



Dreaming Emmett Draft

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DREAMING EMMETT
by
TONI MORRISON

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"Carolyn"

You? I saw to it.

Eustace

Shot gun make everybody cool. Baby girl cool with a shot gun. But
a gun ain't a man.

afraid of? Something on the outside? Or something on the inside?

George

How bout that? "ARMED WHITE MAN SHOOTS UNARMED BLACK CHILD"
It's her heart, baby. That's what needs protecting. And her heart
Deep down, man, you have got to know you jive.
trouble.

Eustace

And can't no judge change that.
There's nothing wrong with a judge.

[Heartbeats are heard. "Eustace" appears with an assembled rifle]

"Carolyn"

You? I saw to it.

DREAMING EMMETT

by TONI MORRISON Tamara © 1985

What did he see to, Carolyn? What's he protecting? What's he so afraid of? Something on the outside? Or something on the inside?

Ma

It's her heart, baby. That's what needs protecting. She has heart trouble. M I Crooked letter crooked letter I

Crooked letter crooked "Carolyn"

There's nothing wrong with my heart!

[Heartbeats are heard. "Emmett" appears with an assembled rifle]

[He repeats this song intermittently while he hauls in, then rummages through the trunk. From it he extracts a visor which he puts on his head, a huge watch which he straps to his wrist, an old typewriter, paper and other paraphernalia suggestive both of theater props and an executioner's tools. He arranges the typewriter and kneels in front of it, preparing to type.]

EMMETT

How I Spent My Summer Vacation August 24 August 26? 1955 August, 1955

Senflower County Mississippi U.S.A.

[He stands and blocks the scene with his hands.]

A greyhound bus station. Chicago. Crowded. Hot. (wipes under his chin) Here I'm hopping on in. (passes the money) Yeah, you ain't deaf. Mississippi. Huh? No way! Round trip, baby. This is definitely a round trip. Sheesh, two weeks and I'm back in Chicago. Where? Same to you! Then. Then. I stroll over to

DREAMING EMMETT

by TONI MORRISON - © 1985

EMMETT(singing)

M I Crooked letter crooked letter I

Crooked letter crooked letter I

Hump back hump back I Mississippi

[He repeats this song intermittently while he hauls in, then rummages through the trunk. From it he extracts a visor which he puts on his head, a huge watch which he straps to his wrist, an old typewriter, paper and other paraphenalia suggestive both of theater props and an executioner's tools. He arranges the typewriter and kneels in front of it, preparing to type.]

EMMETT

How I Spent My Sumner Vacation. August 24. August 26? Shit. August, 1955..

Sunflower County Mississippi U.S.A.

[He stands and blocks the scene with his hands.]

A greyhound bus station. Chicago. Crowded. Hot. (wipes under his chin.) Here's me bopping on in. (Bops around) Got my suitcase. Money in my wallet. (To clerk) Hey, baby.

No way! Round trip, baby. This is definitely a round trip. Sheeee, two weeks and I'm back in Chicago! Where I belong. Same to you! Then. Then. I stroll over to

the newstand. Buy me a Plastic Man Comic and a pack of Lucky Strike. Couple of Butternut candy bars. Some Wrigley. Spearmint. (Unwraps the gum.) Mmmmmm. (Chewing with deep pleasure.) Gotta get me a ^{Co}Coca Cola. (Drinks it, tosses bottle. Looks at watch.) Right on time. Hey, buddy! I'm first. Ticket right here, sir. Sit myself down. (Pointedly.) Up front. No, not up front. This is gonna be a long trip and I need room, man. Room. Go to the back; spread myself out. (Does so, looks out window,) Ma. Ma. Here I am. (Waves.) What? I can't hear. Stay out of what? Oh. Yeah, sure. Yeah. Bye! Mmmmmmmmm. (Imitating sound of motor, rocking a little in his seat.) I light me up a cig. (Smokes and gazes out of window.) 'S green. Wow. One mile and it's green. Lawns. Look at those trees! Oh, man! (Yawns.) Sun's going down. (Closes his eyes; snores; wakes; looks out of window.) Ha ha. Oh, man! Don't tell me that's cotton! Ha ha. I thought it was gonna be big. Big bushes of it. Like snowballs. Like, like cotton. This is jive. Where the houses? Oops, there's one. Damn. Shoe boxes. Wee little shoe boxes from Thom Mcann. Hey, Mississippi, ain't you got no towns? No magnolia? Lord have mercy. Look at that. Hey! Hey! (Waving.) Where your shoes, nigger? (Laughs.) (TK?) (Opens window, pokes his head out.) Mmmm. What is it? (Inhaling) Something, something, sweet like honeysuckle, leaves, moss. And (his voice alters) mud. Smells like mud. And water.

[Suddenly agitated, he slams window.]

Cut! Cut, cut, cut!

~~[Returns to typewriter and types a bit.]~~

Way-off-in-the-cotton-field-down-by-the Tallahatchee-River...[Pauses, stands, looks around] is a, a barn. Over there. See? It looks like a barn, but it's not. It's a...a...(pleased with himself) a cotton mill.

[Lights go up on what he is imagining: a structure suggesting a cotton mill.]

Yes. Oh yeah. Solid. Oh this is gonna be good. Oh, get down! Oh, man this is good.

[Pleased and excited he returns to the typewriter and types. While he types, below him, in an area not in his "Set", five actors enter. They have no make-up on. They all sit before "mirrors" and put on make-up, after which they place on their heads "faces" each according to his race and sex, but huge and all about fifty years old. They are quiet as they dress, and although they do not hear EMMETT above, their movements are synchronized with his descriptions of each. Each "face" is radically unlike what EMMETT is picturing.]

Okay now. I need one white girl. Twenty, twenty-five. Red hair fixed in a--what you call it?--kind of a fluffy page boy. Slanty green eyes. Hoo! A fox in Mississippi. A dog in Chicago. Tits? (Shapes them.) Yeah, tits. One of those little strap dresses. Wooo. Sunback. Yeah. Sunback dress. High heel shoes. Hee hee. Her stockings, the run is a little crooked. Hee, hee. And a red, red mouth. Which I will get to later. And one white boy. Not much older than me. Black hair, oily. Sideburns. Big Mississippi cracker grin. Litty bitty miss-colored eyes. And a red, red neck. Which I will also get to later. Okay now. One, big, go-for-bad white dude. Wear his balls on his shoulders. Where they might do him some good.

John Wayne of the swamps. Yeah, live mustache. Crew cut. Military-type dude.

Now, my buddies. Let me see now. Eustace, you sixteen. Got a buck tooth, too: Left-handed. Shaves a part in his head...And George, you 'bout fifteen. Thinks that mess up under his chin is a goatee. Ha ha ha. I seen more hair on a egg. Don't never wear shoes and don't even own no socks.

[The actors are finished now, waiting for directions.]

EMMETT

Yo! White Girl. Pretty white girl!!! On stage, woman!

[A white woman rises and enters his domain.]

EMMETT

Who are you? Hey, I know what you look like. You trying to fool me? Me? Fat chance! Red hair, green eyes. Twenties, I said! Get on out of here!

[He ~~returns to his typewriter~~. Notices the woman has not moved]

Didn't you hear what I said? Get out till I call you, and next time I call you you better come out looking right

[The woman returns to her place.]

EMMETT

Who she think I am? After thirty years she still trying to pull something? You don't scare me and you can't fool me. This time I'm running it. Hear me? You not gonna mess this vacation up. This is my summer vacation. (Chuckling.) Revised! Way it's 'sposed to be. Way it would have been if I had my boys with me. Sheee. Wow, Oh man, if those cats

could see me now! (Seriously, commanding.) If those cats could see me now! Eustace! Yo! Eustace Spottswood.

[Eustace enters.]

EMMETT

Hey man, no! What is this? You sixteen. Two years older than me. It's gotta be like it was then. You had two buck teeth, remember? Come on Eustace, you wasn't even shaving yet, except the part in your head.

[Gives him another face--a mask that is the happy innocent face of a young Black boy.]

EMMETT

There, that's it. We buddies. You ain't no old man. Now where's your friend; my ace boon coon. George! George Harvey!

[George enters.]

EMMETT

Aw, look at you man. Who would have thought it? Shoot. I have to do everything myself.

[Adjusts old face to the new one: a young pleasant Black boy with a tiny goatee. EMMETT steps back, turns away from then, then while eyeing them over his shoulder, George and Eustace spring into action, recognizing each other, slapping hands etc. EMMETT turns around toward them--all smiles.]

EMMETT

George. Eustace. How you all doing? Been a long time. Hey, Come on! You remember me don't you?

GEORGE

Gee, you do look familiar.

EUSTACE

Yeah. You favor somebody.

EMMETT

Oh, man! How could you forget?

(sings)

"Many a tear has to fall

But it's all in the game.

Do wah wah wah."

[He waits expectantly. George and Eustace look at one another.]

[Louder and a little wild]

"Many a tear has to fall;

But it's all in the game."

When's the first time you heard that? You know the words, right?

Eustace (Singing softly)

"Many a tear"(laughs) I ain't heard that since --oo, a long time.

EMMETT

Sittin by the well. 1955? August? You never heard it before then. I taught it to you as a favor because Mississippi boys don't get no Chicago music.

EUSTACE

August. 1955. August, 1955.

EMMETT

The Sweetheart Cafe? I taught you how to do the twist, man! (Dances for him.)

EUSTACE

Emmett? Emmett Till?

GEORGE

Good God is that you?

EMMETT

Is pig pussy pork?

GEORGE AND EUSTACE

I be damn.

[They are thrilled, excited. All greet him with warm enthusiasm.

EMMETT lapping it up.]

EMMETT

Okay! That Enough! Quit!

[George and Eustace freeze-Emmett returns to his platform and

~~typewriter. Makes a note and~~ notices the frozen men]

EMMETT (cont'd)

Hey. Not like that. Loosen up. This ain't a morgue. Ha ha ha. That's it.

[EMMETT humming "Many a Tear" selects items from his trunk: guns, whips, rope, etc.]

GEORGE

Say, ah, what you doing back here?

EMMETT

[EMMETT examines a hanging rope--noose tied.]

Making a movie.

GEORGE AND EUSTACE

A movie?

EMMETT

Yeah. Called "How I Spent My Summer Vacation", and both you all in it.

EUSTACE

I thought--

EMMETT

Yeah. You thought what?

EUSTACE

They killed Emmett Till. You dead. Ain't you dead?

EMMETT

Wellll, yes. But not forgotten. Not forgotten, am I? But you know what? It ain't like what they said. You know: sleep, rest, rest in peace. (Laughs) I don't even doze I dream, but I don't sleep. I been awake for thirty years.

DREAMING EMMETT/TONI MORRISON

EUSTACE

You don't get no rest?

EMMETT

~~When you ain't got a body, there's nothing to rest.~~ Nope.

GEORGE

You must be wore out.

