



Dreaming Emmett Draft

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DREAMING EMMETT

by

TONI MORRISON

June/1985

5/ In every way possible, this play should have the quality of a dream. Not dreamy, or dream-like (meaning fuzzy or floating) but the way sustained dreaming really is: sometimes the pace seems to slow down to agonizing lengths; sometimes the movement ~~and~~ speech is oddly rapid. Color is generally black and white or sepia. The scenes we dream in color are always memorable, since it happens so seldom, and since it frequently happens when nothing dramatic is being dreamed. Sounds accompanying the play should support this quality: i.e. sometimes the call of a bird is very, very loud, but one can't hear the telephone ring, or the gunfire. 9/

15/ Angles are all "wrong" in a dream; people sometimes do not have the reaction we expect (they may look on quietly at a murder but get very active if the water is turned on). Mood changes quickly as from the sound of bells to rain drops. These values should be incorporated in the play to heighten its dramatic and dream-like values. (The white characters, for example, might be carrying umbrellas; Ma could have a balloon) None of these things are written into the play; but the style of the production should try to accommodate them.

There should be no intermission, but once (twice, actually) there are black-outs--places where the light literally dies and the audience "loses" sight of the characters... While the dialogue and revelation of the plot is fairly straightforward, the feel of the play should suggest improvisation. are white /

The action takes place NOW in an abandoned cotton mill--that is to say, what an abandoned cotton mill looks like to someone who has never seen one.

It should be constructed in such a way as to suggest rusted violence: pulleys, blades, platforms, loading bays, motors, teeth, roped etc. But the ropes can be used as a child's swing or a clothesline; the bays can be slept on; the blades can be shelter. Cotton that bursts from one or two huge bales is an obviously theatrical touch of the dreaming set-maker. Exaggeration is the pose to be struck.

S/
E

CHARACTERS

f/
"EMMETT"-- A mannish and manly fourteen year old black boy. He is at the age when braggadocio and vulnerability combine but don't mix. He is moody, a chameleon--capable of infectious humor and grightening violence. Small-framed, he has a good singing voice and can move from cold menace to warm charm in a flash. He is able to make us cry and to drive us to fury. His accent is Northern; when he affects a Southern one it sounds false.

GEORGE-- Forty-five years old, this black man is probably a salesman or the owner of a small business of which he is extremely proud.

EUSTACE-- Black man in mid-forties, obviously a farmer who has never traveled outside his county--and has no desire to.

MA-- The boy's mother. In her late sisties or early seventies. A gentle, life-abused woman; the kind who brings out tenderness in orhters because she seems to need it so.

*small
^ X /
others /*

Rita **-CAROLYN**-- A white woman in her mid-sixties, she is habitually suspicious and defensive. She rests comfortably on the cliches of racial superiority, regional pride aand sexual manipulation. Very interested in what goes on around her, unlike--

Westin

J.W.--

Husband of Carolyn. Hard times have turned his unexamined opinions into cemented attitudes. he is very confident in this company, but one feels that that is probably never true elsewhere

Bernard
ROY--

Brother to J.W., in his late fifties. He has a kind of malevolent innocence--as though a corner of his mind is missing. He is skillful with his hands--coherent and content if he can repair something.

TAMARA-- Black girl in her early twenties. Glib, managerial, independent, sassy but very loving--when she initiates it.

The play opens on to darkness, but we hear humming; A light plays on "Emmett" only. He is above us on a ramp of some sort. Dragging a huge trunk or footlocker. He has on a white shirt with the sleeves rolled up to his elbow. Pants once called "drapes", suspenders, and his hair is untended, but suggests a style of some time ago.

Dressed
in exasperated
Confusion -
i.e. big shoulders
glittery shoes -
visor

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 typing} an old typewriter, some paper ^{and} a school notebook. He arranges the typewriter and paper on the trunk lid and kneels in front of it.] ^{(shrugs) August 5} August 29. 28? NO. No, no, no no. ^{29. 1954} Sumner, Mississippi. ~~Ho! Summer in Sumner.~~ (revising) How I Spent My Sumner Vacation.

on and
straps a huge
watch to his
wrist.

#

(singing)

"There was a little country schoolhouse

Where the darkies used to go.

