



Emmett Draft

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Cast of Characters

Emmett

Ma

George Harvey

Eustus Spottswood

J.W.

Roy

Carolyn

Black Girl

Time: Right now

ACT I

Emmett enters on a platform above. We cannot see the platform, so he appears to be walking on air. A single spot is on him. He is carrying a large sample case--the kind traveling salesmen of cosmetics or Fuller brushes used to carry. He is dressed in a white shirt, sleeves rolled up, vest, fifties peg trousers and ankle-high sneakers. His hair is cut short except for a shaft in the front. He is humming as he positions the sample case, opens it so that its lid conceals its contents, removes a tablet of paper from his pocket and a pencil from the sample case. he sits on the floor. Writing.

Emmett: August 29. 28? No 29. 1953, Sumner Mississippi.

(rocking his head and singing)

M I

Crooked leter crooked letter I

Crooked letter crooked letter I

Hump back hump back I Mississippi

Sunflower County

(rural sounds her with background music)

Where? Where in Sunflower County? Mmmmmmm.

Hey! The gin mill. Why not?

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(lights come up showing one section at a time, the interior of a cotton gin mill, disused full of the gins , binders and all the fnags and blades of that industry)

Emmette: Good. That's good. Solid. Yeah.

(Jumping up)

Carolyn! Yo, Carolyn.

(A white woman in her late sixties enters, She is shabby, unattractive seems depressed and befuddled. She hovers near the wings confused about where she is)

Emmett: Nope. Nope. Not yet. Get on back.

(He walks about consulting tablet and the details of the machinery. Notices that Carolyn is still lingering at the wings.)

Emmett: Didn't you hear what I said? Get on back in there till I call you.

(She retreats)

Emmett: Damn. Can't do nothing right. Thirty years and still stupid. Lemme see.

(muses; smiles)

Emmett: Spottwood, Eustus Spottwood.

(Eustus Spottwood enters. A black man in his forties, dressed in faded coveralls.)

Emmett: (calling) George Harvey

(George Harvey enters. A Black man dressed in a business suit)

(Eustus and Geroge recognize each other and shake hands and embrace as though they had not seen each other for a long time)

Emmett: Hey baby!

(jumping down from a piece of machinery above their heads and landing right in front of them)

Emmett: George. Eustus. How you doin'?

Eustus: Emmett? Good God. That you?

Emmett: Damn right.

Eustus and George: I'll be damn (noises of excitement shock love hugging slapping--all excessive and over-acted)

Emmett: (sharply) OK. That's enough.

(abruptly George and Eustus stop and wait for direction)

Emmett: Enough. I want... I want...Hey. Let's sing. Remember how it went?

(Singing)

If I didn't care for you...

Come on.

(All three sing the Inkspot favorite. and dance the steps that were popular then. At the end of the routine the two older men drop back into neutral.)

Emmett: You need practice, man. You had a voice like a angel. What happen? You start smoking?

Eustace: (embarrassed) I don't smoke; drink neither.

Emmett: Drink neither? (sly) What was in that bottle we hung down the well? Kool -aid? (laughing)

Holler, that's what it made you do. (imitates a drunken teen aged Eustace) Uncle Drew threw a hammer at your head . (sourly) Missed you. Right George?

George: Right. Right.

Emmett: (coldly) Missed him. That's what made you stop drinking, Eus? Somebody tried to kill you, huh? You never was one for much rough stuff was you? You and Uncle Drew. Oh he could throw a hammer all right, but he couldn't stop two crackers from snatching me out of his house. Don't that beat all?

(Background sounds of motor of pick up truck; slamming doors, voices in rage, voices in defense; motor of truck starting up and driving off)

Emmett: Throw a hamer at a kid having fun, but can't throw nothing at two crackers dragging his own nephew out the house.

Eustace: That ain't right what you saying, and it aint fair.

Emmett: Not fair?

George: That was a long time ago, Emmett.

Emmett: Was it? Hey you lookin good. (touches and arragnes George's lapsesl etc.) Put on a light weight though. Not good, George. Gotta stay lean, fit. (shadow boxes and punches George playfully)

Emmett: Come on. Come on.

George: Em, I'm forty-four years old. Forty-four.

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Emmett: (stops punching; affecting innocence) How's it
feel, forty four?

George: Well it aint twenty-four (laughs)

Emmett: (with some menace) I wouldn't know. I got stopped
No forty-four. No thrity-four. No twentyOfour.
Not even fifteen. Just fourteen. That's all
I know George. Fourteen. So you all got to tell
me about the rest. Tell me, Eus, when you get to be
twenty, do you cool down, are the women different?
You got any kids?

Eustace: (hesitant) Five.

Emmett: No shit. How old?

