



Dreaming Emmett Draft

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DREAMING EMMETT

by

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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 or 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 gunfire.

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 is written into the play; but the style of the production should try to accomodate 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 are fairly straightforward, the feel of the play should suggest improvisation.

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, ropes 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.

CHARACTERS

"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 frightening 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 sixties or early seventies. A gentle, life-abused woman; the kind who brings out tenderness in others because she seems to need it so.

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 and sexual manipulation. Very interested in what goes on around her, unlike--

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

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.

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 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.]

August 29. 28? NO. No,no, no no. 29. 1956. Sumner, Mississippi. Ho!
Summer in Sumner. (revising) How I Spent My Sumner Vacation.

(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

So she called on ragtime Joe

He was the leader of his class

and he didn't hesitate

EMMETT (cont'd)

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 C again and I'm lookin for the bird

K- that's the next letter in

E- now I'm nearin the end

C H I C K E N

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 dat a way, Ho! Duh niggas? De niggas. De niggas?

Duh. Duh. De niggas. Duh niggas. How you spell "duh"?

(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.

[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 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]

EMMETT (cont'd)

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

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

(Sees Eustace)

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]

Okay. Okay. You guys can look any way you want to. I can handle it. Stand 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 thought it?

[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.]

EMMETT (cont'd)

George. Eustace. How you all doing?

[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]

(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.

EMMETT

Sittin by the well. 1956? 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. 1956? 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]

EMMETT (cont'd)

Hey. Not like that. Loosen up. This ain't a morgue. (The men relax)

That's it.

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

GEORGE

(bravely)

Say, ah, what you doing back here?

EMMETT

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

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.

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 smoking them Phillip Morris cigarettes?

EUSTACE

I don't smoke; never did.

GEORGE

They don't make Phillip Morris anymore.

EUSTACE

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 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 but unconvinced)

Right. Right.

EMMETT

Missed him. That what made you stop drinking, Eus? Somebody tried to 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.

[Lights alter; sounds of motor of a truck, slamming doors, voices in rage, voices 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--

[Emmett stills him; then walks around examining the machinery]

EUSTACE (cont'd)

(to George)

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

GEORGE

I can't figure it.

EUSTACE (to Emmett)

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

[Emmett looks at them. In the quiet he covers his face and trembles. Then he is suddenly all smiles again.]

EMMETT

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) Come on. Come on.

GEORGE

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

EMMETT

How's it feel, forty-four?

GEORGE

Well, it ain't twenty-four.

EMMETT

I wouldn't know. I got stopped. No forty-four. No thirty-four. No twenty-four. Not even fifteen. Just fourteen. 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

Five.

EMMETT

No kidding. How old?

EUSTACE

Got a girl 20. Nother one 18. 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)

Put a blue light bulb in the socket and dance close? Smell like hair oil and Cashmere Bouquet. Sweat, sweat. Jesus, I wish I could sweat. (angry) 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....Oh, well, let's get on with it. Ma! Ma!

[Black woman enters, frail, a little stooped. She is in her seventies.]

Oh, Ma. Not like that. What'd you do to your hair?

MA

Oh, Is that my baby?

EMMETT

You was a tall woman...Ma. Stand up straight, Ma. Come on now. Here...

MA

It is. It really is! (She tries to hug him. He won't let her.)

EMMETT

Stand up Ma. (Presses her spine while pressing her stomach) Little more, little more, just a li-- (Ma shakes her head) I'm doing this Ma. You have to do what I want you to!

MA

Son, I'm awful tired. You know I'd do anything...

EMMETT

(Angry) No! No! Oh shit! Your teeth. You got different teeth, Ma.
(frustrated) Okay, okay. Look, just sit down over there. Over there. Go sit down, Ma!

[She sits. George and Eustace go to her, shake hands, speak to her words we cannot hear. Emmett picks up his notebook and writes furiously for a moment. Tears out paper throws it on the floor. He is very angry.]

All right. Here we go? Carolyn! (teasing voice) Carolyn!

[Carolyn re-enters. Sees Emmett and the others. Turns to go]
Uh, uh, Carolyn. This is my movie, baby. You ain't going nowhere.

CAROLYN

You better let me out of here. Don't you come near me.

(no one is coming near her)

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, etc. Finally she turns back toward the others, her back edging along the wall Ma stands up.]

MA

What you doing? What you doing?

