanks.

Junior nods and steps away. Leroy collects the tools.

GENE
That lady in the car sure enough
got the party going. BANG!

Leroy jumps. Gene and Morris CRACK UP.

MORRIS
Aw, did somebody scare lil Leroy?

Leroy sets an oil can in the toolbox and wipes his hands.

LEROY
Gears should be aligning right now.

GENE
(glancing slyly at Morris)
I don't believe we saw you downtown
last night. It's rude to just
ignore an invitation.

MORRIS
Constitution too ... too delicate?

Leroy latches the toolbox and stands with it in his hand.

LEROY
I was there. West side of Euclid.

MORRIS
(grinning)
Quite a sight, hunh?

Leroy turns away. Gene and Morris mime mincing gestures.

Leroy rounds beyond another press and encounters Junior.

JUNIOR
You were there?

Ashamed, Leroy nods.

JUNIOR (CONT'D)
Do you know what they did to our
area afterwards? Only reason I'm
here and not fixing our porch and
windows is we need money for that.

LEROY
I'm sorry. But if -- if I don't--

JUNIOR
They're not going to come for you
like they do us.

Leroy fixes Junior with a miserable gaze.

LEROY
Here.

Leroy proffers a couple of crumpled bills from his pocket.
Junior slaps his hand aside.

JUNIOR
I don't want your dang money.

LEROY
(picking up the bills)
What am I supposed to do?

JUNIOR
Don't be part of a lynch mob, to
start with. It's not that hard.

Gene and Morris sidle up to Junior and Leroy.

GENE
Everything all right, boys?

LEROY
It's fine. We're just grouching over
the paper load.
(to Junior)
Let's get it over with.

They leave together.

MORRIS MAKES KISSY NOISES, and GENE GUFFAWS.

7 **INT. LEROY'S HOUSE - EVENING** 7

Leroy sits down in the kitchen while Nell works on supper. She resolutely avoids looking his way. Her body language and the BANGING OF PANS AND DRAWERS make clear her fury.

Leroy fills two glasses with lemonade from a pitcher.

Nell sets his plate in front of him and carries hers away, leaving the lemonade.

LEROY SIGHS and digs in as NELL'S BEDROOM DOOR SLAMS SHUT.

8 **EXT. ST. PETERSBURG STREET, OLD NORTHEAST - LATER** 8

Leroy saunters along, smoking a cigarette. A Model T approaches from behind, and he swerves to get out of its way.

MORRIS (O.S.)
That's him. That's Leroy.

Leroy takes off at a run between houses and hops a fence.

GENE (O.S.)
Get him. Don't let him get away.

Leroy makes a sudden zag into an alley and cuts past a stable, startling a gelding. He reaches his street, heading for home, when the car careens around the corner. He leaps onto the porch and dives into the house, locking the door.

9 **INT. LEROY'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS** 9

Nell is standing in her bedroom doorway, her face grim.

LEROY
Get the shotgun.

Nell crouches to reach under her bed. She crosses through the parlor, checking the shells as she goes.

NELL
What do they want?

10 **EXT. LEROY'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS** 10

The Model T stops in front of the cottage. Three white men get out: Morris and Gene, plus brawny JEB.

GENE
Little Lord Leroy...

MORRIS
(cross-talking)
Hey, Leroy. Got a question for you.

The front door opens, and Nell steps out, leaving the shotgun at hand but out of sight.

NELL
It's late. Y'all get on home.

MORRIS
We just need to have a short ...
parley with Leroy.

NELL
Not this time of night you don't.

MORRIS
We work with Leroy, couple of us.

NELL
Then you can talk to him at work.

GENE
We're here. Now's just fine.

NELL
I say it's not. Now, go on.

JEB
Figures, toy-toy Leroy lets his
momma handle his fights.

THE MEN ALL LAUGH.

NELL
(raising the shotgun)
I said "go."

THE LAUGHTER DIES DOWN. The men raise their hands slowly.

