

# Ain't Ethiopia

## BRIEF DESCRIPTION

After local whites lynch his wife as a suspected Communist, African-American Jesse Colton travels to Spain in 1937 to fight Franco. But there he finds that his real battle is with the fascists in the small Mississippi town from which he escaped and that he must return to face them down if his life, and his wife's death, is to have any meaning.

## PRIMARY MAJOR CHARACTERS

- JESSE COLTON, 21, African-American
- OLIVER LUMET, 36, African-American
- LUZ BAROJA Y NESSI, 20s, Spanish

## SECONDARY MAJOR CHARACTERS

Below are listed the roles for the UTILITY CHARACTERS. In addition to these roles are the following:

- UTILITY 1 -- AWAGU, anarchist from Ethiopia fighting in Spain
- UTILITY 2 -- JAMES, anarchist from Northern Ireland fighting in Spain
- UTILITY 3 -- DEWEY MARLOWE, journalist, Ernest Hemingway and Robert Capa wanna-be

**UTILITY CHARACTERS** -- The UTILITY CHARACTERS play the roles listed below, along with act:scene designation.

- UTILITY CHARACTER 1 (female, African American)
  - Harlem Speaker -- 1:1
  - Marley Colton (JESSE's wife) -- 1:3, 2:16
  - Woman In Church -- 1:7, 1:8
  - Nurse -- 1:14, 1:15
- UTILITY CHARACTER 2 (male, Caucasian)
  - Policeman 1 -- 1:1
  - Red Neck -- 1:3, 2:16
  - Police Sergeant -- 1:7
  - Soldier -- 1:9, 1:10
  - Orderly -- 1:11
  - Blind Poet -- 1:13
  - Nationalist Soldier 1 -- 2:2
  - Hobo -- 2:9
  - Editor -- 2:17
- UTILITY CHARACTER 3 (male, Caucasian)
  - Tom Milocz -- 1:4, 1:8
  - Policeman 1 -- 1:7
  - Captain Merriman -- 1:9, 1:14
  - Soldier -- 1:15

- UTILITY CHARACTER 4 (male, between light- and dark-skinned)
  - Man On Street -- 1:6
  - Harlem Minister -- 1:7, 1:8
  - Man Handing Out Rifles -- 1:9, 1:10
  - Soldier -- 1:14, 1:15
  - Sniper -- 1:15, 2:1
  - Mayor -- 2:4
  - Republican Soldier -- 2:7
  - Young Boy -- 2:12
  - Bum -- 2:17
  
- UTILITY 5 (female, Caucasian)
  - Nurse -- 1:11, 1:14, 1:15
  - Doña Ibárruri -- 1:12
  - Isabel -- 2:4
  - Mrs. Swanson -- 2:11
  
- UTILITY 6 (male, Caucasian)
  - Policeman 2 -- 1:1
  - Jose Luis Alonso -- 1:7
  - Soldier -- 1:9, 1:10
  - Doctor -- 1:11
  - Nationalist Soldier 2 -- 2:2
  - Largo -- 2:6
  - Colonel -- 2:7
  - Mayor -- 2:15, 2:16
  
- UTILITY 7 (male, Caucasian)
  - Policeman 3 -- 1:1
  - Policeman 2 -- 1:7
  - Soldier -- 1:9, 1:10
  - Orderly -- 1:11
  - Waiter -- 1:12, 1:13
  - Nationalist Soldier 3 -- 2:2
  - Bellarmino -- 2:6
  - Colonel's Aide -- 2:7
  - Sheriff -- 2:15, 2:16

#### **TIME/PLACE**

- Republican Spain and Mississippi, 1936 and 1937

#### **NOTES**

- Actors must be dialectically versatile, especially in being able to speak Spanish (or fake it well) and speak a Spanish-accented English. Also, UTILITY 2 will need to do a northern Ireland Irish accent (from near Belfast).
- To compensate for keeping the production set- and prop-light, sound design is crucial.
- All items/props are mimed unless it is absolutely essential to have them on the actor's person, such as MARLOWE's bag or JESSE's photo.

Such things as guns, surgical tools, etc. are mimed and, where possible, underscored by a sound effect. Props to a minimum!

- Costumes should be kept simple and follow a pattern of either adding or subtracting small items to make the character stand out.
- The script is written for a bare stage, but director and designers are free to re-shape the space with platforms, ladders, etc. wherever it makes sense (both theatrically and budgetarily) to do so.
- Actors are on stage all the time along with props and costumes, etc. "Exit" simply means they go out of the playing area and sit.
- Scene changes must take place as seamlessly as possible -- no dead air between scenes.

