



## Dreaming Emmett Draft

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...team. Not  
...the way sustained  
...to slow down to agonizing  
...the movement or speech is oddly rapid. Color is  
black and white or sepia. The scenes we dream in color are  
...memorable, since it happens so seldom, and since it frequently  
...when nothing dramatic is being dreamed. Sounds accompanying  
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.

...gies 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.

...re should be no intermission, but once (twice, actually) there are black-  
...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.

...he action takes place NOW in an abandoned cotton mill--that is to say,  
...at an abandoned cotton mill looks like to someone who has never seen  
It should be constructed in such a way as to suggest rusted violence:  
...s, blades, platforms, loading bays, motors, teeth, ropes etc. But the  
...s can be used as a child's swing or a clothesline; the bays can be slept  
...he blades can be shelter. Cotton that bursts from one or two huge  
...is an obviously theatrical touch of the dreaming set-maker.  
...ation is the pose to be struck.



...old black boy. He is at  
...braggadocio and vulgarity combine but don't mix. He is  
...a chameleon--capable of infectious humor and frightening  
...ence. Small-framed, he has a good singing voice and can move from  
...menace to warm charm in a flash. He is able to make us cry and to  
...ve us to fury. His accent is Northern; when he affects a Southern  
...it sounds false.

**ARGE**--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 tr  
aveled 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.

**PRINCESS**--A white woman in her mid-sixties, she is habitually sus-  
picious 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--

**MAJOR**--Husband of Princess. 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

**BUCK**--Brother to MAJOR, in his late fifties. He has a kind of male-volent  
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 a visor which he puts on his head, a huge watch which he straps to his wrist, an old typewriter, paper and other paraphenalia suggestive both of theater props and an executioner's tools. He arranges the typewriter and kneels in front of it, preparing to type.]

EMMETT

How I Spent My 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 bus station. Chicago. Crowded. Hot. [Wipes under his chin.] Here's me bopping on in. [Bops around.] Got my suitcase. Money in my wallet. [To clerk.] Hey, baby. [Tosses the money.] Ah, you ain't deaf. Mississippi. Huh? No way! Round trip, baby. Definitely a round trip. Sheeee, two weeks and I'm back in Mississippi where I belong. Same to you! Then. Then. I stroll over to the newsstand. Buy me a Plastic Man Comic and a pack of Lucky Strike. Couple of Butternut candy bars. Some Wrigley. Spearmint. [Unwraps the gum.] Mmmmm. [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



...room. Go to the back; spread  
...looks out window.] Ma. Ma. Here I am.  
...I can't hear. Stay out of what? Oh. Yeah, sure.  
...Bye! Mmmmmmm. [Imitating sound of motor, rocking a  
little in his seat.] I light me up a cig. [Smokes and gazes out of  
window.] 'S green. Wow. One mile and it's green. Lawns. Look at  
those trees! Oh, man! [Yawns.] Sun's going down. [Closes his eyes;  
snores; wakes; looks out of window.] Ha ha. Oh, man! Don't tell me  
that's cotton! Ha ha. I thought it was gonna be big. Big bushes of it.  
Like snowballs. Like, like cotton. This is jive. Where the houses?  
Oops, there's one. Damn. Shoe boxes. Wee little shoe boxes from  
Whom Mc An. Hey, Mississippi, ain't you got no towns? No magnolia?  
Lord have mercy. Look at that. Hey! Hey! [Waving.] Where your  
shoes, nigger? [Laughs. Opens window, pokes his head out.] Mmmm.  
What is it? [Inhaling.] Something, something, sweet like  
honeysuckle? Leaves. Moss. And [his voice alters] mud. Smells like  
mud. And water.

[Suddenly agitated.]

Cut! Cut, cut, cut!

[Returns to business at hand.]

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

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

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

Yeah, od.

This is

Chicago

the

nd

[Below him five characters enter  
as he calls their names. Each wears a 'face' appropriate  
for his or her age, race, gender and self-perception.  
Their movements are

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MORRISON

NOVEMBER 20TH, 1985

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descriptions of each. Each "face" is  
[The actors are picturing.]

EMMETT

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

[A white woman rises and enters his domain.]

EMMETT

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

[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?



EMMETT [cont.]

and you can't fool me. This time I'm running it. Hear  
You not gonna mess this vacation up. This is my summer vacation.  
[backling.] Revised! Way it's 'sposed to be. Way it would have been if I  
had my boys with me. Sheee. Wow, Oh man, if those cats could see me  
now! [Seriously, commanding.] If those cats could see me now! Eustace!  
Yo! Eustace Spottswood.

[EUSTACE enters.]

EMMETT

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

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

EMMETT

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

[GEORGE enters.]

EMMETT

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

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

EMMETT

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

GEORGE

Gee, you do look familiar.



EUSTACE

nobody.

EMMETT

Oh, man! How could you forget? [Sings.]

"Many a tear has to fall

But it's all in the game.

Do wah wah wah." [He waits expectantly. GEORGE and EUSTACE look at one another.]

[Louder and a little wild.]

"Many a tear has to fall;

But it's all in the game."

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

EUSTACE [Singing softly]

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

EMMETT

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

EUSTACE

August. 1955. August, 1955.

EMMETT

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

EUSTACE

Emmett? Emmett Till?

GEORGE

Good God is that you?

EMMETT

Is pig pussy pork?



EUSTACE

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

EMMETT

Okay! That Enough! Quit!

[GEORGE and EUSTACE freeze. EMMETT returns to his platform. He 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?

EUSTACE

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



...forgotten. Not forgotten, am I? But you know what?  
 I don'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

Nope.

GEORGE

You must be wore out.

EMMETT

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

EUSTACE

[Observing rope.] What's that for?

EMMETT

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

GEORGE AND EUSTACE

Right. Right.

EMMETT

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

[They all laugh and roughhouse each other.]



EMMETT [Cont.]

Want you a 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

I don't smoke; never did.

GEORGE

Phillip Morris? They still make Phillip Morris?

EUSTACE

Drink neither.

EMMETT

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

GEORGE

[Agreeable; back in his face.] Right. Right

EMMETT

That what made you stop drinking, Eus? Cause somebody tried to hurt you? You never was one for rough stuff. [Playing with his weapons.] Old 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

EMMETT

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



## EMMETT (Cont.)

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

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

## EUSTACE

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

## GEORGE

I can't figure it.

## EUSTACE

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

## EMMETT

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

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

Come on. Come on.

[GEORGE reacts to this play like an older man.]



GEORGE

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

EMMETT

[Suddenly curious.] How's it feel, forty-four?

GEORGE

Well, it ain't twenty-four.

EMMETT

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

EUSTACE

[Taking off his face.] Five.

EMMETT

No kidding. How old?