EMMETT

It's okay, Ma. Just sit. 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. A white man in his sixties]

J.W. Milan. Carolyn, (still playing with her) here's your husband. The skilled mechanic. The killer who is not guilty. Roy! Hey, Roy!

[Roy enters. A white man same age and dress as J.W.]

Mr. Roy, is a store keeper and he ain't guilty either. These two killed a certain Emmett Till - me - but they were found not guilty.

[J.W. and Roy are silent, alert standing close to one another watching Emmett]

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

[J.W. pulls out a knife and swishes it toward Emmett's back, just missing. Ma and the others jump up. Emmett turns toward J.W. who sticks the knife

deep into Emmett's stomach. Others scream. Emmett dies all over the place. Then gets up and brushes himself carefully.]

EMMETT (cont'd)

This is my movie.

[The white men back away, rush to leave; bump into the "wall." Search it, but find no opening.]

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

[He goes over to Carolyn and sings "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 is repelled, stiff with rage- He speaks 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?

MA

Baby, please.

EMMETT

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.
[She continues to curtsey.]

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. Ma is discomfitted. Eustace soothes her. George approaches Emmett.]

GEORGE

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

EMMETT

But, but...?

GEORGE

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 1956. All those signs, remember? For colored only, toilets, in waiting rooms, bus seats, water fountains. Colored section this, colored section that. Remember?

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 Negros at the University of Mississippi! We got mayors. Black mayors.

EUSTACE

Had a senator too, while back.

GEORGE

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.

[Carolyn re-groups with the white men]

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 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]

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 I made you dead. And ain't no Black mayor gonna change that.

MA

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.

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.

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?

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)

EMMETT (cont'd)

Yep Six. (coughs as for a speech) 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 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 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

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

MA

Amen.

EMMETT

Amen? Ma!

MA

What good will it do?

EMMETT (shocked)

You on his side. Against me.

MA

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

EMMETT

They killed me, Ma. I'm dead!

MA

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

(Dryly) Thanks ma. (Returns to his list) Number five: Make me a kite. You, (to Roy) and you.(to J.W.)

J.W.

A what?

EMMETT

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

GEORGE

You don't even see what you doing to your Mother.

ROY

Dead 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

Kite'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.

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

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 touch. They knew. They knew what it felt like to be fourteen. But these here white men they was

EMMETT (cont'd)

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

Don't, don't.

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

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

EMMETT

You didn't die, Mama. I did.

MA

Oh, I would have. If I thought--

EMMETT

(To the white men) Finish my kite. Go on, 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.

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

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

EUSTACE

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

(Agitated bickering)

EMMETT

That's enough! Quit it! (They stop--Emmett smiles) I'm up to date now.

May I give you some advice? 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, 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, let me tell you what to do. Be careful of his face. Don't smash it too much. 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.

EMMETT(cont'd)

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 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 have been there, doing it--for thirty years. And like Mr. J.W. says, I wasn't the first or the last Emmett Till.

EUSTACE

(Feeling abused; working up to something) Scuse me, but ah, what's it really like Emmett.

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

What makes you think any angels is where he is?

EUSTACE

Well, whatever.

EMMETT

Shut up, you two.

EUSTACE

Come on. Tell us.

EMMETT

I said stop talking.

EUSTACE

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

EMMETT

I don't like this. I tell you to stop, you supposed to stop.

GEORGE

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

EMMETT

What's going on? I said stop!

GEORGE

We didn't know you all that well, you know. Couple week 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 Godsweet (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 in town for if the black berries was so sweet-like you say?

EMMETT

No! Fuck you!

MA

Son!

[Set grinds and swings. All have trouble keeping balance. Through the grinding and shifting, Emmett climbs up to his platform]

ROY

Hey! The kite! You tearing up the kite!

J.W. (to Carolyn)

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

ROY

(Holding up scraps of kite paper) It's all tore up.

EUSTACE (to Ma)

Too late ma'am. I can't get nowhere near him.

[Emmett is groaning 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 letting a nigger boy make you wet your pants.

MA

(To Emmett) Listen to me. Just once you got to listen.

EMMETT

(Screaming) Dead boys can't hear.

[Emmett pulls out a light blue suit, a white, straw, snap brim hat, black and white wing-tipped shoes, placing each carefully on the platform. 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!

(Bellowing) Move!!

[Ma screams, the others are deeply disgusted. Emmett roars, wills, abuses J.W., Roy, and Carolyn until they submit like trained animals or puppets. While they begin the shrouding/dressing, Emmett sings and dances to a powerful, sexy, R & B song. He is interrupted by a scuffle in the audience. A young Black girl climbs up, from the audience, onto the stage, screaming:]

BLACK GIRL

Stop it! Stop it!

