



## Dreaming Emmett Draft

---

No Known Copyright

Princeton University Library reasonably believes that the Item is not restricted by copyright or related rights, but a conclusive determination could not be made.

You are free to use this Item in any way that is permitted by the copyright and related rights legislation that applies to your use.

## Princeton University Library Disclaimer

---

Princeton University Library claims no copyright governing this digital resource. It is provided for free, on a non-commercial, open-access basis, for fair-use academic and research purposes only. Anyone who claims copyright over any part of these resources and feels that they should not be presented in this manner is invited to contact Princeton University Library, who will in turn consider such concerns and make every effort to respond appropriately. We request that users reproducing this resource cite it according the guidelines described at <http://rbcs.princeton.edu/policies/forms-citation>.

## Citation Information

---

Morrison, Toni. 1931-  
Dreaming Emmett Draft  
1 folder

## Contact Information

---

## Download Information

---

Date Rendered: 2019-09-05 01:23:56 PM UTC

Available Online at: <http://arks.princeton.edu/ark:/88435/g732df59z>

DREAMING EMMETT

~~2nd Draft~~

9.26.

September 15, 1985

"Emmett"

M I crooked letter crooked letter I  
Crooked letter crooked letter I  
Hump back hump back I Mississippi

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

"Emmett"

How I Spent My Summer Vacation. August 24. August 26? Shit. August, 1955. Sunflower County. Mississippi. U.S.A.

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

*Greyhound Chicago.*

A bus station. Crowded. Hot. (Wipes under his chin.) Here's me bopping on in. (Bops around.) Got my suitcase. Money in my wallet. (To clerk.) Hey, baby. (Tosses the money.) Yeah, you ain't deaf. Mississippi. Huh? No way! Round trip, baby. This is definitely a round trip. Sheeee, two weeks and I'm back in Chicago! Where I belong. Same to you! Then. Then. I stroll over to the newstand. Buy me a Plastic Man Comic and a pack of Lucky Strike. Couple of Butternut candy bars. Some Wrigley. Spearmint. (Unwraps the gum.) Mmmmmmm. (Chewing with deep pleasure.) Gotta get me a Co Cola. (Drinks it, tosses bottle. Looks at watch.) Right on time. Hey, buddy! I'm first. Ticket right here, sir. Sit myself down. (Pointedly.) Up front. No, not up front. This is gonna be a long trip and I need room, man. Room. Go to the back; spread myself out. (Does so, looks out window,) Ma. Ma. Here I am. (Waves.) What? I can't hear. ~~What?~~ Stay out of trouble? Oh. Yeah, sure. Yeah. Bye! Mmmmmmmmmmm. (Imitating sound of motor, rocking a little in his seat.) I light me ~~a~~ up a cig. (Smokes and gazes out of window.) 'S green. Wow. One mile ~~outside the city~~ and it's green. Lawns. Look at those trees! Oh, man! (Yawns.) Sun's going down. (Closes his eyes; snores; wakes; looks out of window.) ~~Jesus!~~ Don't tell me that's cotton! Ha ha. I thought it was gonna be big. Big bushes of it. Like snowballs. Like, like cotton. This is jive. Where the houses? Oops, there's one. Damn. ~~They look like~~ shoe boxes. Wee

*what/*

*Ha Ha*  
*Oh man*

*9/*



# DREAMING EMMETT

2nd Draft

26  
September 14, 1985

What is it? (inhaling) little shoe boxes from Thom McAn. Hey, Mississippi, ain't you got no towns? No magnolia? Lord have mercy. Look at that. Hey! Hey! (Waving.) Where your shoes, nigger? (Laughs.) (TK?) (Opens window, pokes his head out.) Mmmm. ~~Smell that.~~ Something, something, sweet like honeysuckle, leaves, moss. And (his voice alters) mud. Smells like mud. And water.

[Suddenly agitated, he slams window.]

Cut! Cut, cut, cut!

[Returns to typewriter and types a bit.]

Way-off-in-the-cotton-field-down-by-the Tallahatchee-River... [Pauses, stands, looks around] is a , a barn. ~~I can see it from here.~~ It looks like a barn, but it's not. It's a...a... (pleased with himself) a cotton mill.

Over there.  
See? /

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

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

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

Okay. Now I need /

"Emmett"

^ One white girl. Twenty, twenty-five. Red hair fixed in a--what you call it?--kid of a fluffy page boy. Slanty green eyes. Hoo! A fox in Mississippi. A dog in Chicago. Tits? (Shapes them.) Yeah, tits. One of those little strap dresses. Woooo. Sunback. Yeah. Sunback dress. High heel shoes. Hee hee. Her stockings, the run is a little crooked. Hee, hee. And a red red mouth. Which I will get to later. ^ One white boy. Not much older than me. Black hair, oily. Sideburns. Big Mississippi cracker grin. Litty bitty

And /



DREAMING EMMETT

~~2nd Draft~~

26  
September 14, 1985

piss-colored eyes. And a red, red neck. Which I will also get to later. Okay now. One, big, go-for-bad white dude. John Wayne of the swamps. Yeah. Jive mustache. Crew cut. Military type dude. Wear his balls on his shoulders. Where they might do him some good.

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

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

"Emmett"

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

[White woman rises and enters his domain.]

"Emmett"

Who <sup>g</sup> ~~the hell~~ <sup>Hey</sup> are you? ^ I know what you look like. You trying to fool me? Me? Fat chance! Red hair, green eyes. Twenties, I said! Get on out of here!

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

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

[The woman returns to her place.]