EMMETT

I am. Oh I am. Wore out. Tired, man. Dead tired. (Brightly) That's why I'm making this movie. (Serious) Because if I make this movie, I mean really make it--then I can just watch the movie when I want to, I don't have to keep dreaming it. Over and over...So I got to make it right, this time. (Cheerful.) Hey, it's my movie. And what good is a movie if you can't put your best friends in it

EUSTACE

(Observing rope.) What's that for?

EMMETT

This? Aw, no, man. Not you. You my main man. You both got parts, though. See, it starts out with me getting on the bus. Sharp, you know. I got a brand new wallet, some Lucky Strikes. I get on this here bus. Like I'm gonna have me a good time. Know what I mean? Take a trip, raise some hell. It's summer time, right? Gonna have me a good time. We had a good time, didn't we?

GEORGE AND EUSTACE

Right. Right.

EMMETT

All of us, boy. Riding round in that jalopy. Remember the girls? Hee hee

[They all laugh and roughhouse each other.]

EMMETT

See I want you all for background music. You know, like we used to do on the porch and down by the well. So we got to practice before the others get here. (Singing) "If I didn't care..." Come on!

[George and Eustace join him in this Ink Spot song]

EMMETT (to Eustace)

You need a lot of practice man. You had a voice like a angel. What happened? You still smoking them Phillip Morris?

EUSTACE

(His voice altering.) I don't smoke; never did.

GEORGE

(Altering also.) They don't make Phillip Morris anymore.

EUSTACE

Drink neither

EMMETT

~~(Consulting his watch, sensitive to the slight change in time.)~~ Drink neither?

(Laughing shrilly) What was in that bottle we hung down in the well? Kool Aid? It made you holler. That's that first time I ever saw a running drunk. I used to hear people say "He was running drunk." I didn't know what they meant till that day. You was hollering and running all round the yard. Uncle Drew threw a hammer at your head. Remember? Missed you. Right, George?

GEORGE

(Agreeable, back in his face.) Right. Right

EMMETT

That what made you stop drinking, Eus? Cause somebody tried to hurt you, huh? You never was one for rough stuff. (Playing with his weapons.) Oh Uncle Drew. He could throw a hammer all right, but he couldn't stop two crackers from snatching me out of his house. Here I am sleep. Night's so hot you want to call the fire department. We all in the bed together, trying not to touch cause the person next to you is hotter than you are. Crickets driving me crazy, but soon as I fall sleep I wake up. Somebody's touching me. Right here. Calling me. Flashlight. I can't see who it is. But I start to get dressed. White men. I smell white men. "You don need no socks!" Red neck, what he know about socks? I tell him "I don't wear no shoes without socks, turkey!" And make 'em wait. Uncle Drew, he's whispering. But not to me--to them-the white men. "He just a kid and he ain't from round here. From up North. He don't understand. He don't understand." He was right, I don't understand. Throw a hammer 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 ain't fair. Uncle Drew took care of us; you too. Fed you; gave you the best piece of the chicken, like you was a guest or something. We showed you a good time--

EMMETT

Who told on me? Somebody told on me, Eustace. Who told that cracker what I did. Three days passed since I went in that jive ass little store. Three days!

EUSTACE

He ain't making no movie. What he want with us?

GEORGE

I can't figure it.

EUSTACE

I didn't do nothing to you. Neither one of us did nothing

EMMETT

You got that right. You didn't do nothing. (He adjusts George's appearance.) You looking good George, real good. Put on a little weight though. Not good, George. Gotta stay fit.

[Shadow boxes and then punches George playfully, but with an edge in it.]

Come on. Come on.

[George reacts to this play like an older man. The exertion makes him "lose" his face.]

GEORGE

Hey. I ain't no kid no more. I'm forty-four.

EMMETT

(Suddenly curious.) How's it feel, forty-four?

GEORGE

Well, it ain't twenty-four.

EMMETT

There's a difference? I wouldn't know. I got stopped. No forty-four. No thirty-four. No twenty-four. Not even fifteen. That's all I know, George. Fourteen. So you all got to tell me about the rest. Tell me, when you get to be twenty do you cool down? Are the women different? Is that when you get a car? You make any money? Yeah. I bet you got some kids. Eustace?

EUSTACE

(Taking off his face.) Five.

EMMETT

No kidding. How old?

EUSTACE

Got a girl twenty. N'other one eighteen. One is...

EMMETT

Older than me! Older than me! My best friend got kids older than me. What they do for fun Eustace? Go to dances and stuff?

[Dance music is heard. As EMMETT continues, EUSTACE and GEORGE both, caught up in his words, put their young faces back on.]

EMMETT

Put a blue light bulb in the socket and dance close? Smell like Posner hair oil and Cashmere Bouquet. Sweat. Sweat. Jesus. I wish I could sweat. Or taste. Do they eat smoked pork on Saturday, chicken on Sunday? Big old biscuits with jalapeno jelly and Kool Aid. Sit on the porch and look at lightening bugs? Drink well water out a gourd? Taste like moss. (Earnestly) Does the water still taste like moss? Is it cold? It used to be cold. Real, real cold. Maybe it was the heat that made it seem so cold. I never liked eggs before. In Mississippi they tasted different. Yolks so dark. Orange-colored. Almost bloody. My mother used to try to get me to eat eggs. But I didn't like--they looked so--She said, "Eggs is like meat to the body. Same as meat." I hated 'em. But I liked her pan bread. Cooked in a skillet on top of the stove. Burnt a little bit around the edges. She always burnt it--just a little around the edges. Ma. Ma.

[MA enters. She has no painted face--she is herself.]

MA

Oh baby, did I burn your bread?

EMMETT

Ma! Aw, Ma. Aw no. You was a tall woman. Stand up straight, Ma. Come on now. Here...

[She tries to hug him. He won't let her.]

EMMETT

Stand up, Ma. Stand tall. For once in your life would you stand tall? Little more, little more, just a... (Ma struggles away from his hands. She is petulant like a child.) I'm doing this, Ma. You have to do what I want you to!

MA

(Partly to EMMETT, partly to GEORGE and EUSTACE.) You can't get that nice crust less the flame is high.

EMMETT

What you need those for? (Reaches for her glasses. She eludes him.)

MA

That's how come it burns. Give it a nice flavor, I always thought. I don't know why he always fussed so.

EMMETT

Your ^{hair}teeth. You got different teeth, Ma.

MA

(Laughing.) I'm not going to eat you. Would you feel better if I took them out?

EMMETT

No!

[MA disappears]

DREAMING EMMETT/TONI MORRISON

[Unsettled and a little frightened, EMMETT leaps away from her ^{vacuum.}
Addresses himself to his paraphernalia and the ordering of his "set." He is agitated and
fearing the loss of control. ~~Ma disappears.~~]

(Bellowing.) All right. Here we go? Gimme the White Girl. ^{Princess! Princess!} Carolyn! Carolyn!
^{Princess} [Actress Carolyn enters with young, pretty face. Sees EMMETT and
the others and, as if on cue, backs away in exaggerated fear.]

Uh, uh, White lady. This is my movie. You ain't going nowhere.

CAROLYN

You better let me out of here. Don't you come near me. Stay away from me!

[Carolyn runs downstage; bumps into a "wall." Searches it. No exit. EMMETT and the
others watch her feeling an invisible "wall", touching it at its base, pounding on it,
jabbing it. Finally she turns back toward the others, her back edging along the wall.]

EUSTACE

(To EMMETT) What you doing?

EMMETT

All in good time. All in good time. (To CAROLYN) You like a good time, Carolyn? (He
wiggles his pelvis at her. Wolf-whistles etc, then laughs.) J. W. Get in here!

[J.W. enters, his face is old, tired and harmless.]

EMMETT

Carolyn. Here's your husband. What the hell is this? Cut it out!

[Tries to give him young, smiling malevolent face. J.W. resists while
EMMETT goads him and finally succeeds.]

Look a here, man. You the Lone Ranger. Kill any Indians today? Or you still specializing in niggers? Nigger boys that is. Where's Tonto? Hey Roy! Get in here!

[ROY enters, putting his young face over his old as he comes.]

EMMETT

Right. Right. (To GEORGE and EUSTACE.) Member them? Had a little country store smack dab in the cotton field. Full of Kerosene and Red Seal snuff. Indian Head cornmeal and all the Dr. Pepper you could ever want. Green lunch meat and super buds and rock candy and matches and (Turning to CAROLYN) other things.

GEORGE

Just a store. Just a country store. People can't ride twenty miles every time they want tobacco.

[MA appears]

MA

Did you go in these people's store? I told you to stay out of trouble, didn't I?

EMMETT

These two faggots killed a certain Emmett Till. Me. Me!

MA

You doing it all wrong, baby.

EMMETT

Pistol whipped him, made him take off his clothes, shot him, tied a motor on his neck, threw him in the water. But the jury said "not guilty."

[J.W. and ROY lower their smiling heads.]

EMMETT

I said not guilty, didn't I? Not guilty. You ain't guilty, but you are evil and now you in danger.

[He turns his back to them. J.W. pulls out a knife and swishes it toward EMMETT'S back, just missing. EMMETT turns toward J.W. who sticks the knife deep into EMMETT'S stomach. Others groan.. EMMETT dies all over the place. Then gets up and brushes himself carefully.]

EMMETT

~~Want to try that again? Slower this time.~~

~~[They repeat the action, but this time EMMETT pushes the two men before the second staggling. They bump into the wall; search it, then back away.]~~

EMMETT

Look like somebody kidnapped your ass. Ain't that a hoot?

[EMMETT moves to Carolyn and begins to sing, "In the dark, in the dark, I get such a thrill, when you press your sweet lips to mine," etc. Dances with her as close as possible--a kind of slow drag. Carolyn writhes with rage.]

MA

(At large.) Everything's going to be all right.

EMMETT

(To Carolyn.) Did you think I was serious? (To J.W.) Did you think I was serious? I was fourteen. Fourteen! In the ninth grade. Two weeks after you killed me I would have been in high school. I couldn't wait to go to high school. (Sighs) Hey, did you ever meet my Mom? Carolyn, My mother. (The women react) What about a little curtsey, Miss Ann? (Carolyn curtsies) You need practice. Practice, I said. Keep practicing till you get it right.

MA

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, husband, jack-of-all-trades, murderer, and this is his brother. (Slapping him on the back) Roy, ditto, except for skill. He can't even shoot. J.W. here's the marksman. "Shoot the head off a turtle at fifty yards," Right? Right! (shaking his finger at CAROLYN who has stopped curtseying) Practice. Practice makes perfect.

[She continues, frequently stumbling, but is forced by EMMETT'S attention to keep it up, until, puppet-like, she establishes a rhythm. EUSTACE soothes her. ^{MA shakes her head} GEORGE approaches EMMETT.]

GEORGE

Look, uh, Emmett, I know this is, uh, how you want it and everything, but, but...

EMMETT

But, but...?

GEORGE(Changing faces)

I understand your position, but...well, things is different now.