EUSTACE

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

EMMETT

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

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

EMMETT

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



EMMETT [Cont.]

the body. Same as meat." I hated 'em. But I liked her pan bread. Cooked in a skillet on top of the stove. Burnt a little bit around the edges. She always burnt it--just a little around the edges. Ma. Ma.

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

MA

Oh baby, did I burn your bread?

EMMETT

Ma!

MA

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

EMMETT

What you need those for? [Reaches for her glasses. She eludes him.]

MA

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

EMMETT

Your hair. You got different teeth, Ma.

MA

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

EMMETT

No!

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

[Bellowing.] All right. Here we go? Gimme the White Girl. Princess! Princess!



PRINCESS enters with young, pretty face. Sees EMMETT and the others and, as if on cue, backs away in exaggerated fear.]

EMMETT

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

PRINCESS

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

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

EUSTACE

[To EMMETT.] What you doing?

EMMETT

All in good time. All in good time. [To PRINCESS.] You like a good time, Princess? [He wiggles his pelvis at her. Wolf-whistles etc, then laughs.] Major! Get in here!

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

EMMETT

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

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

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

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

EMMETT

Right. Right. [To GEORGE and EUSTACE.] Member them? Had a little country store smack dab in the cotton field. Full of Kerosene and Red Seal snuff. Indian Head cornmeal and all the Dr. Pepper you could ever want.



EMMETT [Cont.]

and Super Suds and rock candy and matches and  
turning to PRINCESS] other things.

GEORGE

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

[MA appears.]

MA

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

EMMETT

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

MA

You doing it all wrong, baby.

EMMETT

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

[MAJOR and BUCK lower their smiling heads.]

EMMETT

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

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

EMMETT

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

[EMMETT moves to Princess 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.



[EMMETT moves to Princess 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.]

[PRINCESS writhes with rage.]

MA

[At large.] Everything's going to be all right.

EMMETT

[To PRINCESS.] Did you think I was serious? [To MAJOR.] 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? Princess, My mother. [The women react.] What about a little curtsey, Miss Ann? [PRINCESS curtsies.] You need practice. Practice, I said. Keep practicing till you get it right.

MA

I don't want that. I don't need that.

EMMETT

[Shouting.] I want it. I need it! [To MAJOR, cordially.] Major? You and Buck ever meet my Mom? Mom, this is Major, skilled mechanic, killer, farmer, husband, jack-of-all-trades, murderer, and this is his brother. [Slapping him on the back] Buck, ditto, except for skill. He can't even shoot. Major here's the marksman. "Shoot the head off a turtle at fifty yards," Right? Right! [Shaking his finger at PRINCESS who has stopped curtseying.] Practice. Practice makes perfect.

[She continues, frequently stumbling, but is forced by EMMETT'S attention to keep it up, until, puppet-like, she establishes a rhythm. EUSTACE moves to MA. 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 PRINCESS] 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, for colored only waiting rooms, bus seats, water fountains. Colored section this, colored section that. Remember? I remember.

GEORGE

[Proudly.] Not a one left. You can go from the Gulf to the St. Lawrence River and never see a single one.

EMMETT

Uh, uh, uh.

GEORGE

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

EUSTACE

Had a senator too, while back. First and only since Reconstruction.



President! And look here. Look. Can you believe  
 he pulls out a sheaf of cards.] Mastercard. Visa Card. Sears. Exxon.

GEORGE [Cont.]

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 PRINCESS.] Sit down. You can't do nothing learn nothing.

[PRINCESS re-groups with MAJOR and BUCK.]

PRINCESS

Are we hostages?

MAJOR

Be still.

BUCK

Maybe he wants ransom.

PRINCESS.

I'm scared.

MAJOR

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

EMMETT

[Still fingering the wallet.] When you have a wallet, you can pull it out of your hip pocket and show it to another man. He pulls out his; I pull out mine. He shows me his; I show him mine. See? Like just now. First thing you did was show me yours. All the stuff you got in here, just like the



EMMETT [Cont.]

stuff I had in mine. You got cards, I had pictures. All bullshit. So another man would know how tough you are. Hey, George, I can tell you tough. White folks don't scare you now. You got cards, plenty cards. I remember when you didn't even have a wallet. You think that's why you was so scared to meddle some white girl, and why I wasn't? Black boy with a wallet, he has to have something in it. Don't he Princess? Buck? What you got in your wallet, Major? One of them little Klan cards, right?

MAJOR

Let me tell you something boy...

[EMMETT punches MAJOR in the stomach, hard, then curbs himself from doing more, as if waiting to savor it later. MAJOR is bent over breathless and in pain.]

*1st punch*

EMMETT

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

MAJOR

[Gasping.] Don't make no difference what you do to me. You a dead nigger and ain't no Black mayor gonna change that.

MA

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

EMMETT

Not yet. I'm not finished, Ma.

MA

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

EMMETT

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

MA

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

*To - audience*



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. See, I narrowed everything down to six things. [Coughs as for a speech.] Six. Number one: lynch Major. Number two: lynch Buck. Number three: lynch Princess. 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.

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

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



EMMETT

Ma!

MA

Think ahead, son. Think ahead.

EMMETT

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

MA

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

EMMETT

They killed me, Ma. I'm dead!

MA

You mustn't worry so.

EMMETT

This matters! Don't you care about me?

MA

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

EMMETT

[Annoyed] Number five! Make me a kite. You, [to BUCK] and you. [To MAJOR] and you. [To PRINCESS.]

MAJOR

A what?

EMMETT

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

[He selects material from his foot locker.]

GEORGE

Be reasonable.



EUSTACE

Dead people don't need no kite.

MA

Don't you think I know you miss me?

EMMETT

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

BUCK

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

PRINCESS

You gonna make that nigger a kite?

EMMETT

[To PRINCESS.] Tie my shoe.

[PRINCESS turns her back on him and walks away.]

I said tie my shoe.

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

EMMETT

Not too tight.

[MAJOR reaches to snatch her up. EMMETT strikes him.]

MAJOR

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.

BUCK

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



## EMMETT

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

## MA

Breeze dried. That's the way.

## EMMETT

She irons my shorts. So white and clean. You made me dirty my underwear. [Cross-rubbing his fingers; sing-song.] Shame, shame on me-ee. Shame, shame on you-ou. Cause you put me in the river and I wasn't dead yet. My teeth were in my nose so I couldn't hold my breath. And the place where my eye used to be, [touches it tenderly] it hurt me. It hurt me. I can't find my eye.

## MA

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

## EMMETT

You didn't die, Mama. I did.

## MA

I forgive you.

[MA disappears.]

## EMMETT

[To the white men.] Do my kite. Go on, do 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?



Not yet.

GEORGE

How many more are there?

EMMETT

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

EUSTACE

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

EMMETT

MAJOR

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.

MAJOR

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.

PRINCESS

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.]

BUCK

You people never could understand nothing.



MAJOR

Nothing. What you know about making a nation?