"Emmett"

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



DREAMING EMMETT

~~2nd Draft~~

26  
September 14, 1985

[Eustace enters.]

"Emmett"

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

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

"Emmett"

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

[George enters.]

"Emmett"

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

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

then/

"Emmett"

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

George

Gee, you do look familiar.

Eustace

Yeah. You favor somebody.

"Emmett"

Oh, man, how could you forget?



DREAMING EMMETT

~~2nd Draft~~

26  
September 14, 1985

(Sings.) "Emmett" (Con't.)

"Many a tear has to fall,  
But it's all in the game  
Do wah wah wah"

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

"Emmett"  
[Louder and a little wild.]

"Many a tear has to fall  
But it's all in the game."

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

Eustace (Singing softly)  
"Many a tear..." (Laughs.) I ain't heard tht since--oooo a long time. a/

"Emmett"  
Sitting 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. r/

Eustace  
August. 1955. August, 1955.

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

Eustace  
Emmett? Emmett Till?

George  
Good God. Is that you?

"Emmett"  
Is pig pussy pork?



DREAMING EMMETT

~~2nd Draft~~

26  
September 14, 1985

George and Eustace

I be damn.

[They are thrilled, excited. All greet him with warm enthusiasm. "Emmett" lapping it up.]

"Emmett"

Okay. That's enough. Quit!

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

"Emmett"

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

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

George

Say, ah, what you doing back here?

"Emmett"

["Emmett" examines a hanging rope--noose tied.]  
Making a movie.

George and Eustace

A movie?

"Emmett"

Yeah. Called How I Spent My Summer Vacation. And both you all in it.

Eustace

I thought--

"Emmett"

Yeah. You thought what?



DREAMING EMMETT

2nd Draft

September 14, 1985

Eustace

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

"Emmett"

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

Eustace

You don't get no rest?

"Emmett"

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

George

You must be wore out.

"Emmett"

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

Eustace

(Observing rope.) What's that for?

"Emmett"

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

George and Eustace

Right. Right.



DREAMING EMMETT

~~2nd Draft~~

26  
September 14, 1985

"Emmett"

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

[They all laugh and roughhouse each other.]

"Emmett"

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

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

"Emmett"

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

Eustace

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

George

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

Eustace

Drink neither.

"Emmett"

(Consulting his watch; sensitive to the slight change in time.) Drink neither? (Laughing shrilly) What was in that bottle we hung down in the well? Kool Aid? It made you holler. That's the first time I ever saw a runnning drunk. I used to hear people say "He was running drunk." I didn't know what they meant till that day. You was hollering and running all round the yard. Uncle Drew threw a hammer at your head. Remember? Missed you. Right, George?

George

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



# DREAMING EMMETT

2nd Draft

26  
September 14, 1985

"Emmett"

Cause

hurt

That what made you stop drinking, Eus? Somebody tried to ~~kill~~ you ~~huh~~? You never was one for rough stuff. (Playing with his weapons.) Oh Uncle Drew. He could throw a hammer all right, but he couldn't stop two crackers from snatching me out of his house. Here I am sleep. Night's so hot you want to call the fire department. We all in the bed together, trying not to touch cause the person next to you is hotter than you are. Crickets driving me crazy, but soon as I fall sleep I wake up. Somebody's touching me. Right here. Calling me. Flashlight. I can't see who it is. But I start to get dressed. White men. I smell white men. "You don't need no socks!" Red neck, what he know about socks? I tell him "I don't wear no shoes without socks, turkey!" And make 'em wait. Uncle Drew, he's whispering. But not to me--to them--the white men. "He just a kid and he ain't from round here. From up North. He don't understand. He don't understand." He was right, I don't understand. Throw a hammer at a kid having fun, but can't throw nothing at two crackers dragging his own nephew out the house.

Eustace

That ain't right what you saying, and it ain't fair. Uncle Drew took care of us; you too. Fed you; gave you the best piece of the chicken, like you was a guest or something. ~~WE~~ showed you a good time--

"Emmett"

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

Eustace

(To George.) He ain't making no movie. What he want with us?

George

I can't figure it.

Eustace

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

"Emmett"

You got that right. You didn't do nothing. (He adjusts George's appearance.)



DREAMING EMMETT

2nd Draft

26  
September 14, 1985

"Emmett" (Con't.)

You looking good, George, real good. Put on a little weight though. Not good, George. Gotta stay fit.

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

Come on. Come on, man.

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

George

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

"Emmett"

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

George

Well, it ain't twenty-four.

*There's a difference?*

"Emmett"

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

Eustace

(Taking off his face.) Five.

"Emmett"

No kidding. How old?

Eustace

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

"Emmett"

Older than me. Older than me! My best friend got kids older than me. What



DREAMING EMMETT

2nd Draft

26  
September 14, 1985

"Emmett" (Con't.)

do they do for fun Eustace? Go to dances and stuff?

[Dance music is heard. As "Emmett" continues, Eustace and George both, caught up in his words, put their young faces back on.]

"Emmett"

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

In Mississippi

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

Ma

Oh baby, did I burn your bread?

"Emmett"

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

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

"Emmett"

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



DREAMING EMMETT

2nd Draft

26  
September 14, 1985

Ma

(Partly to "Emmett", partly to George and Eustace.) You can't get that nice crust less the flame is high.

"Emmett"

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

Ma

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

"Emmett"

Your teeth. You got different teeth, Ma.

Ma

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

"Emmett"

No!