And there was a little pickaninny

By the name of Ragtime Joe-

(dancing)

Now the teacher called on them one day

To spell a certain kind of a bird

And that bird was a chicken

And they could not spell a word

EMMETT (cont'd)

So she called on ragtime Joe
He was the leader of his class
and he didn't hesitate
He spelled it up right fast.
He said: C- that's the first letter in
H- that's the next letter in
I- that am third
Now it's Z again and I'm lookin for the bird
K- that's the next letter in
E- now I'm nearin the end
CHICKEN
That am the way to spell Chicken!

~~(Returning to the typewriter making notes.)~~

Cotton. Rows and rows of cotton. Rattle snakes; a mag-a nol-ya.

(singing)

And da niggas love it day a way, Ho! Duh niggas? De niggas. ^{Duh} De niggas?
Duh. Duh. De niggas. Duh niggas. How you spell "duh"? dat/

(mimicing)

Duh darkies like it dat a way. All but ~~this~~ one. This darky doesn't like it
that a way.

(typing - two finger)

How I Spent My Sumner Vacation. 1956. Sunflower County Mississippi in,
in (smiling with pleasure) a cotton mill.

*Postalgia
for the trip
he took
one summer.
a. Bus ride
(backseat)
"Be good"
Sweet my sand
mind
everybody.*

[Lights begin to reveal parts of set as Emmett imagines it. Flashes of light are confusing and hallucinatory, but eventually reveal the interior of an old, unused cotton mill including the makings of a cotton gin: pulleys, binders, blades, teeth, etc.]

EMMETT(cont'd)

Yes. Oh yes. Solid. Yeah. Oo, get down! That's good.

(typing)

Okay now. Get the show on the road! White girl. Ah, twenty-five years old. Name of, of. Damn. Uh, uh, Carolyn! Carolyn. Red hair, green eyes. A fox in Mississippi. A dog in Chicago. Carolyn! Yo, Carolyn. On stage!

A

[A white woman in her late sixties enters. She is plain and plainly dressed; anxious, suspicious but not intimidated. She hovers at the edge of the set. Emmett looks at her and then back at his notes.]

EMMETT

Who are you? [She looks around but can't see him] Will you get out of here! I said twenty-five years old; red hair! Red.

[He returns to his typing and notebook. Notices woman again]

Didn't you hear what I said. Get out till I call you, and when I call you this time, you better come out looking right

[Carolyn exits]

Damn can't do nothing right. Thirty years and she still stupid. Was she that ugly? ^{Na} No. Couldn't have been. Lemme see now. Spottwood. Little Eustace Spottwood. Fourteen years old, pitches ^d left handed--

[Eustace Spottwood enters. A black man about fifty years old dressed in faded coveralls] --little junior mustache.

(Sees Eustace)

(A)

Oh shit. You too? (whining) Come on, Eustace. Be fourteen. You wasn't even shaving yet. It's gotta be like it was then.

[Eustace looks around, unperturbed. Examines set with casual interest]

(B)

Okay. Okay. ^{I don't care} You guys can look any way you want to. I can handle it. ^(E. sits) Stand up! over there man, no. Left, left. There you go. Now. Who's next? George! George Harvey! Come on in here, man with your buck tooth self.

[George Harvey enters. A heavy black man dressed in a business suit. Same age as Eustace.]

(shaking his head)

~~who would have though it?~~

who would have though it?

(B)

(after (B))

t/

[George and Eustace recognize each other, shake hands and embrace as though they have not seen each other in a long time. As they greet one another, Emmett climbs down from his platform above and jumps, landing right in front of them.]

^{all smile} Emmett turns around. ~~He~~ George and Eustace ^{spurs into action, recognizing each other, slapping hands.} Emmett Turns around toward them All smiles.

5
[The men smile tentatively, obviously do not know him]

You remember me don't you?

GEORGE

You 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 chuckle and ~~exchange glances~~ *lower their heads,*]

(Louder and a little wild)

"Many a tear has to fall;

But it's all in the game."

[George and Eustace are uneasy]

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.

6
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.

6
EUSTACE

August. 195⁵? August 1956.

EMMETT

§ The Sweetheart Cafe?

EUSTACE

Emmett? Emmett Till?

GEORGE

Good God is that you?

EMMETT

Is the Pope Catholic?

EUSTACE AND GEORGE

I be damn.