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## Act I, Scene 1

Light is tight on UTILITY 1 as a SPEAKER standing on a soapbox. She holds up pamphlets to an imaginary "crowd."

SOUND EFFECT: Crowd sounds.

UTILITY 2, 6, and 7 as POLICEMEN 1, 2, and 3 hang around.

SPEAKER

Brothers and sisters, we stand in Harlem, in 1936, in the modern age, but in democratic Spain the fascists under Franco want to go back to the middle ages!

Light up on JESSE COLTON, who slinks through the "crowd." His eyes dart, his hands twitch, his clothes are disheveled -- a man at the end of his tether. A dirty gash cuts his left temple.

SPEAKER

Mussolini, who raped our people in Ethiopia -- and Hitler, with his cock-eyed ideas about the supremacy of white people --

JESSE finds OLIVER LUMET listening to the SPEAKER. JESSE sidles up to him to pick his pocket.

POLICEMAN 1 notices JESSE. He signals his buddies, and they drift closer.

JESSE's eyes dart right, then left. He moves his hand towards OLIVER's pocket, fingers twitching. The POLICEMEN are close.

SPEAKER

If we don't stop the fascists in Spain -- brothers, sisters -- please listen --

JESSE is just about to close in when OLIVER's hand clamps down over JESSE's hand and OLIVER turns to face JESSE.

SPEAKER

We need to fight the fascists, not among ourselves --

OLIVER looks at the POLICEMEN, shakes JESSE's hand with a hard handshake.

OLIVER

Just an old friend playing a joke, officers.

OLIVER claps JESSE on the shoulder, keeps an eye on the POLICEMEN.

SPEAKER

We need to go to Spain --

OLIVER

How are you doing, my man?

SPEAKER

-- because we could not go to Ethiopia to help  
our brothers and sisters --

OLIVER

How's tricks?

SPEAKER

-- fight the Italian fascist barbarians --

The POLICEMEN drift back toward the SPEAKER.

OLIVER

My man, you a cat that's been gone too long.

SPEAKER

As my good friend said, "Spain ain't Ethiopia,  
but it'll do."

POLICEMAN 1

All right, let's move your raggedy asses out of  
here.

The POLICEMEN swipe the air in a stylized manner with their batons.

SOUND EFFECT: Three heavy thuds in the air.

Still holding onto JESSE, OLIVER lets out a shrill whistle. The  
SPEAKER looks toward OLIVER.

OLIVER raises his finger and circles it, points to the POLICEMEN. The  
SPEAKER takes note, gives OLIVER a thumbs-up.

SPEAKER

Watch your backs, my friends --

OLIVER

(to JESSE)

Let's go.

OLIVER hustles JESSE along.

The POLICEMEN swipe the air again and move forward.

SOUND EFFECT: Three heavy thuds again, then crowd sounds, riot sounds.

SPEAKER

-- we got our own fascists coming in now to take  
away our First Amendment.

The POLICEMEN come to the SPEAKER. The SPEAKER hands each of them a  
pamphlet.

SPEAKER

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Now come and  
get me, pigs!

The SPEAKER jumps off the soap box and melts away, pursued.

OLIVER turns his attention to JESSE, whose hand is still firmly in  
OLIVER's grasp. OLIVER pulls him away.

OLIVER

Let's get you to a safe harbor, my friend.

Lights shift to a diner.

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## Act I, Scene 2

SOUNDS EFFECT: Morph from a riot to the inside of a diner.

Table set with a "mimed" breakfast that JESSE tears into as they sit.  
Two chairs. OLIVER waits. JESSE finishes, mops his plate.

JESSE

Thanks.

JESSE gets up, ready to flee.

JESSE

Gotta go.

OLIVER

I lied.

JESSE

What?

OLIVER

You're gonna have to pay me something.

JESSE

I got no money. I got nothing.

OLIVER

You have a name.

JESSE

Everyone's got a name.

OLIVER

So tell me your name. And I'll tell you who just fed a brother.

JESSE

That's what I got to pay?

OLIVER

Sit down.

JESSE sits.

OLIVER

Now, what's your name?

JESSE

Jesse Colton.

OLIVER reaches into his back pocket. He notices that JESSE winces at the sudden movement. More slowly, OLIVER draws out a small blue booklet and slides it across.