[Unsettled and a little frightened, "Emmett" leaps away from her. Addresses himself to his paraphernalia and the ordering of his "set." He is agitated and fearing the loss of control. ~~Ma is talking and gesturing happily with George and Eustace who are acting gracious.~~ disappears]

"Emmett"

(Bellowing.) All right. Here we go! Gimme the White Girl. Carolyn!  
(Teasing voice.) Carolyn.

S/ [Actress Carolyn enters with young, pretty face. Sees "Emmett" and the other <sup>^</sup>and, as if on cue, backs away in exaggerated fear.]

"Emmett"

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

"Carolyn"

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



DREAMING EMMETT

~~2nd Draft~~

26  
September 14, 1985

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

~~Ma~~ Eustace

(To "Emmett".) What you doing?

"Emmett"

~~It's all right, Ma. Just sit down.~~ All in good time. All in good time. (To "Carolyn".) You like a good time, Carolyn? [He wiggles his pelvis at her. Wolf-whistles etc., then laughs.] J.W. Get in here!

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

"Emmett"

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

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

"Emmett"

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

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

(15-D-3)

"Emmett"

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

George

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

[Ma appears]



DREAMING EMMETT

~~2nd Draft~~

26  
September 14, 1985

Ma

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

"Emmett"

These two faggots killed a certain Emmett Till. Me. Me! <sup>l#</sup> Pistol whipped him, made him take off his clothes, shot him, <sup>^</sup> threw him in the water. But the jury said "not guilty."

["J.W." and "Roy" lower their smiling heads.]

"Emmett"

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

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

"Emmett"

Want to try that again? Slower this time.

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

"Emmett"

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

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

Ma

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

fred a  
motor on  
his neck,

l# Ma  
you doing  
it all  
wrong,  
baby. l#



DREAMING EMMETT

~~2nd Draft~~

26  
September 14, 1985

"Emmett"

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

[Pg. 15]

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 curtsying.) 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 (crying.)~~ 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

[changing faces]

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

EMMETT

Different?

GEORGE

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

EMMETT

(To Carolyn) Practice.

GEORGE

(Showing a card to Emmett) See this?

EMMETT

What is it?

GEORGE

My registration card. My voter registration card.

EMMETT

Hot, hot shit.

GEORGE

A lot has gone down since 1955. All those signs, remember? For colored only, toilets, in waiting rooms, bus seats, water fountains. Colored section this, colored section that. Remember?



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 *(Changing his face)*

Had a senator too, while back.

*A Black man ran for President! (Geo. & Eustace slap hands)*  
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] *to an area where "Emmett" can not see them. They remove their young faces]*



Are we hostages?

"J.W."

Be still.

"Roy"

Maybe he wants ransom.

"Carolyn"

I'm scared.

"J.W."

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

"Emmett"

(Still fingering the wallet) When you have a wallet<sup>t</sup> 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? Just like 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<sup>t</sup>. You think that's why you was so scared to meddle some white girl, and why I wasn't? Black boy with a wallet, he has to have something in it. Don't he Carolyn? Roy? [The three cover their faces<sup>s</sup> with young ones] What you got in your wallet, J.W.? One of them little klan cards, right?



"J.W."

Let me tell you something, boy---

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

"Emmett"

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

"J.W."

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

Ma

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

"Emmett"

Not yet. I'm not finished, Ma

Ma

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

"Emmett"

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



Ma

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

"Emmett"

A lot. Look (cheerful) I got this whole thing worked out. I thought about it--a lot. I had a lifetime, understand, to think about it. (~~shuffle~~ ~~pages~~) See, I narrowed everything down to six things.

(coughs as for a speech) Six. Number one: lynch ~~J.W.~~ <sup>Mayor</sup> Number two: lynch ~~Rey.~~ <sup>Buck</sup> Number three: lynch ~~Carolyn.~~ <sup>Princess</sup> Not a big lynching, mind you, because ain't nobody but me left to do it. Now if I had a crowd, or even a friend--which brings me to number four: ask George where he was on the night of August 24, 1955, or any god dam night after they tied that cotton gin fan on my neck and dumped me in the river. I mean, like, how come those crackers still alive?

George

What crackers?

"Emmett"

Them crackers

George

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

"Emmett"

(peeping under George's young face) You didn't stay one. You got to be a man.

George

Look out, now.



21

"Emmett"

Maybe not. Maybe you still a kid.

George

I'm man enough.

"Emmett"

For what?

Eusstace (putting on his old face)

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

Ma

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

"Emmett"

Ma!

Ma

Think ahead, son. Think ahead.

"Emmett"

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

Ma

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

"Emmett,"

They killed me, Ma, I'm dead!

Ma

You mustn't worry so.

"Emmett"

This matters! Don't you care 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, with work with trouble.  
Now they're empty. (She turns to the others) Look.  
Look. Look here. See? I got nothing to hold.  
And nothing to drop.

"Emmett" (annoyed)

Number five! Make me a kite. You (to Roy) and  
you( to "J.W.") and you (to "Carolyn")

"J.W."

A what?

"Emmett"

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

[He selects material from his foot locker]

Geroge

Be reasonable.

Eustace

Dead people don't need no kite.

Ma

~~You doing this to hurt me~~ *I KNOW you miss me.*

"Emmett"

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

"Roy"

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



23

"Carolyn"

You gonna make that nigger a kite?

"Emmett" (to "Carolyn")

Tie my shoe.

["Carolyn" turns her back on him and walks away]

"Emmett"

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 <sup>of</sup> touch. They knew. They knew what it felt like to be fourteen. But these here white men they was doing the dreaming then. And this little colored boy, he was the dreamed. So...he died and they went freeeee. What the hell. Don't make no never mind



"Emmett" (cont'd.)