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

BLACK GIRL (cont'd)

I'm not listening to any more of this mess! (to Emmett) Who the hell you think you are?

EMMETT

Get outta here!

BLACK GIRL

Make me.

EMMETT

You can't come in here. I'm working. This is a movie and you ain't in it.

BLACK GIRL

I don't even like your movie.

EMMETT

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

BLACK GIRL

That's the trouble with it. I'm not in it. (BLACK OUT)

[When the lights come up the Black Girl is rearranging the set, the machinery making it into suitable furniture, hanging up his suit, wiping off his wing-tipped shoes]

EMMETT

Where you come from?

BLACK GIRL

Out there.

MA

Thank God for God.

EMMETT

Out where?

BLACK GIRL

The audience. You got a clean shirt?

EUSTACE

We on TV?

CAROLYN

Oh no. My Lord.

EMMETT

What audience?

EUSTACE

Hah! George, we on TV.

BLACK GIRL

You make a movie; you make an audience. Every fool knows that. A button's missing.

EMMETT

I'm the audience!

GEORGE (to Eustace)

You lying.

BLACK GIRL (to Emmett)

Be serious. (to Ma) Hi. How you doing? You all right?

EUSTACE (to George)

No I ain't.

MA

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

EMMETT

Hold on!

BLACK GIRL

Thank you. I had a lot of trouble with the placket.

GEORGE

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

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 lon. Nylon, banlon.

BLACK GIRL

I know. Even the zippers are fake. You wouldn't have a needle and thread 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.

Who?

CAROLYN

The camera people. Over there! Or there!

GEORGE

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

EMMETT

Stop it! Everybody stop it!

BLACK GIRL

How you do, Mr. Harvey. (To Ma) Thanks. This should hold it.

CAROLYN

Is that it? Right yonder?

GEORGE

Call me George. And this here's Eustace.

J.W. (to Carolyn)

Go somewhere and sit down. Quit acting the fool

EUSTACE

Evening.

BLACK GIRL

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.

EMMETT

(Screaming) This is not TV! This is my dream. I am dreaming it I brought you here. 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.

EUSTACE

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

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.

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 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--

MA

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

(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.

TAMARA

You messed it up yourself in 1956

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

I took a dare. From my friends over there. Bragging, just a couple of kids bragging. I go in, see that woman and, and asked for a date.

CAROLYN

You didn't say date. You said--a nasty rotten word.

EMMETT

Did you think I 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. You can't just play with me, make bets on me, because
I'm a woman. Say what you want, call me names. Put your hand on me.

TAMARA (cont'd)

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.

CAROLYN

Don't touch me.

EMMETT

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

MA

O my baby!

EMMETT

And it's your fault.

[shoots]

CAROLYN

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.

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

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

J.W.

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

EMMETT

So did you.

J.W.

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

EMMETT

I forgot. What was I supposed to learn.

[He shoots]

J.W.

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

EMMETT

I'm going to blow your head off.

TAMARA

That's easy too.

EMMETT

Then shut up!

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

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

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.

[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.

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.

EMMETT

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

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?

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.

CAROLYN

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

MA

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

TAMARA

Hey-ay!

CAROLYN

She was!

MA

Her children walk ground? Then shut your damn mouth!

EMMETT

Ma! You swore.

MA

God forgive me.

EMMETT

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

TAMARA

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

EMMETT

I never said silver.

ROY

Be pretty.

EMMETT

I want shazaam.

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

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

TAMARA

Captain Marvel. Well I guess that explains you.

EMMETT

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.

TAMARA

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

EMMETT

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.

EMMETT

Who's Martin Luther King?

[They all turn to him]

TAMARA

You really are dead.

EUSTACE

You never run across him--up there?

GEORGE

Dr. King wouldn't be nowhere near him.

EUSTACE

You don't know that. Did he?

EMMETT

It's not like that. Not for me, anyway. I can't run across anybody. I told you: I can't stop dreaming. My Summer Vacation. I dream. I dream. I dream. Always the same dream. forever.

MA

I dream you. Thirty years and you still come to me. Ma, you say, gimme a dollar. Ma, you say, what's to eat? I get up, but by the time I get it on the table, you gone.

EMMETT

Ma.

MA

I never can forgive myself. Jesus may, but I can't. I should have given you the money. (crying)

TAMARA

I'm taking her out of here.