[Emmett motions and suddenly they express excitement, love, camaraderie, instead of disbelief and alarm. Their greetings are excessive and over acted]

EMMETT

(sharply)

Okay! That Enough! Quit!

[George and Eustace freeze-Emmett returns to his platform and typewriter. Makes a note and notices the frozen men]

Hey. Not like that. Loosen up. This ain't a morgue. ^{Ha Ha Ha} [The men relax]

[

That's it.

[The men ~~whisper~~ to each other while Emmett ~~types~~ above them]

Checks ~~examines~~ his papers.
Gets paraphernalia: gun
ropes etc.

GEORGE

~~(travels)~~

Say, ah, what you doing back here?

EMMETT (Examining hanging rope)

Making a movie.

GEORGE AND EUSTACE

A movie?

EMMETT

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

~~(He picks up his notebook and climbs down)~~

EUSTACE

I thought--

EMMETT

Yeah?
You thought what?

EUSTACE

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

EMMETT

Wellll, yes. But not forgotten. Not forgotten, am I? (confidentially) But you know what? I don't feel like it. I mean, you know, I still dream. I been dreaming for thirty years. It ain't like what they said. You know: sleep, rest, rest in peace. I don't sleep. I been awake for thirty years.

Eustace

30 years! How come? Everybody needs rest
Emmett
Every body, yeah. But if you don't have a body -

TIC!
vacation?
movie?
That's, that's great!

TIC
Better
TR

there's nothing to rest, see?

You ain't got no body >

Nope

what you sitting on >

The floor, & that.

What you do, if you

Eustace: Whose that for?
Emmett: ~~Not~~ This. An no
man. Not you. You my main
man.

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. And what good is a movie if you can't put your best

EMMETT (cont'd)

friends in it? ~~Now~~ (businesslike, but sly) You both got parts, but, see what I really want you all for is 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!

[Reluctantly, mesmerized, 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 happen? You ~~still~~ ^{been} smoking them Phillip Morris cigarettes?

EUSTACE (altered voice)

I don't smoke; never did.

GEORGE (altered voice)

They don't make Phillip Morris anymore.

EUSTACE (altered voice)

Drink neither.

EMMETT

Drink neither? (laughing) 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

though. describes

8
It's ^{starts} all
out with
abstract how
me getting
this bus
I got a
brown
new
wallet
some

Luckies (over)
Good time
I had

Time
Shifts
a bit

maybe

Know what I mean? Get on this here bus. Like I'm.
Gonna have ^{me} a good time. No dady right

G. Right

E. Right

All of us, boy. Riding round in cars.
Member the girls? Hee hee [They all
Jump around with laughter + pushing]

9
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? (Serious.) Missed you. Right, George?

GEORGE (agreeable but ^{tentative} unconvinced)

Right. Right.

EMMETT

~~Missed him:~~ That what' made you stop drinking, Eus? Somebody tried to ~~E~~

~~EMMETT (cont'd)~~

[Fixing rope]
kill you, huh? You never was one for rough stuff. Oh, he could throw a hammer all right, but he couldn't stop two crackers from snatching me out of his house.

S/ [Lights alter; sounds of motor of a truck, slamming doors, voices in rage, voice in defense, motor of truck starting up and driving off; screaming. No one hears these sounds apparently but Emmett]

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 your ass and everything--

X [Emmett stills him, then walks around examining the machinery]

(to George)

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

Emmett.
Who fed on
me Eustace
Who told
that cracker
what I did
Somebody told
on me.

Talk off
your shoes
E. J.

CAROLYN

Are we hostages?

J.W.

Be still.

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~~ ^{when you saw those white girls in my wallet?} (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? 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 your faces

EMMETT

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

*[The three
they cover old faces
with new
young ones]* (B)

Roy

Maybe he wants ransom.

Cardyn

I'm scared.

J. W.

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

J.W.

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

*dreamy
- odd*

MA Stubborn. Why is he so stubborn?

~~I can't go through this no more. (George and Eustace try to hold her down)~~
~~Let go of me! (pleading to Emmett) You have to quit this. You have to quit.~~
~~What you got in mind is wrong! It's not going to change what happened to~~
~~to you. It's over.~~

*Is it the
make them
or just be
young I
wonders
(Shows her
hands) See, It's
over.*

EMMETT

Not yet. I'm not finished, Ma.