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 mother  
irons my underwear. She doesn't just wash them, and hang them  
on the line.

Ma

Breeze dried. That's the way.

"Emmett"

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

[cross-rubbing his fingers: sing-song]

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

Ma

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

"Emmett"

You didn't die, Mama. I did.

Ma

I forgive you.



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

GEORGE

(still in (A))

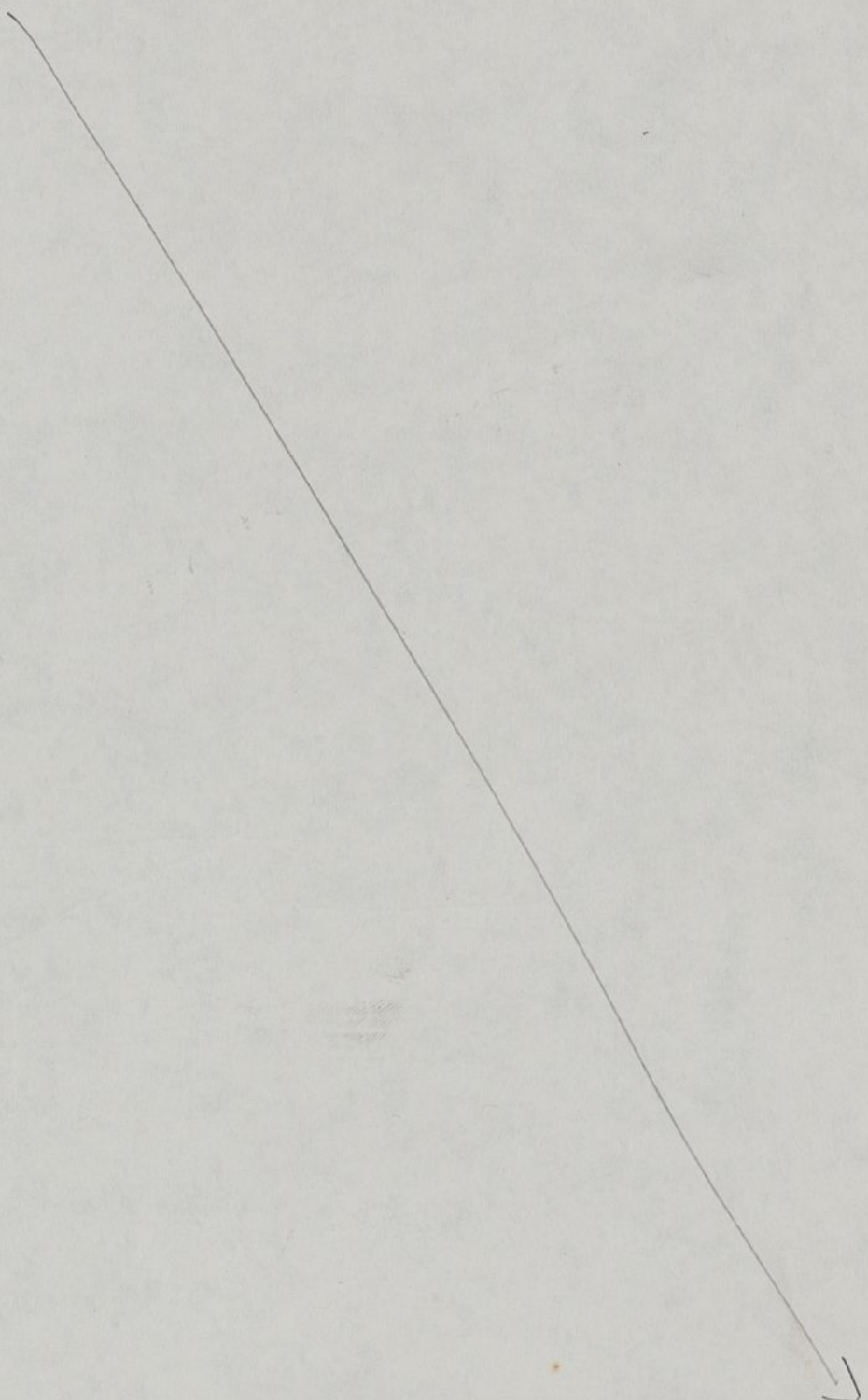
~~25~~  
26

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

EMMETT

(fixing weapons)

So everybody's safe, huh?





EUSTACE

Well, you know...

EMMETT

No more Emmett Tills?

GEORGE

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

EMMETT

Credit cards.

GEORGE

It's more than that.

EMMETT

Water fountains. Toilets.

GEORGE

Sure.

EMMETT

White people better too?

GEORGE

Some, yeah.

EMMETT

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

GEORGE

It's not perfect.

EMMETT

No? I'm not the last?

GEORGE

Not yet.



EMMETT

How many more are there?

EUSTACE

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

EMMETT

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

J.W. [snatching off hrs face]

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

GEORGE

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

J.W.

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

GEORGE

You been in it less than a hundred years and swear you know all about it.

What you know about what it stands for?

EUSTACE

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

CAROLYN

(~~putson~~ her pretty face  
takes off)



"Carolyn"

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

Eustace

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

[They enter into agitated bickering]

"Emmett"

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

George (to Eustace)

Ask him. Go head. Ask him.

Eustace

You ask him. Looks viscious to me.

George

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

Eustace

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

George

As<sup>^</sup>k him. This is a two way street.

Eustace (to "Emmett")

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



"Emmett"

What's what like?

Eustace

You know. Being dead and all

"Emmett"

I'd avoid it if I was you.