Eustace: Got a girl 23. 'Nother 18. One is--

Emmett: (screaming) Older than me! Older than me! My
best friend got kids older than me. (Begins to
stroke and handle the machinery in a threatening
way) What they do for fun Eustace? Go to dances
and stuff? (Loud dance music) Eat smoked pork
on Saturday, chicken on Sunday? (Slaming around
in a rage) Big old biscuits with jalapeno jelly
and Kool Aid. Sit on the porch and look at lightening
bugs? (fatigued--music softer) Drink well water
out a guord? Taste like moss. (Earnestly) Does
the water taste like moss? Is it cold? It used
to be cold. Real, real cold.
(closes his eyes remembering the taste of cold
well water on a hot day in Mississippi)

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Emmett: Oh well, Let's get on with it. Ma! Ma!

(Mrs. Till enters; she is bent and older than her years.)

Emmett: Oh, Ma. No. NOT like that. What'd you do to your hair? You was--a big woman, wasn't you Ma? Stand up straight, Ma. Come on, now. Here (Presses her spine while pressing her stomach to make her stand straight) Little more, little more, just a li-

(She shakes her head)

Emmett: I'm doing that Ma. YHou have to do what I want you to.

Mrs. Till: Bobo, I'm awful tired. You know I---

Emmett: (angry) No! No! Oh shit. Your teeth. YOu got different teeth, Ma. (frustrated) OK. Ok. Look jut , sit. Over there. Sit down and rest.

(She sits. George and Eustace go to her, shake hands, speak to her words we can not hear. Emmett picks up his table and writes furiously for amoment, then more calmly singing along with a gospel choir I am climbing Jacob's ladder .

At end of the song, he looks at his mother and the two men engaged in a private conversation. He picks up something and smashes it.

Emmett: All right! Here we go! Carolyn! (teasing voice)
Oh, Carolyn.

(Carolyn ~~re~~enters; sees Emmett and the others. Reacts as thought she is in danger and turns to go.)

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Emmett: Uh uh Carolyn. This is my world, baby. YOU
aint going no where.

Carolyn: You better let me out of here. Don't you come near
me (No one is) Stay the hell away from me!

(Runs toward wings, bumps into "wall" Searches it. No exit.)

Emmett and the others watch her felling an invisible wall,
touching it at its base, pounding on it, jabbing it etc.

Finally she turns back toward the others her back edging along
the "wall." Mrs. Till recognizes her and slowly, painfully begins
to raise her self up from where she is seated. Starts
toward Carolyn.

Emmett: (Waving) No Ma. It's OK. Just sit. All in good
time. All in good time. You like a good time,
Carolyn?

(He wiggles his pelvis at her. Wolf-whistles, etc. Then
bursts into laughter. Points up the difference be-
tween his young, muscular self and her old shapeless self,)

Emmett: (still plying with Carolyn) J.W! Get in here!

(J.W. Milan enters)

Emmett: J.W. Milan, skilled mechanic! Not guilty! Roy
Bryant!

(Roy enters)

Emmett: Mr. Bryant is a store keeper. Not guilty!

(J.W. and Roy are silent, alert standing close to one
another)

Emmett: What's the matter? I said not guilty, didn't I?
Not guilty, not guilt. You ain't guilty, but you

is evil and you also is in danger. (giggles),
 (Emmett turns his back to them. Roy pulls out a knife and swishes it toward Emmett's back, just missing. Mrs. Till, George, Eustace jump up. Carolyn clasps her hands in hope. Emmett urns toward Roy. Roy sticks the knife deep into Emmett's stomach. Others scream. Emmett does not move.)

Emmett: This is my dream, fucker.

(The men back away slowly; turn to leave; bump into "wall"
 The seach it. Find no exit.)

Emmett: What you know? Look like somebody kidnapped
 your ass. Aint that a hoot?

(He walks over to Carolyn and singing " In the4 dark, In the dark, I get such a thrill, when you press your sweet lips to mine etc. ; dances with Carolyn as close as possible (a kind of slow drag) . Carolyn is repelled, stiff with rage. Suddenly Emmett stops , steps back and, with a glance at Carolyn's husband (Roy) wolf-whistles at her. J.W. rubs his jaw, flings out a hand to restrain the leap Roy begins to defend his wife.)

Emmett: To Carolyn) Did you think I was serious? (To J.W.)
 Did you think I was serious? I was fourteen, man.
 Fourteen! Did you think I was serious? In the ninth grade. In the ninth grade. Two weeks after you killed me I would have been in high school, You know what, I couldn't wait to go to hight school. (Sighs)
 Hey, did you ever meet my mom?

Mrs/ Till: Baby, please.

Emmett: No. Come on, Ma. (Introduces, formally, cheerfull)

Carolyn. My mother. (the women react)

Emmett: What about a little curtsey, Miss Ann.

Carolynb curtsies to Mrs. Till)

Emmett: You need practice. Practice, I said. Keep practicing till you get it right.

(She continues to curtsey)

Mrs. Till: I don't want that. I don't need that.

Emmett: (shouting) I want it. I need it! (To J.W. cordially)
J.W.? You and Roy ever meet my Mom? Mom, this is J/W, skilled mechanic, killer, farmer, jack of all trades and this is his brother, (slappin him on the back) Roy, ditto except for skill. Fucker can't even shoot. J.W. here's the marksman. 'Shoot the head off a turtle at fifty yars' Right? Right!