MA

Yes you are baby. You're finished. I'm finished. ~~These here raggedy white~~
~~folks--can't you see they finished too~~

I don't ^{even} know these

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's left to do, baby?~~

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, so to speak, to think about it. (shuffles~~
~~pages) See, I narrowed everything down to six things. (counts silently)~~

understand?

t/

20
y/20
Six. (coughs as for a speech) Number one: Lynch J.W. Number two:
Lynch Roy. Number three: Lynch Carolyn. Not a big lunching, mind you,

EMMETT (cont'd)

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 29, 1956, 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,*
~~I was a kid in '56,~~ just like you.

EMMETT

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

(puts on hrs old face)

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

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MA

Amen.

EMMETT

Amen? Ma!

Think ahead, Son. ^{MA} Think ahead.
~~What good will it do?~~

EMMETT (shocked)

You on his side. Against me.

You're always against me. You never took my side. What are you doing here if you ain't on my side.

~~Not you. I ain't against you. I'm against stirring up old mess. All it can do is smell.~~

EMMETT

EMMETT

They killed me, Ma. I'm dead!

MA

(over)

~~You think I don't know that? You think I still got a whole heart beating in here? Well, I ain't. I stand up but I don't know how. I take in air, can't even think why. I used to like this world. Now I can't even find it. Why they took you from me, they took everything. Everything. But I had one mercy. One mercy: a stone dead heart. Now you want to bring it back to life again--for what? So it can stop again.~~

EMMETT

~~Cut it out! I don't care about your hands,~~
(Dryly) Thanks ma. (Returns to his list) Number five: Make me a kite.

You, (to Roy) and you. (to J.W.) and you (to Carolyn), ~~and you~~
~~(Curtain) and J.W. (George)~~

~~Number five.~~

Ma

You mustn't worry so.

"Emmett"

You don't care nothing about me!

Ma. (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. Now they
empty. (She turns to the others)

Look. Look here. See? I got nothing
to ... hold.

[The others look at her hands]

J. W.
A what?

EMMETT

22

A kite. I-want-you-to-make-me-a-kite. Big thing fly in sky like bird.

~~He's busy in with 166~~

Be reasonable, GEORGE
man,

You don't even see what you doing to your Mother. ~~Look at her hands.~~

ROY Eustace

Dead ^{people} men don't need no kite.

MA

You doing this to hurt me?

EMMETT

No, Ma. I ~~just~~ want a kite. What's the big deal? Every kid wants a kite.

See it stand up in the sky straight up then dip.

[Emmett imitates the movement of a kite ~~as he climbs back to his~~
platform]

ROY

Kit's a delicate thing. Got to know what you're doing when you make em. It
ain't a toy, you know.

[Emmett brings kite material from his foot locker and brings it down to
lower level]

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.

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 iron^s my underwear. She doesn't just wash them, and hang them on the line.

24

S/

MA

~~Don't, don't.~~

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. (like a very small child) It hurt me.

[In the quiet the lights dim on all but his face as the sounds of his dying are recreated]

MA

(over)

~~Do you know~~

doing

~~Somebody. Help me. Help me understand why he's putting me through this..~~

EMMETT

(over)

You didn't die, Mama. I did.

MA

~~Oh, I would have.. If I thought--~~

I forgive you.

EMMETT

Ma

I know why you're doing this
You're mad at me, that's what it is.

BLACK GIRL *cont'd.*

~~Hi, Eustace.~~ My name's Tamara.

GEORGE

Tamara? As in yesterday?

TAMARA

Yeah. Tamara as in yesterday.

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.

from his separate place

Cafe

EMMETT

(Screaming) this is not TV! This is my dream. I am dreaming it I brought you heere. You, you, you, you, you, and you too. And I did not bring you (to Tamara) So get the hell out of here. Now!

[She does not move]

~~Go!~~

~~[She does not move]~~

Beat it!

[He raises his fist]

TAMARA

Don't even try.

EMMETT

Get out of my dream!

TAMARA

~~Are you serious?~~ You invented them, not me. I invented me.

J.W.

That's telling him sister. (He pats her)

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, that's for sure.

TAMARA

from his
separate place

What's he saying

He says it aint T.V.

Oh shoot

What a pity

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. ~~Sit down.~~

~~EMMETT~~

~~Don't be telling me what to do.~~

~~MA~~

~~Listen to her son.~~

TAMARA

I don't like your attitude.