Eustace

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

Geroge ( to Eustace)

What makes you think any angels is where he is?

Eustace

Well, whatever.

"Emmett"

Shutup, you two.



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 (refusing mask)

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

EUSTACE

That's a fact.

GEORGE

Come strutting down here, like he own the place. All Norther<sup>^</sup> 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 mam'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.

Northern

a



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

EUSTACE

That's not the way I remember it.

EMMETT

That the way it was!



George

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

"Emmett"

There were black berries! Persimmon trees and sweet  
sweet blackberries!

"Carolyn"

Then what'd you want to go grabbing me if the black  
berries was so sweet.

"Emmett"

To fuck you!

Ma

Son!

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

"Roy"

Hey! The kite. You tearing up the kite!

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

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

"Roy"

It's all tore up.

George

There he is!

Ma

Catch him!

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

"Carolyn"

He's coming after me. Listen at him!



"J.W."

Keep shut!

"Carolyn"

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

Ma

Listen to me. This one time

"Roy"

Listen to your mammy.

"Emmett"

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

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

"Emmett" (cont'd.)

When you feel him next to your skin, and have to get rid of him. When you know in your heart that his heart<sup>#</sup>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,



"Emmett" (cont'd.)

take my advice: Be careful of his face. Don't smash it too much.

[He crumples the masks]

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

[to George and Eustace]

And if he needs you help and you can't give him any, then you better tell the undertaker to put sand in his mouth. Otherwise he'll just keep whispering your name from bushes, from the trees in your yard. I am telling you what I know. I live there. I been doing it for



"Emmett" (cont'd.)

for thirty years. And like Mr. J.W. says, I wasn't the first or the last Emmett Till.

[He pulls out a beautiful light blue suit, snap brim hat and white wing-tipped shoes. ~~These~~ 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 murderess! Move!

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

Girl

Stop it! Stop it!

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

Girl

I don't want to hear any more.



"Emmett"

Get out of her<sup>e</sup>. You can't come in here. I'm making a movie here.

Girl

I don't like <sup>T</sup>your movie.

"Emmett"

I'm dreaming this, girl. YOU aint in my dream.

Girl

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

Darkness



[Lights up. The Girl is re-arranging the set. Others join her in changing things occasionally<sup>t</sup> Until the re-arrangement 'traps' or 'excludes' "Emmett." ]

"Emmett" (shouting)

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

Ma

Aw, leave her alone. You come right on in<sup>h</sup> if you want to.

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

Where'd she come from? (to Girl) Where'd you come from?

Girl

Out there. The audience.

Eustace

Audience? We on TV!

"Carolyn"

Oh no. My Lord. J.W.!

Eustace

Hah! George, we live! On TV!

"Carolyn"

You hear that?



George

You lying.

"J.W."

Where's the camera at?

"Roy"

You mean we live?

"Carolyn"

Give me your comb. Quick.



Girl (to Ma)

Hi. How you dong? You all right?

Eustace

No I aint. Look over there.

MA

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

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

Button your shirt.

Girl

Thank you.

"J.W."

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

["Emmett" is 'lost' in the set. Bangs, waves but can't get  
through. The others <sup>ignore</sup> ~~do not notice~~ him]

Girl

I had a lot of trouble with the placket.

"Roy"

I don't see nothing (trying to get a piece of the kite on screen)

"Carolyn"

Is it anybody out there?

"J.W."

I kinda felt something all along.



"Carolyn"

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

"J.W"

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

"roy"

Yup. Doomed. If coons is doing it, it's doomed for sure.

Where'd that crosspeice get to?

"Carolyn"

I know it's a camera out there.

"Roy"

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

W

Ma

Hard to find good material anymore. Everything is some kind of lon.  
Nylon. Banlon.

Girl

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

Ma

Let me look. I remember when a zipper actually zipped. Stayed  
shut, too.



"Carolyn"

He's not making it. They are.

"J.W."

They who?

"Carolyn"

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

George

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

"J.W."

What nature shows?

"Carolyn"

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

Girl

Hellow Mr. Harvey. (to Ma) Thanks, this should hold it.

"Roy "

Is that it? Right yonder?

George

Call me George. And this here's Eustace.

~~Girl~~



Girl

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

"Carolyn"

Wait'll the kids see this!

["Roy" mugs for the camera]

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

Go somewhere and sit down. Quit acting the fool.

"Carolyn"

Just be yourself. That's all. Natural<sup>2</sup>a like.

George

How'm I doing?

Girl

NOT bad. My name's Tamara.

George

Tamara? As in yesterday?

Tamara

No. Tamara as in today.

Eustace

Look like a Johnson. Your last name Johnson?

Tamara

No. Ashanti.



Eustace

I don't know no Ashantis.

Ma

OH, that's nice. Tamara Ashanti.

George

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

Tamara

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

"Roy"

I found it! I found it!

"J.W."

What you cadkling aobut?

"Roy"

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

"Emmett"

[screaming, his voice like that of someone in a closet or  
outside a closed window]

This is not TV! This is my dream!

"Carolyn"

What's he saying?

"J.W."

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



"Carolyn"

Aw, what a <sup>shame.</sup> ~~pity.~~

"Emmett"

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

[She does not move]

"Emmett"

Beat it!

[He raises his fist.]

Tamara

Don't even try.

"Emmett"

Get out of my dream!

Ma

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

Tamara

You invented them. NOt me. I invented me.

"J.W."

That's telling him, sister.

[He pats her affect<sup>o</sup>inately]



46  
Tamara

I'm not your sister.

"Carolyn"

Get back over here, J.W.

Eustace

You aint his sister, and you aint your daddy's daughter either.