GENE
All right, all right, little lady.

MORRIS
Eh -- suppose it can wait.

NELL
Now. You're going now.

The men slouch away back to the car. ITS ENGINE PUTTERS, and they drive away.

Nell waits for the nighttime silence to fill in.

11

INT. LEROY'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

11

Leroy takes the shotgun as Nell locks up. She follows him, staring hard, as he stashes the gun under her bed.

NELL

Why were they after you?

Leroy slips past her to his bedroom.

LEROY

Blood got up the other night, I guess.

NELL

...Why did you go downtown?

LEROY

...Downtown?

NELL

Do not play the fool with me, son.

LEROY

You know what people think of me. What they'd think if I hadn't.

NELL

Do you care what I think of you?

LEROY

You know me.

NELL

I'm not so sure I do. Tell me you tried to stop them.

LEROY

And get strung up, too? No, thanks.

NELL

Do nothing, you're as bad as them.

LEROY

How is your being here that night not "doing nothing"?

(beat)

Morris and Gene were going on and on, saying only cowards and Yankees and sissies don't go to lynchings. That lynchings should include cowards and Yankees and sissies.

NELL
So? You're not--

LEROY
Stop.

NELL
...You're not a coward.

LEROY
I've got to get out of here. How
does that not make me a coward?

Nell takes this hard but absorbs it quickly.

NELL
The press will miss you sorely.

LEROY
I'm worried for Junior. He's angry.

NELL
He has every right to be.

LEROY
I'm afraid those fellows will go
looking for him if he pops off.

NELL
Wherever you're going, you should
take him with you.

LEROY
Thinking New York. Maybe the Navy.

Nell gulps, realizing how serious Leroy is.

NELL
You'd better get some sleep.

LEROY
(nodding, steely)
Come dawn I'll go down to Junior's.

NELL
Where's he live?

LEROY
South of Central.

Nell looks dubious. She leaves and returns with a canvas bag.

NELL
Take your daddy's duffel.

Leroy takes it and hugs his mother.

LEROY
I'm sorry.

NELL SHUSHES HIM.

12

INT. JUNIOR'S HOUSE - NIGHT

12

Junior sits at the kitchen table with his father, ABE, who has Junior's eyes and mouth on a larger frame.

JUNIOR
(seething)
The police did nothing. Less than.

ABE
Well, he did seem like a no-count--

JUNIOR
Even so. Even if he did it, nobody deserves that. And we don't deserve all this.

Abe studies his son's posture with genuine apprehension.

13

INT. LEROY'S HOUSE - DAWN

13

Leroy sits on his bed counting money. Nell enters with a battered cookie tin.

NELL
Are you ready?

LEROY
(sighing)
Hope this can get me past Atlanta.

Struggling to quell her anguish, Nell pulls a stack bills from the tin and puts it in Leroy's hands.

LEROY (CONT'D)
I'm scared.

NELL
I know. Me, too.

LEROY
I'll write you as I go.

NELL
You'd better.

LEROY

Write to me, too. Once I have an address.

Nell nods. The strain of letting Leroy go makes her fidget. When Leroy hugs Nell again, SHE YIPS a suppressed sob.

NELL

Love you, son. My Leroy.

LEROY

Love you, too.

Nell sees Leroy through to the front door, lets him out, and watches him until he disappears along the street.

14

EXT. ST. PETERSBURG STREET - LATER

14

Leroy makes his way on foot past Euclid Street and heads south into the Gas Plant neighborhood. IDY, tiny and ancient, is putting out milk bottles on her porch when she spots him.

IDY

Aren't you a little late?

(beat)

You must be lost.

Sheepish, Leroy hurries to take off his hat.

LEROY

No, ma'am. I'm looking for Junior Williams' house.

IDY

Around that corner there. You'll see two mango trees in the yard. And a busted-up porch.

Leroy tips his hat at Idy, who blinks like she's dreaming.