EMMETT

My what?

TAMARA

Your attitude. And I'm gonna fix it. 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 strutting around pretending you love her, but the reason you got her up here is so she can watch you profile. 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/ She what I mean?

~~EMMETT~~

~~She ain't got nothing to do with you.~~

TAMARA

~~She's got everything to do with me.~~ 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--

45

~~MA~~

~~Chas~~ Amen

TAMARA

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.

TAMARA

I bet you do. When you want to. And I bet you know how to manage a pass from a 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 ain't never sunk so low that I got to take a pass from a nigger.

[Emmett begins to climb back up to the platform and rummage through the foot locker]

TAMARA

Your husband touched my behind a minute ago. Who should I call?

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 cameras]

EMMETT

Insert 5 & 6

(Losing it, trying to maintain control) ~~I had this all worked out, script and everything. She's messing it up. Do I need her? I can take care of my own business.~~

[He takes out a disassembled rifle and puts it together. ~~Waves it over the heads of the others.~~]

Hey!

TAMARA

Now what?

EMMETT

You in my way. You messing it up.

Gay to J.W. He: to Carna.
He: 1st guy just add around Chenna -
She: to Carna - He has arms
He: she was a loser.

TAMARA

You messed it up yourself in 1955

EMMETT

(Shocked) They killed me! ~~What's the matter with you?~~ 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

~~Liar!~~

[He shoots; nobody falls or even cringes]

~~EMMETT~~

Eustace

He took a dare. ^{That's all} From my friends over there. Bragging, just a couple of kids
^{but He took the dare - Goes in the store}
bragging. I go in, see that woman and, and asked for a date.

CAROLYN

He you didn't say date. ^{He} You said--a nasty rotten word. AND ^{he} you touched me.

~~EMMETT~~

George

^{he}
Did you think I was serious?

CAROLYN

I don't care if ^{he} you was serious or not. I am serious. I am a serious thing.
Not a joke. A game. ^{He} You can't just play with me, make bets on me, because
I'm a woman. Say what ^{he} you want, call me names. Put ^{his} your hand on me.

Like I wanted it. Like all you had to do was ask like, like I was just waiting for it. I won myself, don't I? I am a serious human person.

J.W.

That beautiful, honey.

CAROLYN

Don't touch me.

And I'm not? I'm not a serious human person.

CAROLYN

I don't know what you are!

EMMETT

Well now you're gonna know, you're gonna be just what I am: dead.

Oh my baby!

Yes, you do.

EMMETT

And it's your fault.

[shoots]

CAROLYN

It's not my fault

I never laid a finger on you. I didn't know they would--I didn't think, I didn't think it would get to that.

[Emmett shoots again]

J.W.

(To Tamar)
I And you're wrong little lady
I didn't even
tell J.W. When
he came back, I
thought oh well
why get him
killed to E. & G.)

Some nigger freed. Not me. (over)

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,
I was gonna let it lie too - You
took a gun to him ^{and all.} I figured that

was enough but

George
But what?

Well later on a nigger told
me the same story - I had to do
something then. I couldn't let
the nigger think I wanted
let it go.

to yellow (X)

C. I did not!

Insert (top of page 50)

"Roy"

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

"Carolyn"

Mine too.

"J.W."

Been dealing with niggers 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."

That trial was fair!

George

With an all white jury?

that
You know what ~~the~~ jury
did while it was listening to evidence?
They watched the Graziano - Archie ^{brovie} fight

Judge let em do it.

Eustace (Can you blame -em)

That's because they were int. in that.
They ^{was} were curious about the outcome of the fight.
They already knew the outcome of the trial.

Ray

GRAZIANO ^{sure} whipped that nigger.

J.W.

That trial was fair. Shouldna even had a trial.

Ray
Never should of got to that.

And J.W. It got to where it got because of him. We was just gonna 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.

EMMETT

Tamara
~~(Shooting)~~ And you had more, didn't you?

J.W.

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

EMMETT

Tamara
So did you.

J.W.

him I taught you something, didn't I? And when I taught you, I taught everybody like you. him,

EMMETT

he I forgot. What was I supposed to learn.

[He shoots]

J.W.

his he wants to his
Keep your hands off white women. If you wanna rape, rape your own women.