Tamara

I know you're not siding with him.

Eustace

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

Tamara

Hers. (point to Ma) I'm her sister.

"Emmett"

That's my mother, bitch.

Ma

Baby!

George

Hey man. Watch your mouth.

Tamara

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



"Emmett"

My what?

Tamara

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

"Emmett"

I'll call you anything I want.

Tamara

I don't think so.

"J.W."

This is getting good.

Tamara (to "J.W.")

Do you want my full attention? (to "Emmett") And I don't  
like the way you treat your mama. You haven't said two kind words to  
her. And what about her back? You dreamed this mess up why couldn't  
you dream up a pillow, so your mama could sit comfortable-like?  
Suppose she's thirsty and wants a nice cup of coffee. Would you  
like a nice cup of coffee, Ma'am?

Ma

Love one.

Tamara

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



48  
Geo,rge

Hey, wait now.

Tamara

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

"Carolyn"

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

Tamara

Who asked you?

"Carolyn"

I was paying you a compliment.

Tamra

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 <sup>g</sup>h when a black kid ask you for a date, you call your husband? <sub>1</sub> I Couldn't manage that could you?

"Carolyn"

I didn't call nobody. I got a gun and shot after him myself!

I ain't never sunk so low that I got to take a pass from a nigger.

["Emmett" is searching through his footlocker]

Tamara

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

"Carolyn"

That's your problem,

Tamara

Not today. Today it's your problem.

"Carolyn"

Oh yeah?

Tamara

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



["Carolyn" looks for a hidden camera]

"Carolyn"

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

"J.W."

(to camera) She was a looker. A real looker.

["Emmett" has assembled a rifle]

"Emmett"

Hey!

Tamara

Now what?

"Emmett"

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

Tamara

You messed it up yourself, in 1955.

"Emmett"

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

"J.W."

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

Ma

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



"J.W."

Would have, if we hadn't stopped him.

["Emmett" shoots; nobody falls or even cringes]

Eustace

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

"Carolyn"

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

George

Come on. Did you think he was serious?

"Carolyn"

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

"J.W."

That's beautiful, honey.



Tamara

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

"Carolyn"

I don't know what he is.

Tamara

Oh, yes you do.

["Emmett" shoots]

"Carolyn"

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

Eustace

You lying, lady.

"Carolyn"

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

"J.W."

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

"Carolyn"

I did not!



"J.W."

Even then I was gonna let it lie. You took a gun to him and all.

*figured*  
I ~~figured~~ that was enough, but

Geroge

But what?

"J.W."

Well, later on a nigger ~~told~~ *t* me the same story. Come up out the field <sup>s</sup> and told me. I had to do something then. I couldn't let the niggers think I would let it go.

"Roy"

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

"Carolyn"

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

"J.W."

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

"Roy"

Always did.

Tamara

You're full of shit,

~~"Carolyn"~~



"Carolyn"

Listen at her mouth. Filthy.

Eustace

Right on, Miss Ashanti.

"J.W."

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

George

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

Eustace

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

"Roy"

Graziano sure whipped that nigger.

"J.W."

~~That tiral was fair.~~ Shouldna even had a trial.



55  
"Roy"

Never should of got to that.

"J.W."

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

Tamara

And you had more, didn't you?

"J.W."

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

Tamra

So did you.

"J.W."

I taught him something, didn't I? And when I taught him, I taught  
everybody like him. We di<sup>it</sup>dn't have no problems in Mississ<sup>i</sup>ppi  
till them northern niggers started coming down there.

"Carolyn"

Your average nigger is polite (pointedly to Tamara)

"J.W."

It's the outside <sup>ones</sup> niggers you have to teach a lesson to.



Tamara

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

"J.W."

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

Tamara

I thought that was your job.

"J.W."

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

["Carolyn" turns toward him]

"J.W."

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.

George

You killed Emmett because she asked for it?



57

Eustace

ky I thought you said it was because a negro told lyou about it  
and you haD ~~TO DO SOMETHING~~.

George

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

Eustace

Now you saying it was cause she asked for it.

"J.W."

You all mixing me up.

Tamara

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

"Carolyn"

Stay out of this.

Tamara

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

"Carolyn "

You waan't even there.

Tamara

No, but my absence was . My absence was <sup>definitely</sup> there.



Eustace (to George)

What the devil is she talking about?

Tamara

When he wanted to prove he was a man, he needed my absence.

Which is another way of saying he needed me, because, one

thing is sure: if he had made a pass at me, he'd be alive

and ~~and~~ that's hard. What he wanted was easy.

George

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

Tamara

That's easy too.

"Roy"

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

["Emmett"] shoots]

George

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

Eustace

I can't hear what I'm saying.

~~"Roy"~~



"Roy"

Anything to eat around here? Sandwich maybe.

[without the attention his weapon was supposed to attract,

"Emmett" is alone with his dying, anonymous. The dialogue

continues against, but without regard to, his private nightmare]

"Carolyn" ( to J.W.", still steaming)

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



60  
"Carolyn"

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

"Roy"

Kick his <sup>black</sup> ~~blat~~ butt all the way back to Chicago. That's what.

"J.W."

I done <sup>l</sup>the right thing. Everybody said so. Said not to worry. It was the right thing and I believe it to this day. But then they changed up on me. After the trial, they stopped speaking like, like I was some sickness they might catch. Nobody came by <sup>the</sup> to store. Business went down to nothing. Zero. And when I went to renew my loan--I been dealing with them for twelve years--they turned me down. The very same people who clapped me on the back for doig<sup>2</sup> what a white man is bound to do. Turned me down.