BUCK

You never even had one.

GEORGE

Got one now.

PRINCESS

Can't we call somebody? Is it a telephone somewhere?

EUSTACE

Must've been some ditch your people lived in. Couldn't wait to come up out of it and get on a boat.

GEORGE

Run out. That's what. Run out their own country cause didn't nobody want 'em there.

ROY

Black mayors. Hee, hee. Can't run a gas station, let alone a town.

EUSTACE

Starving in caves.

PRINCESS

Help. Help.

MAJOR

We built things! Buildings and dams and...

EUSTACE

So do beaver.

GEORGE

So do bees.

BUCK

And ants. They build--



MAJOR

Why don't you shut your mouth.

PRINCESS

Help! Help!

EMMETT

I said quit!

[They are silent.]

I'm up to date now.

[MAJOR and BUCK begin surreptitiously to look for a way out while assembling the frame of the kite. As they handle things, check things, Princess 'shills' for them. EUSTACE and GEORGE are still rippling from the quarrel that was abruptly broken off. And resentful of EMMETT's insinuations about them--his "I told you so" cavalier attitude during the quarrel.]

GEORGE

[To EUSTACE.] Ask him. Go head. Ask him.

EUSTACE

You ask him. Looks vicious to me.

GEORGE

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

EUSTACE

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

GEORGE

Ask him. This a two way street.

EUSTACE

[To EMMETT.] Scuse me, but ah, what's it like?

EMMETT

What's what like?

EUSTACE

You know. Being dead and all.



EMMETT

I'd avoid it if I was you.

EUSTACE

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

GEORGE

[To EUSTACE.] What makes you think any angels is where he is?

EUSTACE

Well, whatever.

EMMETT

Shut up, you two.

EUSTACE

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

EMMETT

I tell you to stop, you supposed to stop.

GEORGE

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

EMMETT

I said stop! [Tries to put their masks back.]

GEORGE

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

EUSTACE

That's a fact.

GEORGE

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

EMMETT

Something's wrong.

[MA appears--on guard.]



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; a persimmon tree, and berries, black berries. Sweet, sweet. Oh God-sweat [He wipes his eyes.]



George:

Buck:

George: Wouldn't know a pecan from a  
cow flop.



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!

PRINCESS

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

EMMETT

To fuck you!

MA

Son!

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

BUCK

Hey! The kite! You tearing up the kite!

MAJOR

[To Princess.] What you say that for? Now look what you done.

BUCK

It's all tore up.

EUSTACE

Where'd he go?

GEORGE

There he is!



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

PRINCESS

He's coming after me! Listen at him!

MAJOR

Keep shut!

PRINCESS

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.

BUCK

Listen to your mammy.

EMMETT

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

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

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

[He crumples the masks.]

I know that's hard. But my advice is not to, because that's the face that watches you. That floats next to you at the supper table, the same one you see in passing cars. Don't smash his face. And if you have to stab him or cut his throat, make sure you also cut his feet off. If you don't-- after he's dead, his feet will walk behind you. They'll touch yours under the blanket at night. And next time, make sure you cut off his hands because the hands never die. They can pat you on the shoulder anytime. Do it right,



## EMMETT [Cont.]

next time. When you feel his-power, and have to shoot him in the back, don't turn and run afterwards, because as soon as you turn your back to him he'll jump on it, throw his arms around you. When you take a shower you can't scrub him off. When you kneel down to pray in your little white churches, he's kneeling too, right behind you.

[To GEORGE and EUSTACE.]

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

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

## EMMETT

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

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

## GIRL

Stop it! Stop it! [She kicks the corpse out of their hands and continues to kick it out of sight.] I don't want to hear any more.

## EMMETT

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

## GIRL

I don't like your movie.

## EMMETT

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



GIRL

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

DARKNESS







ACT II \_

MA

WATCH YOUR STEP, BABY. THIS FLOOR IS A MESS.

EMMETT

GET HER OUT! YOU HEAR ME? I WANT HER OUT OF HERE!

MA

DONT BE LIKE THAT. WE GOT ROOM.

PRINCESS

WHERE'D SHE COME FROM?

MAJOR

ANYBODY"S GUESS.

BUCK

SHOOT UP LIKE WEEDS.

PRINCESS

HOW SHE GET IN HERE?

BUCK

LOOK AT THE OLD LADY. SHE COME AND GO ANYTIME SHE FEEL LIKE IT.

MAJOR

NIGGER MESS.

PRINCESS

MAYBE SHE'S IN CHARGE. I MEAN, IF WE HOSTAGES AND THEY WANT RANSOM.



MAJOR

HE WON'T GET AWAY WITH IT. PROMISE YOU THAT.

BUCK

SHE'S AFTER HIM; NOT US.

PRINCESS

OHH. (to GIRL) SAY THERE. WHERE YOU FROM?

GIRL

OUT THERE. THE AUDIENCE

PRINCESS

AUDIENCE? WE ON TV! OH, NO. MY LORD. MAJOR!

GEORGE

HAH! EUSTACE. WE ON TV!

PRINCESS

YOU HEAR THAT?

EUSTACE

YOU LYING.

MAJOR

WHERE'S THE CAMERA AT?

PRINCESS

SHE COME UP OUT THE AUDIENCE.

EMMETT

I'M THE AUDIENCE! AND THE DIRECTOR!

BUCK

YOU MEAN WE LIVE?



PRINCESS

GIVE ME YOUR COMB. QUICK.

GIRL (to MA)

HOW YOU DOING? YOU ALL RIGHT?

GEORGE (to EUSTACE)

NO I AIN'T. LOOK OVER THERE.

EUSTACE

MAN. DONT WASTE MY TIME.

MA

OH, I'LL MAKE IT. THAT'S A NICE DRESS.

PRINCESS (to MAJOR)

BUTTON YOUR SHIRT.

GIRL

THANK YOU.

MAJOR

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, delighted with the respite, ignore him.]

GEORGE

GOT TO BE THERE.

GIRL

I HAD A LOT OF TROUBLE WITH THE PLACKET.

BUCK

I DONT SEE NOTHING.



EUSTACE

WHY IT GOT TO BE THERE?

GEORGE

THAT EXPLAINS IT.

PRINCESS

IS IT ANYBODY OUT THERE?

EUSTACE

DONT NOTHING EXPLAIN THAT. (observing weapons)

MAJOR

I KINDA FELT SOMETHING ALL ALONG.

PRINCESS

YOU FELT SOMETHING AND YOU LET ME COME OUT HERE LOOKING LIKE THIS?

MAJOR

DONT AGITATE YOURSELF. IF IT IS A PICTURE SHOW REMEMBER WHO'S MAKING IT.  
WHATEVER IT IS, IT'S BACKWARDS.

BUCK

YUP. DOOMED. IF COONS IS DOING IT, IT'S DOOMED FOR SURE. WHERE'D  
THAT CROSSPIECE GET TO?