EMMETT

Different?

GEORGE

Yeah. Oh yeah. I mean you wouldn't believe Sumner now. I mean, well, look...

EMMETT

(To CAROLYN) Practice.

GEORGE

(Showing a card to EMMETT) See this?

EMMETT

What is it?

GEORGE

My registration card. My voter registration card.

EMMETT

Hot, hot shit.

GEORGE

A lot has gone down since 1955. All those signs, remember? For colored only, toilets, ~~in~~

waiting rooms, bus seats, water fountains. Colored section this, colored section that.

Remember?

for colored only
↑

EMMETT

I remember.

GEORGE

(proudly) Not a one left. You can go from the Gulf to the St. Lawrence River and never see a single one.

EMMETT

Uh, uh, uh.

GEORGE

There are Negroes at the University of Mississippi! We got mayors. Black mayors.

EUSTACE (Changing his face)

Had a senator too, while back. *First one since Reconstruction*

GEORGE

A Black man ran for President! And look here. Look. Can you believe this? (He pulls out a sheaf of cards) Mastercard. Visa Card. Sears. Exxon. Used to be Esso, but--

[EMMETT laughs]

GEORGE

What's funny?

EMMETT

Wallets, man. Wallets are funny. I had a wallet once. Brown, genuine artificial calf skin. Yeah. But it didn't have a place for --cards. It had this photo section, though. A place where you put in pictures. Mine had Maria Montez in it and Dorothy Lamour. It's one of those things that makes you a man, having a wallet. (To CAROLYN) Sit down. You can't do nothing learn nothing.

DREAMING EMMETT/TONI MORRISON

Major and Buck

[CAROLYN re-groups with ~~the white men~~ to an area where EMMETT cannot see them. They remove their young faces]

CAROLYN

Are we hostages?

J.W.

Be still.

ROY

Maybe he wants ransom.

CAROLYN.

I'm scared.

J.W.

That's what he wants. Don't give him the satisfaction.

EMMETT

(Still fingering the wallet) When you have a wallet, 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? Like just now. First thing you did was show me yours. All the stuff you got in here, just like the stuff I had in mine. You got cards, I had pictures. All bullshit. So another man would know how tough you are. Hey, George, I can tell you tough. White folks don't scare you now. You got cards, plenty cards. I remember when you didn't even have a wallet. You think that's why you was so scared to meddle some white girl, and why I wasn't? Black boy with a wallet, he has to have something in it. Don't he Carolyn? Roy? [The three cover their faces with young ones] What you got in your wallet, J.W.? One of them little Klan cards, right?

J.W.

Let me tell you something boy...

[EMMETT punches J.W. in the stomach, hard, then curbs himself from doing more, as if waiting to savor it later. J.W. is bent over breathless and in pain. GEORGE and EUSTACE put on young faces.]

EMMETT

Speak up, sweetheart. You ain't got all day.

J.W.

(gasping) Don't make no difference what you do to me. You a dead nigger and ain't no Black mayor gonna change that.

MA

Stubborn. Why is he so stubborn? Is it the man thing or just being young? Look. (hold up her hands.) See? it's over.

EMMETT

Not yet. I'm not finished, Ma.

MA

Yes you are baby. Let go. You're finished. I'm finished.

EMMETT

Nothing is finished until I finish it. I finish it. Can't nobody finish me. You think cause I'm dead I'm finished? Uh, uh. Oh, it's going to be finished all right. But by me this time. I'm the one didn't get to be grown--didn't get to go to high school, didn't get to have a class ring..

MA

You call them names. They call you names. What else is there to do?

EMMETT

A lot. Look. (cheerful) I got this whole thing worked out. I thought about it--a lot. I had a--lifetime, understand, to think about it. (shuffles pages) See, I narrowed everything down to six things. (coughs as for a speech) Six. Number one: lynch J.W. Number two: lynch Roy. Number three: lynch Carolyn. Not a big lynching, mind you, because ain't nobody but me left to do it. Now if I had a crowd, or even a friend--which brings me to number four: Ask George where he was on the night of August 24, 1935, or any god dam night after they tied that cotton gin fan on my neck and dumped me in the river. I mean, like, how come those crackers still alive?

GEORGE

What crackers?

EMMETT

Them crackers!

GEORGE

You crazy! What you expect me to do? I'm a kid, just like you.

EMMETT

(Peeping under GEORGE'S young face) You didn't stay one. You got to be a man.

GEORGE

Look out, now.

EMMETT

Maybe not. Maybe you still a kid...

GEORGE

I'm man enough.

EMMETT

For what?

EUSTACE (putting on his old face)

That all you come back for? You could've stayed in the grave. Better leave it alone.

MA

He might have something. Well, it's worth considering.

EMMETT

Ma!

MA

Think ahead, son. Think ahead.

EMMETT

You on his side. Against me. You never take my side. What are you doing here if you ain't on my side?

MA

Didn't you call me? I thought I heard you call me.

EMMETT

They killed me, Ma. I'm dead!

MA

You musn't worry so.

EMMETT

This matters! Don't you care about me?

MA

Care about you?
(Looking at her palms) What do you see in here? Tell me. There's nothing in them is there? I had my hands full..with you, with work with trouble. Now they're empty. (She turns to the others) Look. Look. Look here. See? I got nothing to hold. And nothing to drop.

EMMETT (annoyed)

Number five! Make me a kite. You, (to ROY) and you (to J.W.) and you (to CAROLYN)

DREAMING EMMETT/TONI MORRISON

J.W.

A what?

EMMETT

A kite. I-want-you-make-me-kite-big- thing- fly- in- sky.

[He selects material from his foot locker]

GEORGE

Be reasonable.

EUSTACE

Dead people don't need no kite.

MA

~~You doing this to hurt me?~~ Oh, baby. I know how much you missed me.

EMMETT

I want a kite. What's the big deal? Every kid wants a kite. See it stand up in the sky straight up then dip.

ROY

Kite's a delicate thing. Got to know what you're doing. It ain't a toy, you know.

CAROLYN

You gonna make that nigger a kite?

EMMETT (to CAROLYN)

Tie my shoe.

[CAROLYN turns her back on him and walks away]

I said tie my shoe.

[She turns and they stare at each other. The set begins to grind. She kneels and ties his shoe]

EMMETT

Not too tight.

[J.W. reaches to snatch her up. EMMETT strikes him]

J.W.

Ooh! Damn your black hide-

EMMETT

That hurt you? Come on. It's just a dream. You dream don't you? That's all it is. Only difference, this one's mine.

ROY

What kinda nigger you? You hit us, but we can't even touch you. That ain't fair.

EMMETT

I was thinking the same thing. You alive, you hurt. I'm dead, I don't. I'm the dreamer. You the dreamed. Sound familiar? Huh? Like a couple of grown white men beating up a little colored boy, cause he asked a white woman for a date. Then kept on beating him. Kept on and kept on. He never touched her. Fact, he wasn't even serious. Just showing off. They knew it too, cause they was showing off just like he was. How many girls did they whistle at? Lean out the car and holler at? They knew all the jokes; they dared each other to maybe walk right up and kind of touch. They knew. They knew what it felt like to be fourteen. But these here white men they was doing the dreaming then. And this little colored boy, he was the dreamed. So...he died and they went freeeee. What the hell. Don't make no never mind he didn't go to high school. Wasn't in the yearbook. So what? His eye fell out. Four side teeth got rammed up his nose. What kind of year book picture would that make? You know, my Mama irons my underwear. She doesn't just wash them, and hang them on the line.

MA

Breeze dried. That's the way

EMMETT

She irons my shorts. So white and clean. You made me dirty my underwear.

[cross-rubbing his fingers; sing-song]

Shame, shame on me-ee. Shame, shame on you-ou. Cause you put me in the river and I wasn't dead yet. My teeth were in my nose so I couldn't hold my breath. And the place where my eye used to be, (touches it tenderly) it hurt me. It hurt me.

MA

He thinks I'm still angry with him. I'm not angry.

EMMETT

You didn't die, Mama. I did.

MA

I forgive you.

[MA disappears]

EMMETT

(To the white men) *Do* Finish my kite. Go on, *do* finish it. (to George) Is that true? You all got Black mayors now?

GEORGE

Quite a few. You'd be proud, Em.

EMMETT

So everybody's safe, huh?

EUSTACE

Well, you know...

EMMETT

No more Emmett Tills?

GEORGE

It's better, Em. It's better than it was. A lot happened and it's better now.

EMMETT

Credit cards.

GEORGE

It's more than that.

EMMETT

Water fountains. Toilets.

GEORGE

Sure.

EMMETT

White people better too?

GEORGE

Some, yeah.

EMMETT

Gee. That's great. Then I was the last Emmett?

GEORGE

It's not perfect.

EMMETT

No? I'm not the last?

GEORGE

Not yet.

EMMETT

How many more are there?

EUSTACE

Look, he's just trying to bring you up to date.

EMMETT

Yes, yes. I wanna be up to date. I do. So, am I the last Emmett Till? J.W., am I?

J.W. (snatching off his face).

No. You wasn't the first and you ain't the last. Every time one of you steps out of line, there's a responsible white man to show you where that line is. We will stop you in the alleys; we'll stop you in the parks. We will stop you on the buses, the subways--anywhere you misbehave. We will go in your churches, if we have to, and in your houses too. You're not going to sink this country out from under us.

GEORGE

If it sinks, it'll be you pulling the plug.

J.W.

Some of us is willing to protect what this country stands for.

GEORGE

You been in it less than a hundred years and swear you know all about it. What you know about what it stands for?

EUSTACE

Two things in this world don't never change: syphilis and white trash.

CAROLYN (takes off her pretty face)

You're calling us trash? He's calling us trash.

EUSTACE

Lady, you sew the seed--you tell me how it grow.

[They enter into agitated bickering]

EMMETT

That's enough. Quit it. I'm up to date now.

GEORGE (to EUSTACE)

Ask him. Go head. Ask him.

EUSTACE

- You ask him. Looks viscious to me.

GEORGE

He say he just want us to sing. For his movie.

EUSTACE

Then where is the camera. I don't see no camera.

GEORGE

Ask him. This is a two way street.

EUSTACE (to EMMETT)

Scuse me, but ah, what's it like?

EMMETT

What's what like?

EUSTACE

You know. Being dead and all.

EMMETT

I'd avoid it if I was you.

EUSTACE

See any angels? Who you see? Is it pretty?

GEORGE (to EUSTACE)

What makes you think any angels is where he is?

EUSTACE

Well, whatever.

EMMETT

Shut up, you two.

EUSTACE

Got to be something. You just floating around up there? By yourself?

EMMETT

I tell you to stop, you supposed to stop.

GEORGE

Any gates? Pearly gates and things? Tell us about it.

EMMETT

I said stop! (tries to put their masks back)

GEORGE (refusing mask)

We didn't know you all that well, you know. Couple weeks don't make blood.

EUSTACE

That's a fact.