Arriving at Junior's house, Leroy clambers onto the damaged front porch and KNOCKS SOFTLY on the door. He hears FOOTFALLS inside and steps back, but the door remains closed.

LEROY

(stammering)

It's -- I'm. Junior's my friend.

Abe opens the door, and Junior steps up behind him.

JUNIOR

It's all right, Daddy. That's Leroy, from the press.

Junior joins Leroy on the porch, pulling the door shut.

JUNIOR (CONT'D)
What are you doing here?

LEROY
I'm leaving. Going north. You
should come, too.

JUNIOR
Why would I go anywhere with some-
body who goes to lynchings? Did you
enjoy an ice cream while that man--

LEROY
I shouldn't have gone. I wish I
hadn't. But if I didn't get how it
goes before, I really get it now.

Junior considers the truth he hears in Leroy's fervor, then
sags and waves at the porch and windows.

JUNIOR
(dejected)
Any money I'd use for going north
has got to go towards this.

LEROY
(pulling cash out)
Take some of this.

JUNIOR SCOFFS.

LEROY (CONT'D)
Call it a loan. There's enough --
make a dent in these repairs, get
us both north and situated. Then
you can send real money back.

JUNIOR
After I pay you back.

LEROY
Or while you pay me back.

JUNIOR
How are you traveling?

LEROY
Freight train comes through in a
couple of hours.

JUNIOR
Thought of everything, didn't you.

Leroy shrugs, looks towards the street.

LEROY
Any mangoes left?

JUNIOR
Yeah, a few. Pick us a couple.

Junior goes inside, and Leroy picks a few fat mangoes. He winces when he hears a WAIL that can only be Junior's mother.

15

EXT. JUNIOR'S HOUSE - LATER

15

Junior leaves the house carrying a suitcase. Siblings crowd in front of their parents calling, "BYE, JUNIOR," and "COME BACK SOON." He has a rough time holding it together, but turns upon reaching Leroy and waves with a devastating smile.

JUNIOR
(turning west; to Leroy)
Let's go.

LEROY
Train's the other way.

JUNIOR
I've got to make a stop.

Leroy ambles after Junior, mildly aggravated.

LEROY
I sure hope you've got some your
momma's cornbread in that valise.

Leroy tags the suitcase. Junior hugs it and feints, grinning playfully. They are children again in that moment.

16

EXT. SARAH'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

16

Sarah washboards laundry in a basin in the back yard. Along the gangway, Junior gestures for Leroy to wait.

As Leroy tries to vanish into the shade of an oak, Junior approaches Sarah, who wipes her hands on her apron and pats her hair, abashed. She clocks Junior's suitcase.

SARAH
We're not married yet, so don't
think I'm doing your wash.

JUNIOR
 (smiling)
 "Yet."

Sarah lifts her chin towards Leroy, "Who's that?" in her eyes.

JUNIOR (CONT'D)
 That's Leroy. He works at the press.

Quiet falls between them.

SARAH
 ...Is there room in there for me?

Junior glances down at his suitcase.

JUNIOR
 I'll find us a roomy enough place.

SARAH
 You'd better. Make it soon.

JUNIOR
 New York suit you?

SARAH
 Aiming high, like always.

Sarah slips her arms around Junior's torso and rests her cheek on his collarbone. He drops the suitcase and returns her embrace, gives her a kiss to last months.

Leroy gives Sarah a gentle wave as she watches Junior leave.

17

EXT. ST. PETERSBURG INDUSTRIAL AREA - DAY

17

Leroy and Junior hunker beside a pile of pallets in the shadow of a warehouse. A TRAIN WHISTLE SOUNDS from the south.

LEROY
 It's time.

The locomotive lumbers slowly by them, and Leroy moves towards the tracks, watching for an open car. One appears after a moment, and Junior joins him running alongside the train. Junior tosses his suitcase in and makes the jump, then turns to take Leroy's duffel and pull him aboard.

The train continues north.