"Carolyn"

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

"J.W."

It was all <sup>e</sup> ~~thm~~ northern newspapers and pictures ~~and~~ them city lawyers.



55/DE 61  
"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.

"Roy"

Had a movie deal that close.

Tamara

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

"j.W."

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

Tamara

Everything? Every single thing?

"J.W."

We did <sup>what</sup> ~~want~~ 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.

Tamar

You lit the fire and they kept warm?



62  
"J.W."

We took all the chances.

"Eustace

You all broke the horse and they sat saddle?

"J.W."

Yeah. Like tha<sup>^</sup>t.

T  
d George

You shoveled <sup>manure</sup> ~~shit~~ and they made hay?

"J.W."

We shoveled, we, we--

Tamara

That's what trash is for.

"Carolyn"

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

T  
d Tamara

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

"Carolyn"

She was!



Tamara

Her children walk ground? Then shut your mouth.

Ma

What you all talking about?

All (taken aback; they exchange looks)

Tillo Emmett Till. Till. Emmett.

Ma

Sound to me like you was talking about yourselves. Did you know him?

George

Sure. 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.

Eustace

Could hear him screaming all night.

Tamara

He was 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~~<sup>1</sup> of white girls.

Eustace

He never had no girl.

Tamara

Real macho. *Always profiling.*

"Roy"

S<sup>7</sup>ad he was more man than we was.

Eustace

Gentle, real gentle.

George

But no coward. NOt him.

"J.W."

We scared him to death, ~~though~~<sup>✓</sup>

Eustace

Real nice kid.



65

"Carolyn"

Awful mean.

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. I didn't always understand him. Sometimes I didn't even hear him. But I always knew when he was there. Like electricity--plugged in and humming.

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

Ma

He sang, my son. A beautiful voice. And he could draw anything he saw. And dance? He slept with his arm over his eyes. Had a smashed thumb. His nail <sup>thumb</sup> never grew straight after that. One time a teacher slapped him in school. I was going to tear her up and you know what he said? He said "She didn't mean it. Her hand did it, but she didn't mean it." He was six years old. Some times I dream him. He comes to me and he says "Ma, what's to eat?" And I get up and go to the stove. But by the time I get it on the table, he's gone. Gone. Now. He asked you to <sup>make</sup> him a kite. So make it.

[Ma exits]

[Emmett" as himself watches the others - then begins to move into their space slowly]



Eustace (to "Roy")

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

George

It ain't bad,

Eustace

Need a hurricane to fly that thing.

"Roy"

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

"J.W."

What's all that there stuff?

"Roy"

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

"J.W."

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

Tamara

Captain Marvel? A fat blonde in tights?

"Roy"

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

Tamara

Captain Marvel. That explains you.



47  
"J.W."

She's right. <sup>Ought</sup> Outhgt not to have a white man on it.

Tamara

Put Shange onit, or Muhammaed Ali.

"Roy"

This ain't your kite.

Tamara

Or Jessie Jackson. Shazamm. Shott.

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 sould put.

George

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



Eustace

You reckon he run across him--up there?

Tamara

Dr. King wouldn't be nowhere near him.

Eustace

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

"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 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.

"KJ.W."

What 's that mean?

"Carolyn"

It means the mobile home ain't mobile, J.W. It aint  
going nowhere.

"J.W."

Well I am. NOW.

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



"Emmett"

I never said silver

"Roy"

Silver be pretty.

"Emmett"

Just a kite. A plain kite.

Tamara

You don't want much, do you? Just 'make me a kite' and then you kill everybody. That your idea of power? Male power? You couldn't even leave home, couldn't 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. You didn't have a picture of a little colored girl in your wallet. Nobody dared you to make a pass at a little colored girl did they? Because you'd lose that dare. Because she'd break your arm ~~and~~ if you did and I wouldn't have to call nobody to help her do it. <sup>Or</sup> Because she'd take you up on it and smile at you, be sweet and love you hard and long and maybe you'd love her back which wouldn't do because where would the power be then? If you loved her back, that'd be weak. Only two possibilities with a little black girl.



She breaks your arm--you lose. She loves you--you lose.

"Emmett"

You walked up here. You were not invited.

Tamara

I know , but I am here.

"Emmett"

I never dreamed you.

Tamara

Why not? ["Emmett" turns away] Why not?

"Emmett"

I don't know.

Tamara

Yes you do.

"Emmett"

Yes. I do. Your mouth.

Tamara

You mean if I was quiet, I could be in your dream? If I just wouldn't say anything? You remind me of my brothers. They show up only when they want five dollars. Even then they stick their fingers in their ears. I don't care. I keep right on, because if I stop...Talk is how I keep my breath going in and out, in and out. I read the papers; listen to the news. Sometimes they have a picture of him. Somebody like you. A high school picture, an elementary school picture. And there he is with a tie on and quiet eyes. and I go Ah! [sucks in air] Sometimes there are neighbors standing around saying what a nice boy he was and I go Ah! [sucks in air] It's not my brother . NOT yet. It's



Tamara (cont'd)

not my girl friend's brother. Or my boy friend's brother.  
Or even my boy friend. Not yet. But I go Ah! Ah! Ah! Ah!  
I want to breathe normal. There is this little cup inside me.  
Like a tea cup. Like the cup you drink the really black oolong out  
of. Thin with a little handle you can't get your forefinger  
through so you have to hold it like this. It clicks when you put  
it down in the saucer. And it breaks if you put it down too hard.  
Just anything at all might break it. So you have to be careful.  
You have to breathe normal or it will break and you'll never hear  
the click. Ah! Ah! So I talk. I talk. So my breath will go in  
and out, in and out. Otherwise I'd be holding all the air in the  
world, right here. Why you have to dare everybody? Test every-  
body? Don't you know they're just waiting for you to make a mis-  
take, step out of line. Draw on the wall? Laugh too loud?  
Turn the volume up on your radio? Anything. Any little mistake---

"Emmett"

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

Tamara

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

"Emmett"

It's not supposed to change. They are.