GEORGE

Come strutting down here, like he own the place. All Northern, City. Big city. Chi-ca-go!
Wearing socks every day like a sheriff.

EMMETT

Something's wrong.

GEORGE

Laughing at the toilet, laughing at the mattress. You even laughed at my mama's snuff
can. (to Eustace) Remember that?

EUSTACE

Flies. That's what I remember. You couldn't stand the flies. Can you beat that? In the
country fussing about flies.

EMMETT

(Struggling for control) The water from the well was like moss. Cool.

GEORGE

Chickens on the porch, you tried to die.

EMMETT

We ate pecans. Big fat pecans. Fell down right by my feet.

EUSTACE

Act like we was flies!

EMMETT

We played soft ball behind the church. Eustace was a lefty.

GEORGE

I didn't play no soft ball. I had chores.

EMMETT

(frantic) We sat on the porch drinking spiked lemonade. Lightening bugs was
everywhere, like, like..

EUSTACE

Flies!

EMMETT

Stars! Stars god damn it! They were! I know how it was! (getting confused) It was hot, but it, it it smelled good. And the sun rose like a bullet, fast. No dawn, just pow! Daylight. And some red flowers, or pink? Roses maybe, over by the shed, no the well by the well. No the wood shed; and berries, black berries. Sweet, sweet. Oh God-sweat (he wipes his eyes.)

EUSTACE

That's not the way I remember it.

EMMETT

That's the way it was!

GEORGE

We didn't even have a well. Got water from the creek.

EMMETT

There were black berries!

CAROLYN

Then what'd you want to go grabbing me if the black berries was so sweet--like you say?

EMMETT

To fuck you!

MA

Son!

[Set grinds and swings. All have trouble keeping balance. Through the grinding and shifting, EMMETT leaps and swings around the set.]

ROY

Hey! The kite! You tearing up the kite!

J.W. (to Carolyn)

What you say that for? Now look what you done.

ROY

It's all tore up.

GEORGE

There he is!

[Emmett is moaning and breathing hard, flinging things from his trunk.]

CAROLYN

He's coming after me! Listen at him!

J.W.

Keep shut!

CAROLYN

Keep shut yourself! You heard what he said and you still letting a nigger boy make you wet your pants.

MA

Listen to me. This one time.

ROY

Listen to your mammy.

EMMETT

You listen. Next time, next time you find an Emmett and you want to get rid of him, when he--bothers you, gets too close, looks you in the eyes, makes--contact. When he says something besides yessir. Next time, let me tell you what to do..

[He begins collecting their young faces. Piling them up and then begins to "dismantle" them]

When you feel him next to your skin, and have to get rid of him. When you know in your heart that his heart is beating too. That he is life and you can't stand it. When you see him see you and you and him both know you do. Next time you come across an Emmett, take my advice: Be careful of his face. Don't smash it too much.

[He crumples the masks]

I know that's hard. But my advice is not to, because that's the face that watches you. That floats next to you at the supper table, the same one you see in passing cars. Don't smash his face. And if you have to stab him or cut his throat, make sure you also cut his feet off. If you don't-- after he's dead, his feet will walk behind you. They'll touch yours under the blanket at night. And next time, make sure you cut off his hands because the hands never die. They can pat you on the shoulder anytime. Do it right, next time. When you feel his-power, and have to shoot him in the back, don't turn and run afterwards, because as soon as you turn your back to him he'll jump on it, throw his arms around you. When you take a shower you can't scrub him off. When you kneel down to pray in your little white churches, he's kneeling too, right behind you.

[To George and Eustace]

And if he needs your help, and you can't give him any, then you better tell the undertaker to put sand in his mouth. Otherwise he'll just keep whispering your name from bushes, from the trees in your yard. I am telling you what I know. I live there. I been doing it--for thirty years. And like Mr. J.W. says, I wasn't the first or the last Emmett Till.

[He pulls out a beautiful light blue suit, snap brim hat, and white wing-tipped shoes. Then he drags out what appears to be a bloated and decaying corpse and throws it down among them]

EMMETT

Number Six! Proper burial in a proper suit by the proper murderers! Move!!

[They rush for their crumpled faces, scrambling, putting on wrong masks, confused and trying to hide. When they finally begin the dressing and shrouding, while EMMETT sings and dances to a powerful, sexy, R & B song, he is interrupted by a figure from the audience. A Black girl climbs upon the stage, screaming:]

GIRL

Stop it! Stop it! [She kicks the corpse out of their hands and continues to kick it out of sight.]

I don't want to hear any more.

EMMETT

Get out of here! You can't come in here. I'm making a movie here.

GIRL

I don't like your movie.

EMMETT

I'm dreaming this, girl. You ain't in my dream.

GIRL

Maybe that's the trouble with it. I'm not in it

DARKNESS

P 37-38

[Lights up]

Ma
Oh. Say there. (to Girl)
Watch your step, baby. This floor is a mess.

"Emmett"
Get her out! You hear me? I want her out of here!

Ma
Don't be like that. We got room.

Carolyn"
Where'd she come from?

"J.W."
Anybody's guess.

"Roy"
Shoot up like weeds.

"Carolyn"
How she get in here?

"Roy"
Look at the old lady. She come and go anytime she feel like it.

"J.W."
Nigger mess.

"Carolyn"
Maybe she's in charge. I mean, if we hostages and they want ransom.

"J.W."
He won't get away with it. Promise you that.

"Roy"
She's after him; not us.

No I ain't. Look over there.

Man, don't waste my time.

"Carolyn"

Ohh. Say there. (to Girl) Where you from?

Girl

Out there. The audience.

"Carolyn"

Audioence? We on TV! Oh, no. My Lord. J.W.!

George

Hah! Eustace. We on TV!

"Carolyn"

You hear that?

Eustace

You lying.

"J.W."

Where's the camera at?

"Carolyn"

She come up out the audience.

"Emmett"

I'm the audience. And the director!

"Roy"

You mean we live?

"Carolyn"

Give me your comb. Quick.

Girl (to Ma)

How you doing? You all right?

George (to Eustace)

No I ain't. Look over there.

Eustace

Man, don't waste my time. "J.W."

Ma

Oh, I'll make it. That's a nice dress.

"Carolyn" (to "J.W.") looking at
Button your shirt.

Girl

Thank you.

"J.W."

Leave off. They want me, they got to tyake me the way I come.
["Emmett" is 'lost' in the set. Bangs, waves, but ~~xxx~~ can't get
through. The others, delighted with the respite, ignore him]

George

Got to be there.

Girl

I had a lot of trouble with the placket.

"Roy"

I don't see nothing.

Eustace

Why it got to be there?

George

That explains it.

"Carolyn"

Is it anybody out there?

Eustace

Don't nothing explain that. (observing weapons)

"J.W."

Lights up. The GIRL is re-arranging the set. Others join her in changing things I kinda felt something all along.

occasionally, until the re-arrangement "traps" or "excludes" EMMETT

"Carolyn"

EMMETT
You felt something and you let me come out here looking l
Get her out! You hear me? I want her out of here!
like this?

MA

Aw, leave her alone. You come right on in if you want to.

CAROLYN (To J.W.)

Where'd she come from? (To GIRL) Where'd you come from?

GIRL

Out there. The audience.

EUSTACE

Audience? We on TV!

CAROLYN

Oh no. My Lord. J.W!

EUSTACE

Hah! George, we live! On TV!

CAROLYN

You hear that?

GEORGE (to EUSTACE)

You lying.

J.W

Where's the camera at?

ROY

You mean we live?

[Lights up. The GIRL is re-arranging the set. Others join her in changing things occasionally, until the re-arrangement "traps" or "excludes" EMMETT

EMMETT

Get her out! You hear me? I want her out of here!

MA

Aw, leave her alone. You come right on in if you want to.

CAROLYN (To J.W.)

Where'd she come from? (To GIRL) Where'd you come from?

GIRL

Out there. The audience.

EUSTACE

Audience? We on TV!

CAROLYN (The way I come

Oh no. My Lord. J.W.!

EUSTACE

Hah! George, we live! On TV!

CAROLYN

You hear that?

GEORGE (to EUSTACE)

You lying.

J.W.

Where's the camera at?

ROY

You mean we live?

CAROLYN

Give me your comb. Quick

GIRL (To MA)

Hi. How you doing? You all right?

EUSTACE (to George)

No I ain't. Look over there.

MA

Oh, I'll make it. That's a nice dress.

CAROLYN (To J.W.)

Button your shirt.

GIRL

Thank you.

J.W.

Leave off. They want me, they got to take me the way I come.

[EMMETT is "lost" in the set. Bangs, waves but can't get through. The other ignore him.]

GIRL

I had a lot of trouble with the placket.

ROY

I don't see nothing.

CAROLYN

Is it anybody out there?

J.W.

I kinda felt something all along.

CAROLYN

You felt something and you let me come out here looking like this?

J.W.

Don't agitate yourself. If it is a picture show remember who's making it. Whatever it is, it's backwards.

ROY

Yup. Doomed. If coons is doing it, it's doomed for sure. Where'd that crosspiece get to?

CAROLYN

I know it's a camera out there.

ROY

He can't make a kite, let alone a movie. You see that piece a wood, J.W.?

MA

Hard to find good material anymore. Everything is some kind of ion. Nylon, banlon.

GIRL

I know. Even the zippers are fake. You wouldn't have a safety pin, would you?

MA

Let me look. I remember when a zipper actually zipped. Stayed shut too. Safety pin any help?

CAROLYN

He's not making it. They are.

J.W.

They who?

CAROLYN

The camera people. Over there! Or there! It's like those nature shows.

GEORGE

Good evening. My name's Harvey. George Harvey.

J.W.

What nature shows?

40-42

I found it! I found it!

Insert new p. 40

"Carolyn"

You know. When you can see the little baby birds coming out the eggs and feeding in their little nests, but the birds don't know you watching them. Cause the camera's hidden.

Girl

Hello Mr. Harvey. (to Ma) Thanks. This should hold it.

"Roy"

Is that it? Right yonder?

George

Call me George. And this here's Eustace.

Girl

I know. I've been sitting out there watching you.

"Carolyn"

Wait'll the kids see this!

"Roy" (to camera)

I'm making a kite here. Least ways, I was. Till he rocked everything. Hold on, just a minute. (searches)

"J.W." (to "Roy")

Go somewhere and sit down. Quit acting the fool.

"Carolyn"

Just be yourself. That's all. Natural like.

George

How'm I doing?

Girl

Not bad.

Tamara

NO. Tamara as in today.

Eustace

Look like a Johnson. Your last name Johnson? (early)

Tamara

No. Ashanti.

Eustace

I don't know no Ashantis.

Ma

Oh, that's nice. Tamara Ashanti.

George

Bet your daddy's name ain't no Ashanti.

Tamara

You asked me my name. You want his, ask him.

"Emmett"

I am dreaming this. I brought you here. You, you, you, you, and you too. (to Tamara) I did not bring you here. So get out!