PRINCESS

I KNOW IT'S A CAMERA OUT THERE.

BUCK

HE CANT MAKE A KITE, LET ALONE A MOVIE. YOU SEE THAT PIECE A WOOD, MAJOR?

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.  
SAFETY PIN ANY HELP?

PRINCESS

HE'S NOT MAKING IT. THEY ARE.

MAJOR

THEY WHO?

PRINCESS

THE CAMERA PEOPLE. OVER THERE! OR THERE! IT'S LIKE THOSE NATURE SHOWS.

GEORGE (to GIRL)

GOOD EVENING. MY NAME IS HARVEY. GEORGE HARVEY.

MAJOR

WHAT NATURE SHOWS?

PRINCESS

YOU KNOW. WHEN YOU CAN SEE THE LITTLE BABY BIRDS COMING OUT THE EGGS AND  
FEEDING IN THEIR LITTLE NESTS, BUT THE BIRDS DONT KNOW YOU WATCHING THEM.  
CAUSE THE CAMERA'S HIDDEN.

GIRL

HELLO MR. HARVEY. (to MA) THANKS. THIS SHOULD HOLD IT.

BUCK

IS THAT IT? RIGHT YONDER?

GEORGE

CALL ME GEORGE. AND THIS HERE IS EUSTACE.



GIRL

I KNOW. I'VE BEEN SITTING OUT THERE WATCHING YOU.

PRINCESS

WAIT'LL THE KIDS SEE THIS!

BUCK (to camera)

I'M MAKING A KITE HERE. LEAST WAYS, I WAS. TILL HE ROCKED EVERYTHING.

HOLD ON. JUST A MINUTE. (searches)

MAJOR (to BUCK)

GO SOMEWHERE AND SIT DOWN. QUIT ACTING THE FOOL.

PRINCESS

JUST BE YOURSELF. THAT'S ALL. NATURAL LIKE.

GEORGE

HOW'M I DOING?

GIRL

NOT BAD.

BUCK

I FOUND IT! I FOUND IT!

MAJOR

WHAT YOU CACKLING ABOUT?

BUCK

THE CROSS PIECE. IT WAS LOST SOMEWHERE. CANT 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!



PRINCESS

WHAT'S HE SAYING?

MAJOR

HE SAYS IT AIN'T NO TV. JUST LIKE I SAID.

PRINCESS

AW, WHAT A SHAME. A REAL SHAME. WELL, WHO IS SHE? WHAT SHE WANT?

MAJOR

NO TELLING.

BUCK

THEY DONT THINK REGULAR.

GEORGE

I TOLD YOU MINE. YOU GOING TO TELL ME YOURS?

GIRL

TAMARA. MY MAN"ES TAMARA.

GEORGE

TAMARA? AS IN YESTERDAY?

TAMARA

NO. TAMARA AS IN TODAY.

EUSTACE

LOOK LIKE A JOHNSON. YOUR LAST NAME JOHNSON?

TAMARA

NO. ASHANTI.

EUSTACE

I DON'T KNOW NO ASHANTIS.

MA

OH, THAT'S NICE. TAMARA ASHANTI.



GEORGE

BET YOUR DADDY'S NAME AIN'T NO ASHANTI.

TAMARA

YOU ASKED ME MY NAME. YOU WANT HIS, ASK HIM.

EMMETT

I AM DREAMING THIS. I BROUGHT YOU HERE. YOU, YOU, YOU, YOU, AND YOU TOO. (to TAMARA) I DID NOT BRING YOU HERE. SO GET OUT!

[She does not move.]

BEAT IT! (threatening )

TAMARA (sitting in his chair)

DONT EVEN TRY.

EMMETT

GET OUT OF MY CHAIR!

MA (touching chair)

EVERYTHING'S GOING TO BE ALL RIGHT. TRUST ME.

[TAMARA 'thrones' it; 'absorbs' the chair, while EMMETT bellows in frustration]

TAMARA (sauntering around)

YOU INVENTED THEM. NOT ME. I INVENTED ME

MAJOR

THAT'S TELLING HIM, SISTER. (he pats her familiarly)

TAMARA

I'M NOT YOUR SISTER.

PRINCESS

GET BACK OVER HERE, MAJOR.



EUSTACE

YOU AIN'T HIS SISTER, AND YOU AIN'T YOUR DADDY'S DAUGHTER EITHER.

TAMARA

I KNOW YOU'RE NOT SIDING WITH HIM.

EUSTACE

I'M JUST TRYING TO FIND OUT WHO YOUR PEOPLE ARE. WHOSE SISTER YOU?

TAMARA

HERS. (pointing to MA) I'M HER SISTER.

EMMETT

THAT'S MY MOTHER BITCH!

MA

BABY!

GOERGE

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. DONT. YOU. EVER. CALL. ME. OUT. OF. MY. NAME. AGAIN.

EMMETT

I'LL CALL YOU ANYTHING I WANT.

TAMARA

I DON'T THINK SO.



MAJOR

THIS IS GETTING GOOD.

TAMARA (to MAJOR)

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? SUPPOSED SHE'S THIRSTY AND WANTS A NICE CUP A COFFEE. WOULD YOU LIKE A NICE CUP OF COFFEE, MA'AM?

MA

LOVE ONE.

TAMARA

SEE WHAT I MEAN? ASIDE FROM ME AND HER, THERE'S NOT A PERSON UP HERE WHO CARES WHETHER YOU LIVE, DIE, EAT, GO HUNGRY--

GEORGE

HEY, WAIT NOW.

TAMARA

--GOT CLEAN DRAWERS, SHEET ON YOUR BED, CHANGE IN YOUR POCKET--I BEEN WATCHING YOU FOR A HALF HOUR. YOU MAKE ME SICK.

PRINCESS

AT LAST! GIRL, YOU HAVE NEVER SAID A TRUER WORD.

TAMARA

WHO ASKED YOU?

PRINCESS

I WAS PAYING YOU A COMPLIMENT.

TAMARA

YOU WANT TO PAY SOMEBODY, PAY HER.



PRINCESS

YOU BETTER WATCH HOW YOU SPEAK TO ME.

TAMARA

OH? YOU GO FOR BAD?

PRINCESS

I MANAGE.

TAMARA

I BET YOU DO. WHEN YOU WANT TO. AND I BET YOU KNOW HOW TO MANAGE A PASS  
FROM A CUSTOMER IN A STORE WHEN YOU BEHIND THE COUNTER, DON'T YOU?

PRINCESS

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?

PRINCESS

WHERE I COME FROM MEN WATCH OVER THEIR WOMEN.

TAMARA

WHERE YOU COME FROM, THEY HAVE TO.

PRINCESS

EXACTLY.

TAMARA

EXACTLY.