(Shaking his finger at Carolyn who has stopped curtseying_

Emmett: Practice. Practice makes perfect.

(She continues, frequently stumbling, bur forced by Emmett's attention to keep it up, until puppel-like she establishes a rhythm. Mrs/ Till is discomnfited, Eustace and Geroge stay by her to sooth her. George approaches Emmett.

George: Look, uh, Bobo. I know this is uh how you want it and everything, but, but

Emmett: But, but

George: Well, things is different now.

Emmett: Different?

George: Yeah. Oh yeah. I mean you wouond't belive
Sumner now. I mean , well, look--

(Geroge brings out his wallett)

Emmett: (to Carolyn) Practice bitch.

George: (showing a card to Emmett) See this?

Emmett: What is it?

George: My registration card. My voter registration card.

Emmett: (deadpan) Hot shit.

George: And LOOK here. Look. Can you believe this.

(pulling out another card) Mastercard. Visa card, Sears and
Roebuck. Exxon,

Emmett: (laughing)

George: What's so funny? (angry)

Emmett: Wallets, man. Wallets are funny. I had a wallet
once. It had a place for money, to just like
yours. (handles Geroge's wallet) Yeah, and a
place for cards, all kinds of credit cards. But
I didn't have none. Money I mean and credit cards.
But it had this place for pictures, photos. It's
one of those things that makes you a man, having a
wallet (to Carolyn) Sit down woman. You can't do
nothing, learn nothing. (fingering the wallet)
Cause when you have a wallett you can pull it out of
your hip pocket and show it to another man. He pulls
out his; I pull out mine. He shows me his; I show
him mine. See? First thign you did was show me
yours. The bullshit yo got in here , just like

j

.. the bull shit I had in mine. YOU got cards, I had pictures. All bull shit. So another man would know how tough you is. Hey. (punches George in friendly but manic manner) Hey, George. You tough? You tough? Yeah, you tough. White folks don't scare you now. You got cards. But seems to me I remember when yo didn't have no wallett. Seems to me I was the only one with a wallet. You think that's why yo was so scared to meedle some white girl? And why I wasn't? Black Boy with a wallett-- he got to have something in it. Don't he, Carolyn. Don't he Roy? What yo got in your wallet, J.W.? One of them little Klan Cards, right?

J.W.; Look boy. Let me tall yo something--

(Emmett punches J.W. in the stocmah, hard, then curbs himself from being enraged and doing more, as if waiting to savor it later.)

J.W. is bent over , breathless and in pain.

Emmett: Speak up, sweet heart. You aint got all day.

J.W.: (gsping) Don't make no difference what you do to me . You a dead nigger and I made you dead. Nothig gonna change that.

Mrs. Till: (Screaming a loud pitiful scream) I aint going through this no more. I am tired! (George and Eustace try to hold her down) Let go of me! (To Emmett, pleading) Let me go. Please Bobo, if you ever loved

me, let me go. Please.

Emmett: (tenderly) I'm not finished, Ma.

Mrs/ Till: Yes you are, baby. You're finished, I'm finished. These here raggedy white fold, Can't you see they finished too?

Emmett: They can't be finished. You either, least of all me. Nothing is finished, until I finish it. I finish it. Can't nobody finish me. You think cause I'm dead I'm finished. Shit no. Shit no. Oh it's going to be finished all right. But by me this time. I'm the one didn't get to bve grown- didn't get to go to high school(mtk)

Mrs. Till: You call them names. They call you names. What's left to do baby?

(As he talks and she replies, Emmett walks up to level where his sample case is. Rummages in it and pulls something out)

Emmett: One thing more. One thing, before I finish it for good!

(Throws his beaten up, dried up corpse down among them. Carolyn screams. Mrs. Till weeps loudly, Eustace covers his nose. George vomits. J.W. and Roylook at the corpse and then turns their backs. Emmett pulling from bhis sampler a cleaner's garment bag in which is a pale blue suit hanging from a hanger. Then he pulls shoes, and a hat. With all of this he walks over to Roy and J.W.)

Emmett: Proper burial in a proper suit.

(They resist)

Emmett: (bellowing) Move!

(The whites, including Carolyn, all set about the task of dressing the corpse in the blue suit. When they falter, Emmett points a finger which makes them jump as though a bolt of electricity has shot through them, and they submit. While they do the shrouding/dressing, Emmett sings and dances a powerful, ~~sedky~~ sexy rocking song-- like Aretha Franklin's "Respect" but of the period he would remember. He is interrupted by a scuffle in the audience. The music fades. A young Black woman climbs up through pit onto the stage.

Black girl: Stop it! Stop it!

(She kicks the corpse out of their hands, continues to kick it until it is off stage)

Black girl: I'm not listening to anymore of this mess!

What is this? (To Emmett) Who the hell do you think you are?

Emmett: You are not in my play!

Black girl: That's the trouble with it. I'm not in it