[She does not move]

"Emmett"

Beat it! (threatens her)

Tamara (sitting in his chair)

Don't even try.

"Emmett"

Get out of my chair!

Ma (touching chair)

Everything's going to be all right. Turst me.

[Tamara 'thrones' it; 'absorbs' it, while "Emmett" bellows in

frustration, she saunters around]
their little nests, but the birds don't have you watching them. Cause the camera's
You invented them. Not me. I invented me.

"J.W."

That's telling him, sister. (he pats her familiarly)

I'm not your sister.

"Carolyn"

Get back over here J.W.

Eustace

You ain't his sister, and you ain't your daddy daughter either.

Wait'll the kids see this!

[ROY mugs for the camera]

J.W. (to ROY)

Go somewhere and sit down. Quit acting the fool

Just be yourself. That's all. Natural like

How'm I doing?

Not bad. My name's Tamara

Tamara? As in yesterday?

CAROLYN

You know. When you can see the little baby birds coming out the eggs and feeding in their little nests, but the birds don't know you watching them. Cause the camera's hidden.

GIRL

Hello Mr. Harvey. (To Ma) Thanks, This should hold it.

ROY

Is that it? Right yonder?

GEORGE

Call me George. And this here's Eustace.

GIRL

I know. I've been sitting out there watching you.

CAROLYN

Wait'll the kids see this!

[ROY mugs for the camera.]

J.W. (to ROY)

Go somewhere and sit down. Quit acting the fool

CAROLYN

Just be yourself. That's all. Natural like.

GEORGE

How'm I doing?

GIRL

Not bad. My name's Tamara.

GEORGE

Tamara? As in yesterday?

TAMARA

No. Tamara as in today.

EUSTACE

Look like a Johnson. Your last name Johnson?

TAMARA

No. Ashanti

EUSTACE

I don't know no Ashantis.

MA

Oh, That's nice: Tamara Ashanti.

GEORGE

Bet your daddy's name ain't no Ashanti.

TAMARA

You asked me my name. You want his, ask him.

ROY

I found it! I found it!!

J.W.

What you cackling about?

ROY

The crosspiece. It was lost. Can't make no kite without a crosspiece.

EMMETT

[Screaming, his voice like that of someone in a closet of outside a closed window.]

This is not TV! This is my dream!

CAROLYN

What's he saying?

J.W.

He says it ain't no TV Just like I said.

CAROLYN

Aw, what a shame.

EMMETT

I am dreaming this. I brought you here. You, you, you, you, and you too. (To TAMARA)

I didn't bring you here. So get out!

[She does not move]

Beat it!

[He raises his fist]

TAMARA

Don't even try.

EMMETT

Get out of my dream!

MA

Everything's going to be all right. Trust me.

TAMARA

You invented them. Not me. I invented me.

J.W.

That's telling him sister. [He pats her affectionately]

TAMARA

- I'm not your sister.

CAROLYN

Get back over here, J.W.

EUSTACE

You ain't his sister, and you ain't your daddy's daughter either.

TAMARA

I know you're not siding with him.

EUSTACE

I'm just trying to find out who your people are. Whose sister are you?

TAMARA

Hers. (pointing to MA) I'm her sister.

EMMETT

That's my mother, bitch!

MA

Baby!

GEORGE

Hey, man. Watch your mouth.

TAMARA

Now that's just what I came up here to talk about. I don't like your attitude.

EMMETT

My what?

TAMARA

Your attitude. First off: Don't. You. Ever. Call. Me. Out. Of. My. Name. Again.

EMMETT

I'll call you anything I want.

TAMARA

I don't think so.

J.W.

This is getting good.

TAMARA (To J.W.)

Do you want my full attention? (To EMMETT) And I don't like the way you treat your mama. You haven't said two kind words to her. And what about her back? You dreamed

this mess up why couldn't you dream up a pillow, so your mama could sit comfortable-like. Suppose she's thirsty and wants a nice cup a coffee. Would you like a nice cup of coffee, Ma'am?

MA

Love one.

TAMARA

See what I mean? Aside from me and her, there's not a person up here who cares whether you live, die, eat, go hungry--

GEORGE

Hey, wait now.

TAMARA

--got clean drawers, sheet on your bed, change in your pocket--I been watching you for a half hour. You make me sick.

CAROLYN

At last! Girl, you have never said a truer word.

TAMARA

Who asked you?

CAROLYN

I was paying you a compliment.

TAMARA

You want to pay somebody, pay her.

CAROLYN

You better watch how you speak to me.

TAMARA

Oh? You go for bad?

CAROLYN

I manage.

"Carolyn"

P. 45

to who?

"Carolyn"

Where I come from men watch over their women.

"Carolyn"

Tamara

I Where you come from, they have to.

"Carolyn"

Exactly. you want to?

"Carolyn"

Tamara

Exactly.

"J.W."

"Carolyn"

Because somebody's always lurking around us.

Tamara

Tamara

And you all might want to get loose?

"Carolyn"

You know what I mean.

Tamara

Tamara

Me/ How would I know? Nobody ever had to watch over me.

"Carolyn"

Would it have done any good?

Tamara

Did it do you any?

"Carolyn"

Yes!

"Roy"

Tamara

Sweet baby. Sweet little white girl baby.

"Carolyn"

I'm a woman.

Te

Prove it.

"Carolyn"

To who?

Tamara

To me. The only one qualified to judge.

"Carolyn"

I don't have to prove nothing.

Tamara

But don't you want to?

"Carolyn"

J.W. your friend. Look like he's the expert on corpses.

"J.W."

You don't have to prove nothing to nobody. Least of all her.

Tamara

Called him again, didn't you?

"J.W." (to "Carolyn")

Come on. Come on. This ain't going to last forever.

Tamara

Bet on that? what you think. You think my life is easy. Cause

I'm a white man? All I got "J.W." is crack a whip? You dumb bastard.

You look here. I don't know what you --people got in mind. But

I don't know a damn thing about no Emmett Till except what I read in

the papers and what folks said. I spoke to some little nigger

about his manners thrity years ago, and that's the last I saw of

him.

looked down on me. Nobody. "Roy" t no civil rights to protect

Last anybody saw of him..

George

Man, you crazy.

"Roy"

Ever find a body? Nobody ever found a body called Emmett Till.

Eustace

What you say?

"J.W."

You heard him. Can't have a killing without a killed.

Eustace

What was that they drug up out the river?

"J.W."

Ask your friend. Look like he's the expert on corpses.

George

Hauled him off in a pick-up.

"J.W."

I never hauled nothing.

Eustace

A kid.

"J.W."

Easy. That's what you think. You think my life is easy. Cause I'm a white man? All I got to do is crack a whip? You dumb bastard. I made a living out that place. Me. My family. Fourteen, sixteen hours a day, I worked. Oh well, no. I didn't got to none of them universities. Ole Miss. But that's all right. Took niggers in, but didn't take me. But I made a living. And I didn't sit behind no desk squeezinvg dimes out of poor people. I made what I owned. Nobody looked down on me. Nobody. Wasn't no civil rights to protect me. No laws to protect me.

Eustace

You got off, didn't you?

"J.W."

Damn right, I got off.

Tamara

How come?

Your husband touched my behind a while ago. Should I shoot him?

"J.W."

Because I was innocent--before the law.

That's your problem

George

Yeah. Before the law. Before there ever was a law, you was innocent.

Not today. Today it's your problem.

Eustace

And after it you was more innocent than ever.

Oh yeah?

Tamara

Just like your bride. (drapes her in a "bridal veil")

Yeah. Cause we're on stage together now. On TV!

Carolyn"

Don't touch me.

He said it wasn't no TV! (desperate, to camera) He used to pick

"J.W."

up whole engines. With his tow arms. Hold it up like...like...Oh

Leave off!

you should have seen him back then. Whole engines. And his hair

"Roy" Leave off!

Leave off!!

"J.W." (to camera)

[They guard her]

She was a looker. A real looker. I got her straight from her

Tamara

Ooo. And she didn't even have to call you. Ha, ha. I love

white women. I just ove em. Show their nipples and then call for help.

"Roy"

Rainwater.

"Carolyn"

I never showed nothing, and I didn't call nobody either. I got

a gun and shot after him myself. I ain't never sunk so low that I got to take a pass from a nigger.

Fair weather or foul, she stayed by my side.

TAMARA

[For a beat or two, no one speaks] w how to manage a pass from a kid in a store when you behind the counter, do?

TAMARA

Your husband touched my behind a while ago. Should I shoot him?

I had my share of interested parties. "Carolyn"

That's your problem

TAMARA

So how come when a black kid ask you if you call your husband? Couldn't

Not today. Today it's your problem.

CAROLYN "Carolyn"

Oh yeah? Nobody. I got a gun and shot after him myself. I ain't never sunk so low that

I got to take a pass from a nigger.

TAMARA

Yeah. Cause we're aon stage together now. On TV!

CAROLYN "Carolyn"

He said it wasn't no TV! (desperate, to camera) He used to pick up whole engines. With his tow arms. Hold it up like...like...Oh you should have seen him back then. Whole engines. Abd his hair smelled so sweet.

TAMARA

Not today. Today it's your problem.

"J.W." (to camera)

She was a looker. A real looker. I got her straight from her mother's arms. Pure as rain water. And I saw to it she stayed that way.

TAMARA

Yeah. Cause we're on stage together now. On TV!

"Roy"

Rainwater.

[Carolyn looks for a hidden camera]

CAROLYN "Carolyn"

You saw do it?

He said it wasn't no TV! (to camera) He used to pick up whole engines. With his two arms.

"J.W."

Hold it up like like Oh you should have seen him back then. Whole engines. And his

Fair weather or foul, she stayed by my side.

TAMARA

I bet you do. When you want to. And I bet you know how to manage a pass from a ^{customer} kid in a store when you behind the counter, don't you.

CAROLYN

I had my share of interested parties.

TAMARA

So how come when a black kid ask you for a date, you call your husband? Couldn't manage that could you?

CAROLYN

I didn't call nobody. I got a gun and shot after him myself. I ain't never sunk so low that I got to take a pass from a nigger.

[EMMETT is searching through the foot locker]

TAMARA

Your husband touched my behind a minute ago. Should I shoot him?

CAROLYN

That's your problem.

TAMARA

Not today. Today it's your problem.

CAROLYN

Oh yeah?

TAMARA

Yeah. Cause we're on stage together now. ON TV!

[Carolyn looks for a hidden camera]

CAROLYN

He said it wasn't TV! (to camera) He used to pick up whole engines. With his two arms. Hold it up like, like...Oh, you should have seen him back then. Whole engines. And his hair smelled so sweet.

~~J.W.~~

~~(To camera) She was a looker. A real looker.~~

~~[EMMETT has assembled a rifle].~~

EMMETT

Hey! Hello

TAMARA

Now what?

EMMETT

You messed it up. I had it right and you messed it up.