PRINCESS

BECAUSE SOMEBODY'S ALWAYS LURKING AROUND US.

TAMARA

AND YOU ALL MIGHT WANT TO GET LOOSE?



PRINCESS

YOU KNOW WHAT I MEAN.

TAMARA

ME? HOW WOULD I KNOW? NOBODY EVERY HAD TO WATCH OVER ME.

PRINCESS

WOULD IT HAVE DONE ANY GOOD?

TAMARA

DID IT DO YOU ANY?

PRINCESS

YES!

TAMARA

SWEET BABY. SWEET LITTLE WHITE GIRL BABY.

PRINCESS

I AM A WOMAN.

TAMARA

PROVE IT.

PRINCESS

TO WHO?

TAMARA

ME. THE ONLY ONE QUALIFIED TO JUDGE.

PRINCESS

I DON'T HAVE TO PROVE NOTHING.

TAMARA

BUT DON'T YOU WANT TO?

PRINCESS

MAJOR!



MAJOR

YOU DON'T HAVE TO PROVE NOTHING TO NOBODY. LEAST OF ALL HER.

TAMARA

CALLED HIM AGAIN, DIDN'T YOU?

MAJOR (to PRINCESS)

COME ON. COME ON. THIS AIN'T GOING TO LAST FOREVER.

TAMARA

BET ON THAT?

MAJOR

YOU LOOK HERE. I DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU--PEOPLE GOT IN MIND. BUT I DON'T KNOW A DAMN THING ABOUT NO EMMETT TILL EXCEPT WHAT I READ IN THE PAPERS AND WHAT FOLKS SAID. I SPOKE TO SOME LITTLE NIGGER ABOUT HIS MANNERS THIRTY YEARS AGO, AND THAT'S THE LAST I SAW OF HIM.

BUCK

LAST ANYBODY SAW OF HIM.

GEORGE

MAN, YOU CRAZY.

BUCK

EVER FIND A BODY? NOBODY EVER FOUND A BODY CALLED EMMETT TILL.

EUSTACE

WHAT YOU SAY?

MAJOR

YOU HEARD HIM. CANT HAVE A KILLING WITHOUT A KILLED.

EUSTACE

WHAT WAS THAT THEY DRUG UP OUT THE RIVER?

MAJOR

ASK YOUR FRIEND. LOOK LIKE HE'S THE EXPERT ON CORPSES.



GEORGE

HAULED HIM OFF IN A PICK-UP.

MAJOR

I NEVER HAULED NOTHING.

EUSTACE.

A KID.

MAJOR.

EASY. THAT'S WHAT YOU THINK. YOU THINK MY LIFE IS EASY. CAUSE I'M A WHITE MAN? ALL I GOT TO DO IS CRACK A WHIP? YOU DUMB BASTARD. THIS SKIN DONT PROTECT ME FROM NOTHING, SAVE ME FROM NOTHING. I MADE A LIVING OUT THAT PLACE. ME. MY FAMILY. FOURTEEN, SIXTEEN HOURS A DAY, I WORKED. OH, WELL, NO. I DIDN'T GO TO NONE OF THEM UNI VER SI TIES. OLE MISS. HUH. BUT THAT'S ALL RIGHT. TOOK NIGGERS IN, THOUGH. YOU THINK I COULD JUST WALK UP THERE AND SHOW EM MY SKIN AND GET IN THE DOOR? BUT I MADE A LIVING. AND I DIDN'T SIT BEHIND NO DESK SQUEEZING DIMES OUT OF POOR PEOPLE NEITHER. I MADE WHAT I OWNED. NOBODY LOOKED DOWN ON ME. NOBODY. WASN'T NO CIVIL RIGHTS TO PROTECT ME. NO LAWS TO PROTECT ME.

EUSTACE

YOU GOT OFF, DIDN'T YOU?

MAJOR

DAMN RIGHT, I GOT OFF!

TAMARA

HOW COME?

MAJOR

BECAUSE I WAS INNOCENT--BEFORE THE LAW.

GEORGE

YEAH. BEFORE THE LAW. BEFORE THERE EVER WAS A LAW, YOU WAS INNOCENT.



EUSTACE

AND AFTER IT WAS WAS MORE INNOCENT THAN EVER.

TAMARA

JUST LIKE YOUR BRIDE. (drapes her in a 'bridal veil')

PRINCESS

DON'T TOUCH ME.

MAJOR

LEAVE OFF!

BUCK

LEAVE OFF!

[They guard PRINCESS]

TAMARA

OOO. AND SHE DIDN'T EVEN HAVE TO CALL YOU. HA, HA. I LOVE WHITE WOMEN.  
I JUST LOVE EM. SHOW THEIR NIPPLES AND THEN CALL FOR HELP.

PRINCESS

I NEVER SHOED NOTHING! AND I DIDN'T CALL NOBODY EITHER. I GOT A GUN AND  
SHOT AFTER HIM MYSELF. I AIN'T NEVER SUNK SO LOW THAT I GOT TO TAKE A PASS  
FROM A NIGGER!

[For a beat or two, no one speaks]

TAMARA

YOUR HUSBAND TOUCHED MY BEHIND A WHILE AGO. SHOULD I SHOOT HIM?

PRINCESS

THAT'S YOUR PROBLEM.



TAMARA

NOT TODAY. TODAY IT'S YOUR PROBLEM.

PRINCESS

OH YEAH?

TAMARA

YEAH. CAUSE WE'RE ON STAGE TOGETHER NOW. ON TV!

PRINCESS

HE SAID IT WASN'T NO TV! (desperate, to camera) HE USED TO PICK UP WHOLE ENGINES. WITH HIS TWO ARMS. HOLD IT UP LIKE...LIKE...OH, YOU SHOULD HAVE SEEN HIM BACK THEN. WHOLE ENGINES. AND HIS HAIR SMELLED SO SWEET.

MAJOR(to camera)

SHE WAS A LOOKER. A REAL LOOKER. I GOT HER STRAIGHT FROM HER MOTHER'S ARMS. PURE AS RAINWATER. AND I SAW TO IT SHE STAYED THAT WAY.

BUCK

RAINWATER.

PRINCESS

YOU SAW TO IT?

MAJOR

FAIR WEATHER OR FOUL, SHE STAYED BY MY SIDE.

PRINCESS

YOU? I SAW TO IT.

TAMARA

WHAT DID HE SEE TO PRINCESS. ~~WHAT'S HE PROTECTING. WHAT'S HE SO SCARED OF?~~  
SOMETHING ON THE OUTSIDE? OR SOMETHING ON THE INSIDE?

MA

IT'S HER HEART, HONEY. THAT'S WHAT NEEDS PROTECTING. SHE HAS HEART TROUBLE.



PRINCESS

THERE'S NOTHING WRONG WITH MY HEART!

[Heartbeats are heard. EMMETT appears with an assembled rifle.]

