The following is an excerpt from *Invisible Man*

Read the passage carefully. It is part of a scene in which the narrator of a novel awakens suddenly to loud noises and simultaneously discovers an object in his boarding-house room. Note the details in this passage. What seems to be the point or purpose of this scene? Write an essay in which you discuss how the author supports a purpose through the interplay among the narrator, the object he has discovered, the neighbors who are banging on the steam pipes (which heat the building), and the woman who is renting him a room and making him breakfast. Given the racial nature of the object, it worth noting that both the narrator and his landlady are black.

Then I was awake and not awake, sitting bolt upright in bed and trying to peer through the sick gray light as I sought the meaning of the brash, nerve-jangling sound. Pushing the blanket aside I clasped my hands to my ears. Someone was pounding the steam line, and I stared helplessly for what seemed minutes. My ears throbbed. My side began itching violently and I tore open my pajamas to scratch, and suddenly the pain seemed to leap from my ears to my side and I saw gray marks appearing where the old skin was flaking away beneath my digging nails. And as I watched I saw thin lines of blood well up in the scratches, bringing pain and joining time and place again, and I thought, The room has lost its heat on my last day at Mary's, and suddenly I was sick at heart.

The clock, its alarm lost in the larger sound, said seven-thirty, and I got out of bed. I'd have to hurry. … Why didn't they stop that noise? I reached for my shoes, flinching as the knocking seemed to sound an inch above my head. Why don't they stop, I thought. And why do I feel so let down? The bourbon? My nerves going bad?

Suddenly I was across the room in a bound, pounding the pipe furiously with my shoe heel.

"Stop it, you ignorant fool!"

My head was splitting. Beside myself, I struck pieces of silver from the pipe, exposing the black and rusted iron. He was using a piece of metal now, his blows ringing with a ragged edge.

If only I knew who it was, I thought, looking for something heavy with which to strike back. If only I knew!

Then near the door I saw something which I'd never noticed there before: the cast-iron figure of a very black, red-lipped and wide-mouthed Negro, whose white eyes stared up at me from the floor, his face an enormous grin, his single large black hand held palm up before his chest. It was a bank, a piece of early Americana, the kind of bank which, if a coin is placed in the hand and a lever pressed upon the back, will raise its arm and flip the coin into the grinning mouth. For a second I stopped, feeling hate charging within me, then dashed over and grabbed it, suddenly as enraged by the tolerance or lack of discrimination, or whatever, that allowed Mary to keep such a self-mocking image around, as by the knocking.

In my hand its expression seemed more of a strangulation than a grin. It was choking, filled to the throat with coins.

How the hell did it get here, I wondered, dashing over and striking the pipe a blow with the kinky iron head. "Shut up!" I screamed, which seemed only to enrage the hidden knocker. The din was deafening. Tenants up and down the entire line of apartments joined in. I hammered back with the iron naps, seeing the silver fly, striking like driven sand against my face. The pipe fairly hummed with the blows. Windows were going up. Voices yelled obscenities down the airshaft.

Who started all this, I wondered, who's responsible?

"Why don't you act like responsible people living in the twentieth century?" I yelled, aiming a blow at the pipe. "Get rid of your cottonpatch ways! Act civilized!"

Then came a crash of sound and I felt the iron head crumble and fly apart in my hand. Coins flew over the room like crickets, ringing, rattling against the floor, rolling. I stopped dead.

"Just listen to 'em! Just listen to 'em!" Mary called from the hall. "Enough noise to wake the dead! They know when the heat don't come up that the super's drunk or done walked off the job looking for his woman, or something. Why don't folks act according to what they know?"

She was at my door now, knocking stroke for stroke with the blows landing on the pipe, calling, "Son! Ain't some of that knocking coming from in there?"

 I turned from side to side in indecision, looking at the pieces of broken head, the small coins of all denominations that were scattered about.

"You hear me, boy?" she called.

"What is it?" I called, dropping to the floor and reaching frantically for the broken pieces, thinking, If she opens the door, I'm lost . . .

"I said is any of that racket coming from in there?"

"Yes, it is, Mary," I called, "but I'm all right . . . I'm already awake."

I saw the knob move and froze, hearing, "Sounded to me like a heap of it was coming from in there. You got your clothes on?"

"No," I cried. "I'm just dressing. I'll have them on in a minute."

"Come on out to the kitchen," she said. "It's warm out there. And there's some hot water on the stove to wash your face in . . . and some coffee. Lawd, just listen at the racket!"

I stood as though frozen, until she moved away from the door. I'd have to hurry. I kneeled, picking up a piece of the bank, a part of the red-shirted chest, reading the legend, FEED ME in a curve of white iron letters, like the team name on an athlete's shirt. The figure had gone to pieces like a grenade, scattering jagged fragments of painted iron among the coins. I looked at my hand; a small trickle of blood showed. I wiped it away, thinking, I'll have to hide this mess! I can't take her this and the news that I'm moving at the same time. Taking a newspaper from the chair I folded it stiffly and swept the coins and broken metal into a pile. Where would I hide it, I wondered, looking with profound distaste at the iron kinks, the dull red of a piece of grinning lip. Why, I thought with anguish, would Mary have something like this around anyway? Just why? I looked under the bed. It was dustless there, no place to hide anything. She was too good a housekeeper. Besides, what of the coins? Hell! Maybe the thing was left by the former roomer. Anyway, whose ever it was, it had to be hidden. There was the closet, but she'd find it there too. After I was gone a few days she'd clean out my things and there it'd be. The knocking had gone beyond mere protest over heatlessness now, they had fallen into a ragged rumba rhythm:

Knock!

Knock-knock

Knock-knock!

Knock!

Knock-knock!

Knock-knock!

vibrating the very floor.

"Just a few minutes more, you bastards," I said aloud, "and I'll be gone! No respect for the individual. Why don't you think about those who might wish to sleep? What if someone is near a nervous breakdown . . . ?"

But there was still the package. There was nothing to do but get rid of it along the way downtown. Making a tight bundle, I placed it in my overcoat pocket.