JESSE picks it up, but he flings it back onto table, his body racked with shivers.

JESSE

That -- that says Communist Party!

OLIVER

(retrieving card)

Harlem Division.

JESSE

Shit shit shit shit --

JESSE's leg pumps hard. OLIVER lays a hand on his forearm, but JESSE snaps it away.

OLIVER

Mississippi in your voice -- right?

JESSE

Maybe.

OLIVER

Texas myself.

JESSE

So what?

OLIVER

Jesse Colton, how'd you end up in New York city  
ready to steal from a brother?

JESSE hesitates, then pulls out an envelope and slams it down. OLIVER  
opens it and pulls out a photograph.

JESSE

That's Marley Colton. Was Marley Colton.

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### Act I, Scene 3

Lights up on the figure of UTILITY 1 as MARLEY COLTON standing on a  
platform, a noose hanging around her neck, her dress torn, her body  
riddled with bullet wounds.

Behind her, UTILITY 2 as RED NECK holds up the end of the noose as if  
it were tied around a tree branch. He has a knife in his hand, ready  
to cut the rope.

JESSE gets up from the table, walks to the hanged figure. MARLEY  
looks with tenderness on JESSE.

SOUND EFFECT: A frenzied crowd at a lynching.

JESSE

"Cut that nigger Communist down!" That's one of  
the nicer things they said.

RED NECK mimes cutting the rope. MARLEY falls into JESSE's arms.

RED NECK

"Better dead than Red" --

JESSE

-- they screamed.

JESSE rolls MARLEY to the floor, stands, horrified. RED NECK spits on  
MARLEY's corpse, spits on JESSE, who reacts as if he'd been touched by  
acid. RED NECK jumps off the platform and leaves.

MARLEY kneels up and looks at him as JESSE begins to beat himself.

SOUND EFFECT: Crowd sounds increase in intensity.

JESSE

They burned the house. They burned Marley,  
dragged her body through the dust tied to some  
cracker's truck bumper. I hid -- in the kudzu,  
in the shit, watching, not being able to -- not  
being able to --

SOUND EFFECT: Crowd sounds increase to deafening, demonic.

Light grows to white-hot. MARLEY raises her hand. JESSE calms.

SOUND EFFECT: Crowd sounds die out.

Light softens.

JESSE

Not being able to do nothing for my Marley.

MARLEY stands, goes to JESSE. JESSE touches her bloody wounds.

JESSE

"Better dead than Red," they screamed. "Cut that  
nigger Communist down!" they barked. Because she  
wanted people to get work relief. Because she  
wanted to help niggers not be niggers.

MARLEY disappears into the shadows. JESSE wipes his hands on his  
filthy coat as he moves back to the table.

SOUND EFFECT: Diner sounds.

OLIVER and JESSE sit in silence while the banging of the diner swirls  
around them. OLIVER slides the picture back across the table.

OLIVER

I'm sorry for your loss, Jesse.

More silence between them.

OLIVER

If you're interested -- hey --

JESSE

Yeah.

OLIVER

I can give you a chance to fight the bastards  
that did that to your wife.

JESSE doesn't answer because he stares at the picture. He picks it up, slips it back into the envelope, slides the envelope into his coat. His body slumps.

OLIVER

But first things first. You need a place to stay.

(pointing to temple)

That needs to be cleaned. Let's go.

OLIVER stands, but JESSE stays seated. JESSE fumbles with the salt shaker.

OLIVER

(to JESSE)

Don't play with the salt. Let's go.

JESSE

They said she was a Communist just 'cause she asked for some work relief. I didn't do nothing to stop 'em. I just ran. I just ran and ran and ran till I ended up here and --

JESSE's words run out.

OLIVER

At some point, Jesse, whether you gotta piss or they shut the door on you, you are going to have to get up from this table and do the rest of your life.

JESSE still hesitates, his nervous hands spilling the salt. OLIVER throws a pinch of it over JESSE's left shoulder.

OLIVER

Salt over the left shoulder -- now you're protected. Come on.

Lights out on diner. OLIVER and JESSE move to the flophouse.

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#### Act I, Scene 4

OLIVER mimes knocking in a secret code on a metal door.

SOUND EFFECT: Secret code on a metal door.

UTILITY 3 as TOM MILOCSZ sits at the table that had been the diner table under the brash light of a single light bulb. TOM wears a black eye-patch over his left eye. On the eye-patch he's painted a red hammer-and-sickle.

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