EMMETT

HELLO.

TAMARA

NOW WHAT?

EMMETT

YOU RUINED IT. I HAD IT RIGHT AND YOU TWO MESSED IT UP.

MA

NO, WE DIDN'T. LOOKS DECEIVE.

EMMETT

THEY TOOK MY LIFE. FOR NOTHING!

MAJOR

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?

MAJOR

WOULD HAVE, IF SOMEBODY HADN'T STOPPED HIM.

[EMMETT shoots. Nobody falls or even cringes]

EUSTACE

HE TOOK A DARE. THAT'S ALL. JUST KIDS BRAGGING AND HE TOOK THE DARE. GOES  
IN THE STORE; SEE THAT WOMAN, AND ASKED FOR A DATE. THAT'S ALL IT WAS.



PRINCESS

HE DIDN'T SAY DATE. HE SAID--A NASTY ROTTEN WORD. AND HE TOUCHED ME.

GEORGE

COME ON. DID YOU THINK HE WAS SERIOUS?

PRINCESS

I DONT CARE IF HE WAS SERIOUS OR NOT. I AM SERIOUS. I AM A SERIOUS THING. NOT A JOKE. A GAME. HE CANT 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, DONT I? I AM A SERIOUS HUMAN PERSON.

MAJOR

THAT'S BEAUTIFUL, HONEY.

TAMARA

AND HE'S NOT? HE'S NOT A SERIOUS HUMAN PERSON?

PRINCESS

I DONT KNOW WHAT HE IS.

TAMARA

OH, YES YOU DO.

[EMMETT shoots again]

PRINCESS

IT'S NOT MY FAULT. I NEVER LAID A FINGER ON HIM. I DIDN'T EVEN TELL MAJOR WHEN HE CAME BACK. I THOUGHT, OH WELL, WHY GET HIM RILED (to EUSTACE and GEORGE) SOME NIGGER TOLD ON HIM. NOT ME.

[EMMETT shoots again.]



EUSTACE

YOU LYING LADY.

PRINCESS

ASK HIM. MAJOR? DID I TELL YOU ABOUT IT?

MAJOR

YEAH. YOU TOLD ME. FIRST THING YOU SAID WHEN I STEPPED IN THE DOOR.

PRINCESS

I DID NOT!

MAJOR

EVEN THEN I WAS GONNA LET IT LIE. YOU TOOK A GUN TO HIM AND ALL. I FIGURED THAT WAS ENOUGH, BUT...

GEORGE

BUT WHAT?

MAJOR

WELL, LATER ON A NIGGER TOLD ME THE SAME STORY. COME UP OUT THE FIELDS AND TOLD ME. I HAD TO DO SOMETHING THEN. I COULDN'T LET THE NIGGERS THINK I WOULD LET IT GO.

BUCK

YES SIR-EE. WE GOT A REPUTATION TO THINK OF.

PRINCESS

MY REPUTATION TOO. MY KIDS WERE IN THE STORE. I CAN'T LET THEM GROW UP THINKING A NIGGER COULD TOUCH THEIR MOTHER.

MAJOR

BEEN DEALING WITH THEM ALL MY DAYS. NEVER HAD NO PROBLEMS. NIGGERS LIKE ME AND I LIKE THEM.



BUCK

ALWAYS DID.

GEORGE

YOUR LOAD OF SHIT SO HEAVY I GET TIRED JUST WATCHING YOU CARRY IT.

MAJOR

YOU DONT LIKE THAT, DO YOU? THAT ONE OF YOUR OWN SNITCHED ON HIM.

GEORGE

ONE NEGRO DONT MAKE A RACE.

EUSTACE

DONT PAY HIM NO MIND. HE CANT BREATHE WITHOUT LYING. HE LIKED NIGGERS AND NIGGERS LIKED HIM. HOW YOU KNOW? HOW YOU KNOW THEY LIKED YOU?

BUCK

WE GREW UP WITH NIGGERS.

EUSTACE.

WELL <sup>we</sup> ~~THEY~~ DIDN'T GROW UP WITH YOU. IF <sup>we</sup> ~~THEY~~ GREW UP AT ALL IT WAS IN SPITE OF YOU. YEAH, WE GREW UP ALL RIGHT, BUT NOT WITH YOU. WE GREW UP IN SECRET, UNDERNEATH THINGS, AND BEHIND THINGS. SQUATTING IN A FIELD, FINGERING SOIL, WALKING BEHIND THE MULE, LEANING IN A DOOR. WE GREW UP. QUIET. LOOKING AT YOUR SHOES, AT YOUR CHEST SO YOU COULDN'T SEE OUR EYES, CAUSE IF YOU EVER SAW WHAT YOU WAS LOOKING AT--(gestures to EMMETT). YOU SAW IT ONCE, DIDN'T YOU? A FOURTEEN YEAR OLD KID AND YOU TREMBLED LIKE A BUNNY.

MAJOR

I WAS NEVER COOLER IN MY LIFE.

EUSTACE

SHOT GUN MAKE EVERYBODY COOL. BABY GIRL COOL WITH A SHOT GUN. BUT A GUN AIN'T A MAN.



GEROGE

HOW BOUT THAT? "ARMED WHITE MAN SHOOT'S UNARMED BLACK CHILD". DEEP  
DOWN, MAN, YOU HAVE GOT TO KNOW YOU JIVE.

EUSTACE

AND CANT NO JUDGE CHANGE THAT.

MAJOR

THAT TRIAL WAS FAIR!

~~GEORGE~~

WITH AN ALL-WHITE JURY? HA, HA. YOU KNOW WHAT THAT JURY DID WHILE THE  
TRIAL WAS GOING ON? WHILE IT WAS HEARING EVIDENCE? THE NIGHT BEFORE THEY  
CAME TO A DECISION, THEY WATCHED THE GRAZIANO-ARCHIE MOORE FIGHT. THAT'S  
RIGHT! THE JUDGE LET EM DO IT. COULDN'T READ NO NEWSPAPERS, OR LISTEN TO A  
RADIO, BUT HE LET EM WATCH A BLACK MAN AND A COLORED MAN FIGHT.

EUSTACE

CANT BLAME EM CAN YOU? THEY WAS CURIOUS ABOUT THE OUTCOME OF THE FIGHT.  
THEY ALREADY KNEW THE OUTCOME OF THE TRIAL. KNEW IT WHEN THEY SWORE EM IN.

BUCK

~~GRAZIANO SURE WHIPPED THAT NIGGER.~~

MAJOR

SHOULDNA EVEN HAD A TRIAL.

BUCK

NEVER SHOULD OF GOT TO THAT.

MAJOR

AND IT GOT TO WHERE IT GOT BECAUSE OF HIM. WE WAS JUST GONNA TALK 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--



MAJOR(cont'd)

IT WAS LIKE HE WANTED MORE.