TAMARA

I thought that was your job.

J.W.

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

[The women turn toward him]

I mean. You know what I mean.

CAROLYN

Maybe I better hear what you mean.

TAMARA

He means just what he said.

CAROLYN

(To J.W.O. You think that?

J.W.

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

EMMETT

You killed me because she asked for it?

[He shoots]

J.W.

You all mixing me up.

TAMARA

He killed you because he could, chump.

EMMETT

Stay out of this.

TAMARA

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

EMMETT

You wasn't even there.

TAMARA

No, but my absence was there. When you want to prove you a man you need my absence. Which is another way of saying you need me, because if you

9/5

7

Geo

Eustace

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

(to George)

George.

George: Before he asked for it? kept on talking

maybe you should

had made a pass at me, ^{he'd} you'd be alive and that's hard. What ^{he} you wanted was easy.

^{one of these days}
^{somebody's}
~~I'm~~ going to blow your head off.

~~EMMETT~~ George

TAMARA

That's easy too.

~~EMMETT~~

~~Then shut up!~~ ~~(shoots)~~

② Ray I almost dread meet (see notes)

GEORGE

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

MA

That is too much noise, honey.

~~EMMETT~~

~~Leave me alone.~~

MA ?

Eustace is trying to sleep.

TAMARA

(To Emmett) You got anything to drink in that trunk?

GEORGE

Or a sandwich, maybe?

EUSTACE (~~waking~~)

There's a spicket over here.

[Tamara and George go to check it out. Emmett continues sporadically to shoot, but the sound of the rifle gets fainter and fainter.]

CAROLYN (*still steaming*)

I wasn't asking for it. He was asking for it.

He sits down to watch
I wasn't asking for nothing.

J.W.

I know that.

CAROLYN

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

J.W.

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.

J.W.

Butt out.

ROY

Kick his black ass all the way to Chicago.

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.

(To Camera) (b)

~~[He moves about looking for someone to tell this too. Ma, Eustace, George, Tamara--they ignore him]~~

After the trial, they stopped speaking like, like I was some sickness they might catch. Nobody came by the shop. Business went down to nothing, zero. And when I went to renew my loan--I been dealing with Mr. Hastie 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

Nobody said kill him. Just run him off. But you had to do it your way.

He was leaving town the next day

Fair Trial

CAROLYN (cont'd)

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

I had my picture took fourteen times.

J.W.

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

Sold more Had a Ray movie that close.

EMMETT *Tamara*

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

J.W.

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

EMMETT *Tamara*

Everything. Every single thing?

J.W.

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?

37
J.W.

We took all the chances.

EUSTACE

You all broke the horse and they sat saddle?

J.W.

Yeah. Like that.

GEORGE

'You shoveled shit and they made hay?

J.W.

We shoveled, we, we--

TAMARA

That's what trash is for.

We ain't trash. (to show) Leastwise I ain't. I was a cheer leader - my daddy had a car - he loved me my daddy

CAROLYN

1 We ain't trash, We decent people. Always was. My mother worked hard all her life.

~~MA Tamara~~

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

~~TAMARA~~ Ge

Hey-ay!

CAROLYN

She was!

~~MA~~ Tamara

Her children walk ground? Then shut your damn mouth!

~~EMMETT~~

~~Ma!~~ You swore,

~~MA~~

God forgive me.

~~EMMETT~~

Cusidym

My mother never said a bad word in her whole life.

~~TAMARA~~

Insert

~~What the hell is he doing?~~

~~EMMETT~~

~~Making me a kite.~~

EUSTACE

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.

GEORGE

What's all that stuff?

ROY

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

EMMETT

(appears)

I never said silver.

ROY

They begin to build kite

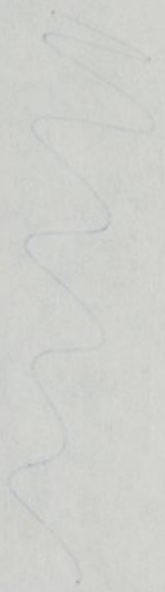
*Roy - that's
the kite
J.W. No
wants to
hear that
Roy!*

*

Ma

Who you all talking about.
(see yellow B)

Insert



Ma

Who you all talking about?

Everybody

Emmett Till (oi him)

George

He was big for his age. Bout six feet.