~~Tamara~~



Tamara

Well they won't.

"Emmett"

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

Tamara

I just want it to stop. But it never does. That's why I--

You want me to be quiet? Shut up? Blow my cup to sm~~th~~thereens?

Don't tell me you don't know what I mean. When they had you down.

When they kept on hitting <sup>you</sup> ~~and~~ and <sup>(</sup>hitting you and hitting you.

Didn't you talk? Didn't you just keep on talking? Talk<sup>(</sup>ing, talk-  
ing. So you could hear yourself and keep the breath going in and  
out, in and out. Wasn't that it?

"Emmett"

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

Tamara

Yes. <sup>==</sup>that's what I mean. Any sound. Even if it's noise.

"Emmett"

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



74  
Tamara.

So you kept talkign. Even when they--

"Emmett"

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

Tamara

But they said--

"Emmett"

What do they know? They killed me and they don't know who I am.

You weren't even alive then, and you act like you know me better

than my mother. fourteen? Black? Male? Chicago? White woman?

Photograph? What does that mean? That doesn't equal me. That's

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

headline. Some picture in the newspaper. I'm not a headline. I

thought I was at least that. At least that. I listendd, I watched.

Them. You. Nothing is deader than a thirty-year-old headline.

Except me. I am deader than that. Dead<sup>er</sup> than that.

A human sound. A picture, maybe. A piece of music. A movie.

That was all. Something to go with the headline. But if your

killers don't remember you, and your friends don't either.

I have to remember my death. How else could I know I lived. I

have to go down in the water. Watch my eye hang out of my socket.

Feel my teeth in my nose. You can't breathe? Your cup won't click?

I know all about breath, I breathe mud. I let it fill me. Fill me



"Emmett" (cont'd.)

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

Ma (softly)

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

Tamara

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

Ma

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

[The Others begin to circle her]

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

"Carolyn"

You talking about Emmett Till?



76

Ma

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

"J.W." (enters)

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

"Roy"

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

"J.W."

That's the boy they said. That's Till. The one we taught. Aint it? Well, that's who he said he was.

Ma

A grown man. A fully grown man with children of his own. He didn't even call the hospital--just the police. My son died on the curb. Never made it to the emergency room. I asked them: Did he call? Did he call? That was 1957. He aint called yet. Shot him and went on about his business. Some women worry about what kind of job their boy is gonna have. If he finish high school, who he might marry. All those kinds of things. Women like me. Black women like me, we just wonder will he make it home? Will he get through the day. When the police came by I thought what nice boys. They sat down and talked real nice to me. I



I wondered if their mama wonders if they'd come home at the end of the day too. But then, they have the guns. At the hearing all anybody wanted to know was whether the storekeeper had a license for his gun.

George

Did he?

Ma

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.

"J.W."

YOU mean to tell me <sup>that</sup> ~~you~~ ain't the boy we taught a lesson to?

I knew it.

Ma

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

Eustace

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

"Emmett"

The man who shot me never saw my face. How could he remember it? At fourteen you--I didn't have a life of my own to call it one. And I didn't have a dying either. So I started imagining I

\*  
Bad  
Break



was Emmett Till. I thought everybody knew about him, remembered him. They wrote him up and put his picture in magazines. For a while he was somebody. He was fourteen--like me. I couldn't take his life, so I took his death. When that bullet hit me I never said a thing. Not a thing. I didn't have time. I wanted to say something. Make a sound. Like Emmett. Like he did. A sound people would hear. Then it would be over and I could dream something different.

①

Ma

Is it clear now?

"J.W."

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

(begins wipe his makeup)

"Roy"

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

"Carolyn"

I'm real sorry.

"J.W."

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

"Emmett"

Can you?

[ "Carolyn" "J.W." and "Roy" exit into "dressing room" ]



Eustace

I thought something was funny bout<sup>t</sup> you. Emmett Till  
wouldn't a done this, He was a good boy.

George

Sorry, kid. I mean we just actors, like the man said.

I was in "Cabin in the Sky" Maybe you remember me?

Well, nice meeting you, ma'am. And you miss. Take care,  
little brother.

[Eustace and George turn to go<sup>t</sup>. The actors finish cleaning  
their faces in the  
"E mett"

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

[They pick up masks and exchange glance<sup>s</sup>]

Eustace

We did all we could

[turns away, pauses and turns back]

You got to remember. We was Black boys.

George

(holding maske before his face) In Mississippi. In 1955.

[They toss the masks away and ~~exit~~ enter "dressing room"  
space]



Ma

80

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

"Emmett"

You don't have to stay.

Tamara

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

"Emmett"

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

Tamara

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

"Emmett"

Almost. Except. It doesn't scare me. I'm not afraid anymore to look at what nobody else can. <sup>I'm</sup> ~~I am~~ more real, more alive than they are. Who knows? Maybe they are worth my attention. But one thing for sure: they aren't worth my imagination.

Tamara

Will you keep on--dreaming "Emmett"? Do you have to?

"Emmett"

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

Tamara

On?



Tamara



"Emmett"

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

[He disappears. The kite rises and gleams]

The end.