TAMARA

AND YOU HAD MORE, DIDN'T YOU?

MAJOR

I FINISH WHAT I START. HE KNOWED BETTER'N TO DO WHAT HE DID.

TAMARA

SO DID YOU.

MAJOR

I TAUGHT HIM SOMETHING, DIDN'T I? AND WHEN I TAUGHT HIM, I TAUGHT EVERYBODY LIKE HIM. WE DIDN'T HAVE NO PROBLEMS IN MISSISSIPPI TIL THEM NORTHERN NIGGERS STARTED COMING DOWN THERE.

PRINCESS

YOUR AVERAGE BLACK IS POLITE. (pointedly to TAMARA)

MAJOR

IT'S THE OUTSIDE ONES YOU HAVE TO TEACH A LESSON TO.

TAMARA

REFRESH MY MEMORY. WHAT WAS HE SUPPOSED TO LEARN?

MAJOR

TO KEEP HIS HANDS OFF WHITE WOMEN. IF HE WANTS TO RAPE, RAPE HIS OWN WOMEN.

TAMARA

I THOUGHT THAT WAS YOUR JOB.

MAJOR

LISTEN HERE. NO WOMAN GETS RAPED LESS SHE ASKS FOR IT.

[PRINCESS turns toward him]

I MEAN. YOU KNOW WHAT I MEAN.



PRINCESS

MAYBE I BETTER HEAR WHT YOU MEAN.

TAMARA

HE MEANS JUST WHAT HE SAID.

PRINCESS (to MAJOR)

YOU THINK THAT?

MAJOR

WELL, WHY'D HE PICK YOU? THERE WAS OTHER WOMEN. HE PICKED YOU.

GEORGE

YOU KILLED EMMETT BECAUSE SHE ASKED FOR IT?

EUSTACE

I THOUGHT YOU SAID IT WAS BECAUSE A NEGRO TOLD YOU ABOUT IT AND YOU HAD TO DO SOMETHING.

GEORGE

BEFORE YOU SAID HE ASKED FOR IT. THAT HE KEPT TALKING AND TALKING LIKE HE WANTED IT.

EUSTACE

NOW YOU SAYING IT WAS CAUSE SHE ASKED FOR IT.

MAJOR

YOU ALL MIXING ME UP.

TAMARA

THEY KILLED HIM BECAUSE THEY COULD. AND BECAUSE SHE HAD TO BE WATCHED OVER.

PRINCESS

STAY OUT OF THIS.

TAMARA

I CANT DO THAT, SWEETHEART, CAUSE IT' ABOUT ME.



PRINCESS

YOU WASN'T EVEN THERE.

TAMARA

NO, BUT MY ABSENCE WAS. MY ABSENCE WAS DEFINITELY THERE.

EUSTACE (to GEORGE)

WHAT THE DEVIL IS SHE TALKING ABOUT NOW?

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 THAT'S HARD. WHAT HE WANTED WAS EASY.

GEORGE

ONE OF THESE DAYS SOMEBODY GOING TO BLOW YOUR HEAD OFF.

TAMARA

THAT'S EASY TOO

[EMMETT shoots]

BUCK

I WAS ALMOST KILLED ONCE. I SEEN MY WHOLE LIFE RUN RIGHT UP IN FRONT OF ME--JUST LIKE HAWAII FIVE-O THAT BIG WAVE COME RIGHT AT ME. BUT IT WASN'T WATER, KNOW WHAT I MEAN? WAS MY LIFE ROLLING UP, ROLLING UP RIGHT BEFORE MY VERY EYES.

[EMMETT shoots]

GEORGE

MAN PUT THAT GUN DOWN. YOU GIVING ME A HEADACHE.



EUSTACE

I CANT HEAR WHAT I'M THINKING ABOUT.

BUCK

ANYTHING TO EAT AROUND HERE? A SANDWICH MAYBE?

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

PRINCESS

I WASN'T ASKING FOR IT. HE WAS ASKING FOR IT. I WASN'T ASKING FOR NOTHING.

MAJOR

I KNOW THAT.

PRINCESS

ALL THIS TIME, YOU WASN'T SURE, WAS YOU?

MAJOR

I TOOK CARE OF IT, DIDN'T I?

PRINCESS

AND LOOK WHERE IT GOT US.

MAJOR

I DONE THE RIGHT THING. YOU TOLD ME WHAT HE DONE AND I TOOK CARE OF IT.

BUCK

WE TAUGHT HIM. LIKE YOU SAID, MAJOR.

PRINCESS

NIGGERS STOPPED COMING TO THE STORE. COULDN'T SELL EM A CAN OF SNUFF.

THEY MADE SHARECROPPERS OUT OF US. SHARECROPPERS!

BUCK

KICK HIS BLACK ASS ALL THE WAY TO CHICAGO. THAT'S WHAT.



MAJOR

I DONE THE RIGHT THING. EVERYBODY SAID SO. SAID NOT TO WORRY, IT WAS THE RIGHT THING AND I BELIEVE IT TO THIS DAY. BUT, BUT THEN THEY CHANGED UP ON ME. AFTER THE TRIAL THEY STOPPED SPEAKING LIKE, LIKE I WAS SOME SICKNESS THEY MIGHT CATCH. NOBODY CAME BY THE HOUSE. BUSINESS WENT DOWN TO NOTHING. ZERO. AND WHEN I WENT TO RENEW MY LOAN--I BEEN DEALING WITH THEM FOR TWELVE YEARS--THEY TURNED ME DOWN. THEY TURNED ME DOWN. THE VERY SAME PEOPLE WHO CLAPPED ME ON THE BACK FOR DOING WHAT A WHITE MAN IS BOUND TO DO. TURNED ME DOWN.

BUCK

I NEVER GOT THE STRAIGHT OF THAT. YOU EVER GET THE STRAIGHT OF THAT, MAJOR? I MEAN I NEVER UNDERSTOOD IT.

PRINCESS

YOU WENT TO 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?

MAJOR

IT WAS ALL THEM NORTHERN NEWSPAPERS AND PICTURES AND THEM CITY LAWYERS.

BUCK

I HAD MY PICTURE TOOK FOURTEEN TIMES.

MAJOR

THEY DIDN'T WANT NO PART OF US. LIKE WE DIRTIED THE STREET JUST WALKING ON IT.

BUCK

HAD A MOVIE DEAL THAT CLOSE.



TAMARA

MY,MY. MURDER A MAN AND YOU HAVE TO MOVE. THAT'S A MIGHTY BIG IN-  
CONVENIENCE.

MAJOR

YOU DONT UNDERSTAND. MY GRAND DADDY WAS BORN IN THAT TOWN. WE LOST  
EVERYTHING.

TAMARA

EVERYTHING. EVERY SINGLE THING?