Eustace

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

Carolyn

He was husky. Looked like a man.

J.W.

Never shed a tear. Just bragged. Never even screamed.

George

Always laughing

Tamara

Stuck on white girls.

Carolyn

He leered at me. You should have seen him,

George

A sweet, easy going guy.

Eustace

Didn't like no flies though.

"J.W.

Said he had lots of white girls.

Eustace

He never had no girl.

Tamara

Real macho.

Roy

Said he was more man than me

Eustace

Gentle, real gentle

George

But no coward. Not him.

J.W.

We scared him to death, though.

Eustace

Real nice kid.

Carolyn

Awful mean ~~kid~~.

Ma

Not my son. I know my son. My son was a prince. None of you know a thing about him. He was a prince, and the world wasn't good enough for him. ~~Oh he got into trouble. Why wouldn't he?~~ And I didn't always understand him. Sometimes I didn't even hear him. 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 right after that.

(drifts) Now he asked you to make him a kite. So make it.

(Exit)

Emmet
appeared
without
E-armor

Silver
A

Be pretty.

58

Put
I want shazaam.

EMMETT J.W.

MA

I guess I'm not supposed to have any peace.

EMMETT

Captain Marvel. Standing like this with a orange lightening bolt.

TAMARA

Captain Marvel? Captain Marvel? ~~You want to be~~ a fat blonde in tights?

~~He wants to be Captain Marvel.~~

EMMETT Roy

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

TAMARA

Captain Marvel. ~~Well~~ I guess that explains you.

EMMETT J.W.

I just want the kite, that's all. I don't want I don't even like Captain
Marvel. All the comics I had, not one was him. Now Plastic Man, I had all
of his stuff. I just want shazaam. It ain't got nothing to do with Captain
Marvel. She's right. Ought ^{not} to have a white man

TAMARA

Then why don't you tell him to put Shange on it, or Muhammed Ali?

EMMETT 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 love him.

d/

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.

EMMETT

~~Who's Martin Luther King?~~

~~[They all turn to him]~~

~~TAMARA~~

~~You really are dead.~~

EUSTACE

~~You~~ ^{reckon he} never run across him--up there?

GEORGE

Dr. King wouldn't be nowhere near him.

EUSTACE

You don't know that. ~~Did he?~~

~~EMMETT~~

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.

Woman!

CAROLYN

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

J.W.

Well, I am. Now! (he exits.)

EMMETT

~~Hey, he left! Wait! Wait! He can't leave!~~ I'm not through with him. Come back in here you.

GEORGE

What you want him for?

EMMETT

He has to be here. He got to bury me in my suit and he's got to make me a kite and then--

EUSTACE AND GEORGE

Then what? What?

["Emmett" enters the actors' space]

MA

Help him. Help him. All he did was steal a kite. Nobody should die for stealing a kite.

CAROLYN

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 thought it was better spent on milk or ^{meat} ~~break~~ or something.

[Eustace, George and ~~Tamara~~ are trying to restore and calm 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 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 and wind. They all played there. Flew kites and things.

CAROLYN

~~Wait a minute. We~~ ^{You} talking about the same person? 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?

I was
mad at
you for
dying.
I really
was -

68

~~Tamara~~
Black Girl - a kite

begin to circle arms

CARDLYN

69

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

J.W.

That's the boy you said. That's Till. The one I 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. ^{on the curb.} My son died ~~in the hall~~. 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? ^{TK.}

He called the police.

EUSTACE

~~You all call the police?~~

MA

Yes.

GEORGE

Well?

TAMARA

You Black and you ask her that?

MA

~~They come by.~~ Nice boys. Sat down and talked real nice to me. I ^{wonder} reckon their mama ~~wondered~~ if they'd come home at the end of the day too. ~~Except~~

Later on the police came by

MA (cont'd)

~~But have at the~~
they had the guns. ~~There was a hearing too.~~ But all anybody wanted to know was whether the storekeeper had a license for his gun.

GEORGE

Did he?

MA

O 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.

EMMETT

I don't care about the kite, Ma. I don't. I thought if they made it for me and we could see it--~~me and you--~~well it'd be over. ~~You could stop crying.~~ And I could ~~too. get~~ ~~by~~ dream something - different.