TAMARA

You messed it up yourself in 1955

EMMETT

They killed me! They took my life. For nothing!

J.W.

It wasn't exactly nothing. Rape is serious where I come from.

MA

Somebody get raped? Where'd you hear tell of somebody getting raped?

J.W.

Would have, if we hadn't stopped him.

[EMMETT shoots; nobody falls or even cringes]

EUSTACE

He took a dare. That's all. Bragging. Just kids bragging and he took the dare. Goes in the store; see that woman, and asked for a date. That's all it was.

CAROLYN

He didn't say date. He said--a nasty rotten word. And he touched me.

GEORGE:

Come on. Did you think he was serious?

CAROLYN

I don't care if you was serious or not. I am serious. I am a serious thing. Not a joke. A game. He can't just play with me, make bets on me because I'm a woman. Say what he wants, call me names. Put his hand on me. Like I wanted it. Like all you had to do was ask, like, like I was just waiting for it. I own myself, don't I? I am a serious human person.

J.W.

That's beautiful, honey.

TAMARA

And he's not? He's not a serious human person?

CAROLYN

I don't know what he is.

TAMARA

Oh, yes you do.

[EMMETT shoots]

CAROLYN

It's not my fault. I never laid a finger on him. I didn't even tell J.W. when he came back. I thought, Oh well, why get him riled. (to EUSTACE and GEORGE) Some nigger told on him. Not me.

[Emmett shoots again]

EUSTACE

You lying, lady.

CAROLYN

Ask him. J.W.? Did I tell you about it?

J.W.

Yeah. You told me. First thing you said when I stepped in the door.

CAROLYN

I did not

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J.W.

Even then I was gonna let it lie. You took a gun to him and all. I figured that was enough, but...

George

Your load of shit so heavy I get tired just watching you carry it.

"J.W."

J.W.

You don't like that, do you? That one of your own snitched on him. Well, later on a nigger told me the same story. Come up out the fields and told me, I had to

George

do something then I couldn't let the niggers think I would let it go.

One Negro don't make a race.

ROY

Eustace

Yes sir-ee. We got a reputation to think of.

Don't pay him no mind. He can't breathe without lying. "He

CAROLYN

liked niggers and niggers liked him. How you know? How you know they liked you? My reputation too. My kids were in the store. I can't let them grow up thinking a nigger

could touch their mother.

"Roy"

J.W.

We grew up with niggers.

Been dealing with them all my days. Never had no problems. Niggers like me and I like

Eustace

them.

Well they didn't grow up with you. If they grew up at all it was

ROY

in spite of you. Yeah, we grew up all right, but not with you.

Always did.

We grew up in secret, underneath things, and behind things. Squatting

TAMARA

in a field, fingering soil, walking behind the mule, leaning in a

You're full of shit!

door. We grew up. Quiet, looking at your shoes, at your chest

CAROLYN

so you couldn't see ~~the~~ our eyes, cause if you ever saw what you

Listen at her mouth. Filthy

was looking at--(gestures to "Emmett") You saw it once, didn't you?

EUSTACE

- A fourteen year old kid and you trembled like a leaf

Right on, Miss Ashanti.

"J.W."

I was never cooler in my life.

CAROLYN

I did not!

J.W.

Even then I was gonna let it lie. You took a gun to him and all. I figured that was enough, but...

GEORGE

But what?

J.W.

Well, later on a nigger told me the same story. Come up out the fields and told me. I had to do something then. I couldn't let the niggers think I would let it go.

ROY

Yes sir-ee. We got a reputation to think of.

CAROLYN

My reputation too. My kids were in the store. I can't let them grow up thinking a nigger could touch their mother.

J.W.

Been dealing with them all my days. Never had no problems. Niggers like me and I like them.

ROY

Always did.

TAMARA

~~You're full of shit!~~

CAROLYN

~~Listen at her mouth. Filthy.~~

EUSTACE

~~Right on, Miss Ashanti.~~

~~J.W.~~ Major

And let me tell you something. That trial was fair.

GEORGE

With an all white jury? You know what that jury did while the trial was going on? While it was hearing evidence? The night before they came to a decision they watched the Graziano-Archie Moore fight. That's right! The Judge let em do it. Couldn't read no newspapers, or listen to a radio, but he let em watch a black man and a colored man fight.

EUSTACE

Can't blame 'em can you? They was curious about the outcome of the fight. They already knew the outcome of the trial. Knew it when they swore em in.

~~ROY~~ Buck

Graziano sure whipped that nigger.

~~J.W.~~ Major

Shouldna even had a trial.

~~ROY~~ Buck

Never should of got to that.

~~J.W.~~ Major

And it got to where it got because of him. We was just gonna talk to. Maybe rough him up a tad. Teach him. But he wouldn't stop. He kept on. Talking. Talking. Talking. Like he wanted more. I swear--it was like he wanted more.

TAMARA

And you had more, didn't you?

~~J.W.~~ Major

I finish what I start. He knowed better'n to do what he did.

TAMARA

So did you.

~~J.W.~~ *Major*

I taught him something, didn't I? And when I taught him, I taught everybody like him. We didn't have no problems in Mississippi till them northern niggers started coming down there..

~~CAROLYN~~ *Princess*

Your average nigger is polite. (pointedly to TAMARA)

~~J.W.~~ *Major*

It's the outside ones you have to teach a lesson to.

TAMARA

Refresh my memory.. What was he was supposed to learn.

[He shoots]

~~J.W.~~ *Major*

To keep his hands off white women. If he wanna rape, rape his own women.

TAMARA

I thought that was your job.

~~J.W.~~ *Major*

Listen here. No woman gets raped less she asks for it.

Princess
[~~CAROLYN~~ turns toward him]

I mean. You know what I mean.

~~CAROLYN~~ *Princess*

Maybe I better hear what you mean.

TAMARA

He means just what he said.

Princess (to Major)
~~CAROLYN~~ ((To J.W.))

You think that?

~~J.W.~~ *Major*

Well why'd he pick you? There was other women. He picked you.

GEORGE

You killed EMMETT because she asked for it?

EUSTACE

I thought you said it was because a negro told you about it and you had to do something.

GEORGE

Before you said he asked for it. That he kept talking and talking like he wanted it.

EUSTACE

Now you saying it was cause she asked for it.

J.W. *Major*

You all mixing me up. *I never killed nobody.*

TAMARA

They killed him because they could. And because she had to be protected.

CAROLYN *Princin*

Stay out of this.

TAMARA

I can't do that, sweet heart, cause it's about me.

CAROLYN *Princin*

You wasn't even there.

TAMARA

No, but my absence was. My absence was definitely there.

EUSTACE (to GEORGE)

What the devil is she talking about?

TAMARA

When he want to prove he was a man, he needed my absence. Which is another way of saying he needed me, because, one thing is sure: if he had made a pass at me, he'd be alive and that's hard. What he wanted was easy.

GEORGE

One of these days somebody going to blow your head off.

TAMARA

That's easy too.

~~ROY~~*Buck*

I was almost killed once. I seen my whole life run right up in front of me--just like Hawaii Five O. That big wave come right at me. But it wasn't water, know what I mean? Was my life rolling up, rolling up right before my very eyes.

[EMMETT shoots]

GEORGE

Man, put that gun down. You giving me a headache.

EUSTACE

I can't hear what I'm saying.

~~ROY~~*Buck*

Anything to eat around here? Sandwich, maybe?

[Without the attention his weapon was supposed to attract, EMMETT is alone with his dying, anonymous. The dialogue continues against, but without regard to, his private nightmare]

~~CAROLYN~~*Princes*

I wasn't asking for it. He was asking for it. I wasn't asking for nothing.

~~J.W.~~*Major*

I know that.

~~CAROLYN~~*Princes*

All this time, you wasn't sure, was you?

~~J.W.~~*Major*

I took care of it, didn't I?

CAROLYN

And look where it got us.

J.W.

I done the right thing. You told me what he done and I took care of it.

ROY

We taught him. Like you said, J.W.

CAROLYN

Niggers stopped coming to the store. Couldn't sell em a can of snuff. They made sharecroppers out of us. Sharecroppers!

ROY

Kick his black ass all the way to Chicago. That's what.

J.W.

I done the right thing. Everybody said so. Said not to worry--it was the right thing and I believe it to this day. But, but then they changed up on me. After the trial, they stopped speaking like, like I was some sickness they might catch. Nobody came by the store. Business went down to nothing. Zero. And when I went to renew my loan--I been dealing with them for twelve years--they turned me down. They turned me down. The very same people who clapped me on the back for doing what a white man is bound to do. Turned me down.

CAROLYN

You went too far. He was leaving town the next day. You said you was just going to run him off. But you had to do it your way. Your everlasting, dumb, fatheaded way. So who got run out of town. Him or us?

J.W.

It was all them northern newspapers and pictures and them city lawyers.

~~ROY~~

Buck

I had my picture took fourteen times.

~~J.W.~~

Major

They didn't want no part of us. Like we dirtied the street just walking on it.

~~ROY~~

Buck

Had a movie deal that close.

TAMARA

My, my. Murder a man and you have to move. That's a mighty big inconvenience.

~~J.W.~~

Major

You don't understand. My granddaddy was born in that town. We lost everything.

TAMARA

Everything? Every single thing?

~~J.W.~~

major

We did what the others talked. They just sat around cussin niggers. But when it came time to stop talking and take action we did it. They didn't lift a hand to help.

TAMARA

You lit the fire and they kept warm?

~~J.W.~~ *Major*

We took all the chances.

EUSTACE

You all broke the horse and they sat saddle?

~~J.W.~~ *Major*

Yeah. Like that.

GEORGE

'You shoveled manure and they made hay?

~~J.W.~~ *Major*

We shoveled, we, we--

TAMARA

That's what trash is for.

~~CAROLYN~~ *Princess*

We ain't trash. (to ~~J.W.~~ *Major*) Leastwise I ain't. I was a cheer-leader. My daddy had a car before anybody. He loved me, my daddy. We ain't trash. We decent people. Always was. My mother worked hard all her life.

TAMARA

Woman, if you say one more word about your hard-working mother, I will knock you down, so help me God.

~~CAROLYN~~ *Princess*

She was!

TAMARA

Her children walk ground? Then shut your damn mouth!

What you all talking about? MA

Till. Emmett Till. Till. Emmett

Sound to me like you was talking about yourselves. Did you know him? ALL (taken aback; they exchange looks)

Sure. He was big for his age. 'Bout six feet. GEORGE

No. He was small for his age. 'Bout five three. EUSTACE

He was husky. Looked like a man. CAROLYN — *Puncies*

Never shed a tear. Just bragged. Never even screamed. J.W. — *Major*

Always laughing. GEORGE

Could hear him screaming all night. EUSTACE

He was stuck on white girls. TAMARA

He leered at me. You should have seen him. CAROLYN — *Heard her so?*

A sweet, easy going guy. GEORGE

Didn't like no flies, though. EUSTACE

J.W. *Major*

Said he had lots of white girls.