EMMETT

You are not.

TAMARA

You don't care about her! You male. You, you, man.

EMMETT

Hey! You make it sound like a dirty word.

TAMARA

You respect her!

EMMETT

This is my mother.

TAMARA

My mother, my mother. You don't own her.

EMMETT

I never mistreated my mother. Never.

TAMARA

You made her cry. You brought her here in order to make her cry. What you call that?

EMMETT

I want my mother here to see this thing out.

TAMARA

You want her here to suffer. Because you feel better, bigger, stronger when some woman is miserable because of you, and can't help it. Control, that's what you want. Control. Make her do what you want. If she doesn't do what you want, make her cry. If she doesn't do what you want, make her mad. If she doesn't do what you want, ignore her. But she had to be there, doesn't she? On the sidelines, so you can feel like a man.

EMMETT

I am a man.

TAMARA

What man need his mother to watch his nightmare?

EMMETT

It's her nightmare too.

TAMARA

Yeah. You better believe it? Why? Because you couldn't even leave home,

couldn't spend a summer in the country without trying to impress somebody about your power over a woman. And what kind of woman? A white woman. Why? Huh? Cause you like white girls. Power over white girls.

EMMETT

I don't care if they're white or black or brown or...

TAMARA

Oh, yes you do. You didn't have a picture of me in your wallet.

EMMETT

I did. I mean.

TAMARA

Nobody dared you to make a pass at me.

EMMETT

What would I want to make a pass at you for?

TAMARA

Exactly! You wouldn't. Because you'd lose the dare. Because I'd break your arm and I wouldn't have to call nobody to help me do it. Or because I'd take you up on it and smile at you, be sweet and love you hard and long and maybe you'd love me back which wouldn't do- because where would the power be then? If you love me back that'd be--weak. Only two possibilities with a black girl like me: I break your arm--you lose. I love you--you lose. That's the way it was back then in the fifties. Today? I don't want to hear your mouth. Profile all you want to. Beat up the white folks, go ahead, make everybody dance to your bullet. Cuss everybody out for not dying along with you. I am not impressed. But you will respect this lady.

EMMETT

I don't understand. You want me to treat you like I did-her (referring to Carolyn). I love my mother, I love--

GEORGE

Leave the boy alone. You too hard on him.

TAMARA

Life is hard.

EUSTACE

Not that hard. Those white men over there killed him. They didn't have to do that. You saying they had a reason?

TAMARA

Reason? Them? There is nothing worse in the world than a racist white man--unless it's his sow.

GEORGE

For a minute there you sounded like, like you were just made the girl was white.

TAMARA

You think I would get up out of my seat and climb up here if I wasn't concerned about him? I can't spend the rest of my life watching black boys murdered about-- about bullshit. White girl, six packs, neck chains, writing on the subway, jogging in the street, asking for a handout, playing in the park--Bull shit! Bullshit! I can't. I can't.

EUSTACE

Hey, little girl. Come on, now. What you think you or anybody else can do about it. All he can do is dream. All you can do is scream.

[Eustace, George and Ma comfort her while Emmett looks on]

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.

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

(Frightened) I don't want to go down in the water again. Watch my eye hang out of my socket. I don't want to feel my teeth in my nose. Mud. Mud! The water is so black. And it's thick. It fills me. It fills me. My eye hurts. I can't swallow. I can't breathe. My eye. My eye. Help me, somebody help me!

[Throughout sounds of struggle, splashes, choking]

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 bread 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 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?

CAROLYN

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. 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?

EUSTACE

You all call the police?

MA

Yes.

GEORGE

Well?

TAMARA

You Black and you ask her that?

MA

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

MA (cont'd)

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.

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 buy a bow and arrow. You said no to that too, remember.

MA

I remember.

EMMETT

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

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.

J.W.

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

MA

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. But I didn't have a dying either. So I started imagining I was Emmett Till. 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--

EMMETT (cont'd)

and dreamed you all up. Except you, Ma. I couldn't dream up anothers 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.

Well look here, if you ain't Till. Well we ain't got no quarrel, do we. Stealing a kite. Shoot.

ROY

You still want the kite? I finished it. 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?

EMMET

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.

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.

MA

Goodnight, baby. Thank-you.

TAMARA

(To Emmett) I 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 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. Should I stop dreaming?

TAMARA

Only if you want me to stop screaming.

EMMETT

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

Don't. I'll be dreaming you.

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

THE END