MA

~~Jesus may forgive me, but~~

EMMETT

Jesus doesn't have a thing to do with this.

MA

Honey! Shhhh.

EMMETT

This is between us. I asked you [#]for some money once to but a bow and arrow. You said no to that too, remember.

MA

I remeber.

EMMETT

And you should have. I didn't need it and I didn't need a kite. I was the one stole it.

Can't use your blame.

license

He has with their faces

m/

for st

Developer
Ma's
Exit
My boy
could
sing

buy

MA

But he shot you, he--

EMMETT

I know. I know. It was the worst thing that ever happened to me--but it wasn't the most important. The most important was having you.

MA

Oh!

EMMETT

When I lost me, I lost you too. It was over so quick. So quick. I didn't have time to think and afterwards, you, only you, remembered. Nobody else. *or say a word.* *J.W.*

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

MA Emmett

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

TAMARA

Why did you pretend?

EMMETT

Nobody wants to know about me. Just like nobody really wants to remember 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, 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- *to have*

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.

And you But what? You don't even remember him

*Putting
life
together
as people*

Charge

2/

m/

*Here the
Ma-Exit*

EMMETT (cont'd)

and dreamed you all up. Except you, Ma. I couldn't dream up another's boy's mother. Look. I don't really know what the real Emmett Till would think-- about me--about this. But I do know one thing. He didn't give. He wouldn't say, I give. Neither could I. I'm not Emmett. There's only one. But there's a whole lot of little black boys like me. ~~Just our mamas know who we are.~~

J.W.

We're actors. Just actors.
Well look here, if you ain't Till. Well, we ain't got no quarrel, do we. Stealing a kite. Shoot. *I mean*

ROY

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

CAROLYN ~~(to Ma)~~

I'm real sorry.

J.W.

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

EMMETT

*(looking at masks)
and their faces*

~~Can You?~~

~~[Roy, Carolyn and J.W. exit]~~

GEORGE

~~Well that's it, I reckon.~~

EUSTACE

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

*Sorry, son. I mean we just actors.
* I was in Cabin on the Sky - maybe
you remember me?*

*actors
speeches*

*"I'm real
dead-
you are"*

72

GEORGE

~~You said he laughed at your mama's snuff can.~~

EUSTACE

~~But not mean. He didn't laugh mean. And he didn't sing no "Many a tear has to fall" neither.~~

GEORGE

Well that about wraps it. Nice meeting you, maam. And you miss. Take care little brother.

EUSTACE

It's over, son. Get yourself some rest, hear?

[They turn to go]

EMMETT

Say. ~~I want you to know~~ I know you tried. To save him I mean. I know you did.

[They exchange glances]

EUSTACE

We did all we could.

[Turns away, pauses and turns back]

You got to remember, we was Black boys.

GEORGE

In Mississippi. In 1956

[Shakes his head; they both exit]

TAMARA

I guess I'd better go. See if my car starts up. I got a long way to go. Good night maam.

I didnt Catch your name >

My name > — —

— — 5 —

— — >

— — — — —

Wish

72/

MA

Goodnight, baby. Thank-you.

TAMARA

(To Emmett) I ^{fixed} ~~fixed~~ your coat, ~~button~~.

EMMETT

Thanks.

TAMARA

(Touching the coat) Real nice material. I don't see fabric like this anymore.

[Emmett takes the coat and puts it on.]

EMMETT

Did you mean what you said? You might have loved ^{him} ~~me~~?

TAMARA

I might have.

EMMETT

My dream is real.

TAMARA

So is my scream.

EMMETT

I never had a woman.

TAMARA

You missed a lot.

EMMETT

I know I did. ^{won't} ~~Should~~ I stop dreaming?



Emmett
What do you see?

Tamara



75

TAMARA

Only if you want me to stop screaming.

I can't

EMMETT

I want

~~Oh no. Oh no.~~ I want--I need to hear it. To know I'm on your mind.

TAMARA

And all the other Emmetts?

EMMETT

They need it too. Scream, Tamara. Please scream. Remember us.

Remember me.

[He climbs up to his platform]

TAMARA

How am I ever gonna get you off my mind?

EMMETT

(warning)

Don't. I'll be dreaming you.

~~He disappears. Ma and Tamara pick up the kite. Its silver bolt gleams.]~~

rises

THE END

*Ma & Tamara
look at it*