EUSTACE

He never had no girl.

TAMARA

Real macho. Always profiling.

ROY *Buck*

Said he was more man than we was.

EUSTACE

Gentle, real gentle.

GEORGE

He wasn't
But no coward. Not him.J.W. *Major*~~We~~ scared ~~him~~ to death.

EUSTACE

Real nice kid.

CAROLYN *Prunice*Awful mean. *Awful*

MA

Not my son. I know my son. My son was a prince. None of you know a thing about him. I didn't always understand him. Sometimes I didn't even hear him. But I always knew when he was there. Like electricity--plugged in and humming.

[EMMETT rises. Shedding his "EMMETT" armor.]

MA

He sang, my son. A beautiful voice. And he could draw anything he saw. And dance? He slept with his arm over his eyes. Had a smashed thumb. His nail never grew straight after that. One time a teacher slapped him in school. I was going to tear her up and you

know what he said? He said "She didn't mean it. Her hand did it, but she didn't mean it."
 He was six years old. Sometimes I dream him. He comes to me and he says "Ma, what's to
 eat?" And I get up and go to the stove. But by the time I get it on the table, he's gone.
 Gone. Now. He asked you to make him a kite. So make it.

[MA exits. EMMETT as himself watches the others - then begins to
 move into their space slowly]]

EUSTACE (to ROY)

Never get off the ground. Too big. Wrong shape.

GEORGE

It ain't bad.

EUSTACE

Need a hurricane to fly that thing.

ROY

This is something I know something about. Can't nobody tell me nothing I don't know
 about a kite.

J.W.

What's all that stuff?

ROY

That's the lightening. It's gonna have lightening bolts here and here. Silver. Be pretty.

J.W.

Put shazaam. Like Captain Marvel. Standing like this with a orange lightening bolt.

TAMARA

Captain Marvel? A fat blonde in tights?

ROY

You think you know everything. You don't know everything.

TAMARA

Captain Marvel. That explains you.

J.W.

She's right. Ought not to have a white man on it.

TAMARA

Put Shange on it, or Muhammed Ali?

ROY

This ain't your kite.

TAMARA

Or Jessie Jackson. Shazaam. Shoot.

GEORGE

Captain Marvel kicked a whole lot of butt as I recall. My kids loved him.

TAMARA

He's a turkey. A white turkey.

EUSTACE

What about Michael Jackson? You could put him.

TAMARA

Please.

EUSTACE

Martin Luther King. That's what he should put.

GEORGE

That's stupid. You can't put Dr. King on a kite. It's disrespectful.

EUSTACE

You reckon he run across him--up there?

TAMARA

Dr. King wouldn't be nowhere near him.

EUSTACE

You don't know that. Dr. King loved people. All kinds of people. Even people like you.

Insert: new p. 60

[As the black people take over the kite building, and the atmosphere becomes "full" of blacks, "J.W." chafes]

"J.W."

I ain't got to stand around here. I ain't got to stand around here.

"J.W."

"Carolyn"

What's that supposed to mean?

What are you talking about?

"Carolyn"

"

"J.W."

The mobile home ain't mobile, J.W. It ain't going nowhere.

If she can get in, we can get out, right? We can go. We ain't got to stand around here. Let's go! Roy!

What about the kids. You don't care nothing about the kids?

"Roy"

"Carolyn"

Lemme finish this. It's just about--

The kids are grown, J.W. Our kids--grew up.

"J.W."

["J.W." tries to leave, is stopped by the "nothing" he imagines]

You defect! Come on. Carolyn! Carolyn!

"Carolyn"

I heard you.

"J.W."

Let's go.

"Carolyn"

Go where?

"J.W."

Home. Where was before--all this--

"Carolyn"

And do what?

Something just come to me. If she can get in, we can get out.

CAROLYN: "J.W."

What's wrong with you? Ain't no camera out there. Ain't nothing out there. Nothing. We can go home anytime we want to.

We can go. We ain't got to stand around "Carolyn" go. Roy!

It'll be there. Waiting ROY Whenever we want it.

Lemme finish this. I'm just about-- "J.W."

What's that supposed to mean?

You defect! Come on, Carolyn! "Carolyn"

The mobile home ain't mobile, J.W. It ain't going nowhere.

I heard you. J.W."

What about the kids. You don't care nothing about the kids?

Let's go. "Carolyn"

The kids are grown. J.W. Our kids--grew up.

["J.W." tries to leave, Is stopped by the "nothing" he imagines]

J.W. "Emmett"

Home. Where we was before.
I never said silver.

CAROLYN
Roy"

And do what?
Silver be pretty.

J.W. "Emmett"

What's got into you? Ain't no camera out there. We can go home anytime we want to.
Just a kite. A plain kite.

CAROLYN
Tamara

Will be there. Waiting Whenever we want it
Then what?

"Emmett"

We make a movie.

J.W.

Something just come to me. If she can get in, we can get out.

CAROLYN

What are you talking about?

J.W.

We can go. We ain't got to stand around here. Let's go. Roy!

ROY

Lemme finish this. I'm just about--

J.W.

You defect! Come on. Carolyn!

CAROLYN

I heard you.

J.W.

Let's go.

CAROLYN

Go where?

J.W.

Home. Where we was before.

CAROLYN

And do what?

J.W.

What's got into you? Ain't no camera out there. We can go home anytime we want to.

CAROLYN

It'll be there. Waiting. Whenever we want it.

J.W.

What's that mean?

CAROLYN

The mobile home ain't mobile, J.W. It ain't going nowhere.

J.W.

Well, I am. Now!

[He exits. The exit J.W. makes provides an entrance for EMMETT. He watches J.W. leave without interest. His manner is different]

EMMETT

I never said silver.

ROY

Silver be pretty.

EMMETT

Just a kite. A plain kite.

EMMETT

TAMARA

EMMETT

TAMARA

EMMETT

TAMARA

TAMARA

You don't want much, do you? Just "make me a kite" and then you kill everybody. That your idea of power? Male power? You couldn't even leave home, couldn't even spend a summer in the country without trying to impress somebody about your power. Over a woman. And what kind of woman? You didn't have a picture of a little colored girl your wallet. Nobody dared you to make a pass at a little colored girl did they? Because you'd lose the dare. Because she'd break your arm if you did and wouldn't have to call nobody to help her do it. Or because she'd take you up on it and smile at you, be sweet and love you hard and long and maybe you'd love her back which wouldn't do because where would the power be then? If you love her back that'd be weak. Only two possibilities with a little black girl: She breaks your arm--you lose. She loves you--you lose.

EMMETT

You walked up here. You were not invited.

TAMARA

I know, but I am here.

EMMETT

I never dreamed you.

TAMARA

Why not? [EMMETT turns away] Why not?

EMMETT

I don't know.

TAMARA

Yes you do.

EMMETT

Yes. I do. Your mouth.

TAMARA

You mean if I was quiet, I could be in your dream? If I just wouldn't say anything? You

remind me of my brothers. They show up only when they want five dollars. Even then they stick their fingers in their ears. I don't care. I keep right on, because if I stop...Talk is how I keep my breath going in and out, in and out. I read the papers; listen to the news. Sometimes they have a picture of him. Somebody like you. A high-school picture, an elementary school picture. And there he is with a tie on and quiet eyes, and I go Ah! [sucks in air] Sometimes there are neighbors standing around saying what a nice boy he was and I go Ah! [suck in air] It's not my brother. Not yet. It's not my girl-friend's brother. Or my boy-friend's brother. Or even my boy-friend. Not yet. But I go Ah! Ah! Ah! I want to breathe normal. There is this little cup inside me. Like a tea cup. Like the cup you drink the really black oolong out of. Thin with a little handle you can't get your forefinger through so you have to hold it like this. It clicks when you put it down in the saucer. And it breaks if you put it down too hard. Just anything at all might break it. So you have to be careful. You have to breathe normal or it will break and you'll never hear the click. Ah! Ah! So I talk. I talk. So my breath will go in and out, in and out. Otherwise I'd be holding all the air in the world, right here. Why you have to dare everybody? Test everybody? Don't you know they're just waiting for you to make a mistake, step out of line. Draw on the wall? Laugh too loud? Turn the volume up on your radio? Anything. Any little mistake--

EMMETT

I didn't die because I made a mistake. I died because I'm Black.

TAMARA

Nothing's going to change that. You'll always be black.

EMMETT

It's not supposed to change. They are.

TAMARA

Well they won't.

EMMETT

Well, I can't. What you want is worse. A paper boy. A little Black paper boy. Get a pencil. Solve all your problems.

TAMARA

I just want it to stop. But it never does. That's why I--You want me to be quiet? Shut up? Blow my cup to smithereens? Don't tell me you don't know what I mean. When they had you down. When they kept on hitting you and hitting you and hitting you. Didn't you talk? Didn't you just keep on talking? Talking, talking. So you could hear yourself and keep the breath going in and out, in and out. Wasn't that it?

EMMETT

When the world is leaving you--you have to make a sound.

TAMARA

Yes. That's what I mean. Any sound. Even if it's noise.

EMMETT

No. Not noise. Trees make noise when you chop them down. Chickens holler when you break their necks in two. No. Not noise. You have to make a human sound. Words. Sentences. They have to know that what's dying is--human.

TAMARA

So you kept talking. Even when they--

EMMETT

I never said a thing. Not a thing. Never had the chance.

TAMARA

But they said--

EMMETT

What do they know? They killed me and they don't know who I am. You weren't even alive then, and you act like you know me better than my mother. Fourteen? Black? Male? Chicago? White woman? Photograph? What does that mean? That doesn't equal

Insert p. 65

me. That's not who I am. You can't breathe, you say, because of a newspaper headline.

Some picture in the newspaper. I'm not a headline. I thought I was at least that. At least

me. That's now who I am. You can't breathe, you say, because of a headline. Except me. I am deader than that. Deader than that.

a headline. I'm a man. A human sound. A picture, maybe. A piece of music. A movie. That was all. Something

Tamara

to go with the headline. But if your killers don't remember you, and your friends don't

I don't know what that means. either, I have to remember my death. How else could I know I lived. I have to go down

"Emmett"

in the water. Watch my eye hang out of my socket. Feel my teeth in my nose. You can't

I'm a man. breathe? Your cup won't click? I know all about breath. I breathe mud. I let it fill me.

Tamara

Fill me. My eye hurts. I can't swallow. (reaching) I can't find my eyes.

I don't know what that means.

MA

"Emmett"

No more. Baby, no more. It was just a kite. I'm not made at you for dying. And I'm not

I'm a man.

made at me for not giving you the dollar. I used to be. I used to think you'd be alive if I

Tamara

let you have the dollar. But no more. No more. Nobody should die for stealing a kite.

I don't know what that means. I don't know what that means.

TAMARA

"Emmett"

Stealing a kite? That's not--what he did.

I'm a man.

MA

Tamara

He asked me for the money. I didn't have it. Least I said I didn't. I guess I thought it was

You mean you have the power and I don't?

better spent on milk or meat or something.

"Emmett"

[The others begin to circle her]

No. No. I don't have the power. I am the power. I can't help
There's a playground in our neighborhood in Chicago. Not a real one, nothing the city
it. I am power! I run! I pop! I twist! I hit! I bite! I
made. Just a lot the kids use. They used to drag stuff in there to play with. Must have
roarrrrrr!

been two or three kids got locked in refrigerators in there. But it was wide open with

Tamara

grass in places and wind. They played there. Flew kites and things.

Stop!

"Emmett"

You can't breathe? Your cup won't click? I know all about breath. I
breathe mud. I let it fill me. Fill me.

me. That's not who I am. You can't breathe, you say, because of a newspaper headline. Some picture in the newspaper. I'm not a headline. I thought I was at least that. At least that. I listened, I watched. Them. You. Nothing is deader than a thirty-year-old headline. Except me. I am deader than that. Deader than that.

A human sound. A picture, maybe. A piece of music. A movie. That was all. Something to go with the headline. But if your killers don't remember you, and your friends don't either, I have to remember my death. How else could I know I lived. I have to go down in the water. Watch my eye hang out of my socket. Feel my teeth in my nose. You can't breathe? Your cup won't click? I know all about breath. I breathe mud. I let it fill me. Fill me. My eye hurts. I can't swallow. (reaching) I can't find my eyes.

MA

No more. Baby, no more. It was just a kite. I'm not made at you for dying. And I'm not made at me for not giving you the dollar. I used to be. I used to think you'd be alive if I let you have the dollar. But no more. No more. Nobody should die for stealing a kite.

TAMARA

Stealing a kite? That's not--what he did.

MA

He asked me for the money. I didn't have it. Least I said I didn't. I guess I thought it was better spent on milk or meat or something.

(The others begin to circle her)

There's a playground in our neighborhood in Chicago. Not a real one, nothing the city made. Just a lot the kids use. They used to drag stuff in there to play with. Must have been two or three kids got locked in refrigerators in there. But it was wide open with grass in places and wind. They played there. Flew kites and things.

CAROLYN

You talking about Emmett Till?

MA

You ought to be 'shamed of yourself. You don't even remember what Emmett Till looked like. None of you. He ain't Emmett Till. He's my son. My son.

~~J.W. enters!~~

~~J.W.~~

~~I'm not leaving you in here with no bunch of--what's going on?~~

ROY

Guess who that is. Or rather guess who that ain't.

J.W.

That's the boy you said. That's Till. The one we taught. Ain't it? Well, that's who he said he was.

MA

A grown man. A fully-grown man with children of his own. He didn't even call the hospital--just the police. My son died on the curb. Never made it to the emergency room. I asked them: Did he call? Did he call? that was 1957. He ain't called yet. Shot him and went on about his business. Some women worry about what kind of job their boy is gonna have. If he finish high school, who he might marry. All those kinds of things. Women like me-Black women like me, we just wonder will he make it home? Will he get through the day? When the police came by I thought what nice boys. They sat down and talked real nice to me. I wondered if their mama wonders if they'd come home at the end of the day too. But then, they have the guns. At the hearing all anybody wanted to know was whether the storekeeper had a license for his gun.

GEORGE

Did he?

MA

Oh yes. Oh yes. He had a license for everything. They always do. If you got a license when a child takes a kite you can take his life.

J.W.

You mean to tell me that ain't the boy we taught a lesson to? I knew it.

MA

You didn't know it. You don't even know the face you smashed.

Ma (holding or restraining him)
No more. Baby, no more. It was just a kite. I'm not mad at
you for dying. And I'm not mad at me for not giving you the
dollar. I used to be. I used to think you'd be alive if I let
you have the dollar. But no more. No more. Nobody should die

Eustace

So what'd you do it for? What'd you say you was Emmett for?

"Emmett"

Everybody knew about him, remembered him. They wrote him up and

put his picture in magazines. For a while he was somebody. He

was young--like me. And he, and he-- When that bullet hit me

I never said a thing. Not a thing. I didn't have time. I wanted

to say something. Make a sound. Like Emmett. Loud. Loud.

There's a playground in our neighborhood in Chicago. Not a real

Ma

one; nothing the city made. Just a lot the kids use. They

used to drag stuff in there to play with. Must have been two or

"J.W."

three kids got locked up in refrigerators there. That's the kind

of 'playground' it was. But it was wide open with grass, trees,

and wind. They all played there. Play kites and things

actors. Just actors. You know? (begins to wipe his makeup off)

"Roy"

Kite's finished. It's right--right here.

"Carolyn"

I'm real sorry. Real sorry.

Emmett Till looked like. One of you. He ain't Emmett Till. He's

"J.W."

When you ah--go back, can you get any sleep? I mean, can you

rest now?

"Emmett"

Can you?

[Roy, Carolyn and J.W. disappear]

Ma (holding or restraining him)

No more. Baby, no more. It was just a kite. I'm not mad at you for dying. And I'm not mad at me for not giving you the

dollar. I used to be. I used to think you'd be alive if I let The man who shot me never saw my face. How could he remember it? At fourteen you-- you have the dollar. But no more. No more. Nobody should die didn't have a life of my own to call it one. And I didn't have a dying either. So I started for stealing a kite.

imagining I was Emmett Till. I thought everybody knew about him. remembered him.

Tamara

They wrote him up and put his picture in magazines. For a while he was somebody. He Stealing a kite? That's not--that's not what he did.

was fourteen--like me. I couldn't take his life, so I took his death. When that bullet hit

Ma

me I never said a thing. Not a thing. I didn't have time. I wanted to say something. He asked me for the money. I didn't have it. Least I said I didn't. Make a sound. Like Emmett. Like he did. A sound people would hear. Then it would be I guess I thought it was better spent on milk or meat or something.

[The Others begin to ~~strike~~ move toward Ma and "Emmett"]

There's a playground in our neighborhood in Chicago. Not a real one; nothing the city made. Just a lot the kids use. They used to drag stuff in there to play with. Must have been two or three kids got locked up in refrigerators there. That's the kind of 'playground' it was. But it was wide open with grass in places, and wind/ They all played there. Flew kites and things.

Carolyn"

You talking about Emmett Till?

Ma

You ought to be shamed of yourself. You don't even remember what Emmett Till looked like. None of you. He ain't Emmett Till. He's my son. My son.

[ROY, CAROLYN, and J.W. exit into "dressing room"]

EUSTACE

I thought something was funny bout you. I mean, you were a good boy.

good boy.

DREAMING EMMETT TILL

EUSTACE

What you do it for? What'd you say you was Emmett for?

EMMETT

The man who shot me never saw my face. How could he remember it? At fourteen you--I didn't have a life of my own to call it one. And I didn't have a dying either. So I started imagining I was Emmett Till. I thought everybody knew about him, remembered him. They wrote him up and put his picture in magazines. For a while he was somebody. He was fourteen--like me. I couldn't take his life, so I took his death. When that bullet hit me I never said a thing. Not a thing. I didn't have time. I wanted to say something. Make a sound. Like Emmett. Like he did. A sound people would hear. Then it would be over and I could dream something different.

J.W.

Well look here, if you ain't Till. Well we ain't got no quarrel, do we. Stealing a kite. Shoot. I mean. Well, well. We're actors. Just actors. You know? (begins to wipe his makeup off)

ROY

You still want the kite? I finished it. I'll leave it right here.

CAROLYN

I'm real sorry.

J.W.

When you ah--go back, can you get any sleep? I mean, can you rest now?

EMMETT

Can You?

[ROY, CAROLYN, and J.W. exit into "dressing room"]

EUSTACE.

I thought something was funny bout you. Emmett Till wouldn't a done this. He was a good boy.

Insert page 69

GEORGE

Sorry, kid. I mean we just actors, like the "Emmett" was in "Cabin in the Sky." Maybe
 you Nothing is deader than a thirty-year old headline. Except me.
 I am deader than that. Deader than that.

[EUSTACE and GEORGE Tamara]

Aw, no. No.

EMMETT

Say. You tried, didn't you? To save him I "Emmett"

A human sound. A picture maybe. A peice of music. A movie. That
 was all. Something to go with the headline. But if your killers
 don't remember you and your friends don't either, you hug your
 death, make it into something. How else could I know I lived?

You got to remember, we was Black boys.

GEORGE Ma

A kite can fly all right if you hold on to the string. But if you let
 go (whoosh) that's hwen it becomes what it really wants be.

[She exits]

MA

["Emmett" looks around. Something is happening to and on the
 set. It both distracts and excites him. As his excitement mounts,
 Tamara touches him]

EMMETT "Emmett"

Movie's over. You don't have to stay.

TAMARA Tamara

I know. Can I ask you something? Is this what the dead do?
 live their dying?

EMMETT

It's what the young dead do. The young "Emmett" dead.

It's what the young dead do. The young murdered dead.

(looks at her hands)

it's like? I mean

GEORGE

Sorry, kid. I mean we just actors, like the man said. I was in "Cabin in the Sky." Maybe you remember me? Well, nice meeting you, ma'am. And you miss. Take care little brother.

[EUSTACE and GEORGE turn to go]

EMMETT

Say. You tried, didn't you? To save him I mean.

[They pick up masks and exchange glances]

EUSTACE

We did all we could.

[Turns away, pauses and turns back]

You got to remember, we was Black boys.

GEORGE

(Holding mask before his face) In Mississippi. In 1955.

[They toss the masks away and enter ~~"dressing room space"~~ ^{EXIT}]

MA → insert

A kite can fly all right if you hold on to the string. But if you let it go (whoosh) that's when it becomes what it really wants to be.

[She exits]

EMMETT

You don't have to stay.

TAMARA

I know. Can I ask you something? Is this what the dead do? Re-live their dying?

EMMETT

It's what the young dead do. The young, murdered dead.

TAMARA

But none of it helped. It didn't do any good. Nobody changed. Everything's the same.

EMMETT

No. It's Not.
~~Almost. Except. It doesn't scare me. I'm not afraid anymore to look at what nobody else~~
can. I'm more real, more alive than they are. Who knows? Maybe they are worth my
attention. But one thing for sure: they aren't worth my imagination.

TAMARA

Will you keep on--dreaming 'EMMETT'? Do you have to?

EMMETT

Not if you do. If you remember, if anybody does, I won't have to. I can get on.

TAMARA

On?

EMMETT

Yeah. On. Do you know that the grass in the sea is always green and moving? And
there's dark velvet alleys in between snow caps? You can look at the sun as an equal, and
then you feel sorry for it because it only has one world. Just one! Tomatoes scream when
you cut them, and there never was a beginning. There never was a nothing. And there
never will be a nothing. It's not empty. It's not. It's, it's --loaded. It's--You dream it. I
have to get out of here. I have to go.

[He disappears. The kite rises and gleams.]

THE END