MAJOR

WE DID WHAT THE OTHERS TALKED. THEY JUST SAT AROUND CUSSIN NIGGERS. BUT  
WHEN IT CAME TIME TO STOP TALKING AND TAKE ACTION, WE DID IT. THEY DIDN'T  
LIFT A FINGER TO HELP.

TAMARA

YOU LIT THE FIRE AND THEY KEPT WARM?

MAJOR

WE TOOK ALL THE CHANCES.

EUSTACE

YOU ALL BROKE THE HORSE AND THEY SAT SADDLE?

MAJOR

YEAH. LIKE THAT.

GEORGE

YOU SHOVELD MANURE AND THEY MADE HAY?

MAJOR

WE SHOVELED, WE, WE--

TAMARA

THAT'S WHAT TRASH IS FOR.



PRINCESS

WE AIN'T TRASH! (to MAJOR) LEASTWISE I AIN'T. I WAS A CHEERLEADER. MY DADDY HAD A CAR BEFORE ANYBODY. HE LOVED ME, MY DADDY. WE AIN'T TRASH. WE DECNET PEOPLE. ALWAYS WAS. MY MOTHER WORKED HARD ALL HER LIFE.

TAMARA

WOMAN, IF YOU SAY ONE MORE WORKD ABOUT YOUR HARD-WORKING MOTHER, I WILL KNOCK YOU DOWN, SO HELP ME GOD.

PRINCESS

SHE WAS!

TAMARA

HER CHILDREN WALK GROUND? THEN SHUT YOUR DAMN MOUTH!

[MA enters]

MA

WHAT YOU ALL TALKING ABOUT?

ALL

TILL. EMMETT TILL. TILL. EMMETT.

MA

I SUPPOSE YOU KNOW ALL ABOUT HIM?

GEORGE

SURE.

MA

WHAT YOU KNOW?

GEORGE

HE WAS BIG FOR HIS AGE.

MA

WAS?



EUSTACE

NAW. HE WAS SMALL FOR HIS AGE. BOUT FIVE THREE.

PRINCESS

HE WAS HUSKY. LOOKED LIKE A MAN.

MA

ACT LIKE ONE?

MAJOR

NEVER SHED A TEAR. JUST BRAGGED. NEVER EVEN SCREAMED.

EUSTACE

COULD HEAR HIM SCREAMING ALL NIGHT.

GEORGE

USED TO LAUGH ALL THE TIME. ALWAYS LAUGHING.

PRINCESS

HE LEERED AT ME. YOU SHOULD HAVE SEEN HIM.

MA

THAT SO?

TAMARA

HE WAS STUCK ON WHITE GIRLS.

GEORGE

OH HE WAS JUST A EASY GOING KID.

EUSTACE

DIDN'T LIKE NO FLIES THOUGH.

MAJOR

SAID HE HAD LOTS OF WHITE GIRLS.

EUSTACE

HE NEVER HAD NO GIRL.



TAMARA

REAL MACHO. ALWAYS PROFILING.

BUCK

SAID HE WAS MORE MAN THAN WE WERE.

MAJOR

HE WAS SCARED TO DEATH.

GEORGE

HE WASN'T NO COWARD. NOT HIM.

EUSTACE

REAL NICE KID.

PRINCESS

AWFUL MEAN. AWFUL.

MA

NOT MY SON. I KNOW MY SON. MY SON WAS A PRINCE. NONE OF YOU KNOW A THING ABOUT HIM. I DIDN'T ALWAYS UNDERSTAND HIM. SOMETIMES I DIDN'T EVEN HEAR HIM. BUT I ALWAYS KNEW WHEN HE WAS THERE. LIKE ELECTRICITY--PLUGGED IN AND HUMMING.

(EMMETT rises, shedding his EMMETT armor.)

MA

HE SANG, MY SON. A BEAUTIFUL VOICE. AND HE COULD DRAW ANYTHING HE SAW. AND DANCE? BY SLEPT WITH HIS ARM OVER HIS EYES. HAD A SMASHED THUMB. HIS NAIL NEVER GREW STRAIGHT AFTER THAT. ONE TIME A TEACHER SLAPPED HIM IN SCHOOL. I WAS GOING TO TEAR HER UP AND YOU KNOW WHAT HE SAID? HE SAID: SHE DIDN'T MEAN IT. HER HAND DID IT, BUT SHE DIDN'T MEAN IT. HE WAS SIX YEARS OLD. SOMETIMES I DREAM HIM. HE COMES TO ME AND HE SAYS: MA, WHAT'S TO EAT? AND I GET UP AND GO TO THE STOVE. BUT BY THE TIME I GET IT ON THE TABLE, HE'S GONE. GONE. NOW HE ASKED YOU TO MAKE HIM A KITE. SO MAKE IT.

*Partially  
Revealing  
"E"*



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

EUSTACE (to BUCK)

NEVER GET OFF THE GROUND. TOO BIG. WRONG SHAPE.

GEORGE

IT AIN'T ALL THAT BAD.

EUSTACE

NEED A HURRICANE TO FLY THAT THING.

BUCK

THIS IS SOMETHING I KNOW SOMETHING ABOUT. CANT NOBODY TELL ME NOTHING I DONT KNOW ABOUT A KITE.

EUSTACE

WHAT'S ALL THAT STUFF?

BUCK

THAT'S THE LIGHTENING. IT'S GONNA HAVE LIGHTENING BOLTS HERE AND HERE. SILVER. BE PRETTY. SHAZAAM. LIKE CAPTAIN MARVEL. STANDING LIKE THIS WITH A BIG OLD LIGHTENING BOLT.

TAMARA

CAPTAIN MARVEL? A FAT BLONDE IN TIGHTS?

BUCK

YOU THINK YOU KNOW EVERYTHING. YOU DON'T KNOW EVERYTHING.

TAMARA

CAPTAIN MARVEL. THAT EXPLAINS YOU.

MAJOR

OUGHT NOT TO HAVE A WHITE MAN ON IT.



TAMARA

PUT SHANGE ON IT.

BUCK

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 MUHAMMED ALI? YOU COULD PUT HIM.

TAMARA

PLEASE.

EUSTACE.

MARTIN LUTHER KING. THAT'S WHAT HE SHOULD PUT.

GEORGE

THAT'S STUPID. YOU CANT PUT DR. KING ON A KITE. IT'S DISRESPECTFUL.

EUSTACE

YOU RECKSON HE RUN ACROSS HIM--UP THERE?

TAMARA

DR. KING WOULDN'T BE NOWHERE NEAR HIM.

EUSTACE

YOU DON'T KNOW THAT. DR. KING LOVED PEOPLE. ALL KINDS OF PEOPLE. EVEN PEOPLE  
LIKE YOU.



[As the black people take over the kite building, and the atmosphere becomes 'full' of blacks, MAJOR chafes.]

MAJOR

I AIN'T GOT TO STAND AROUND HERE. I AIN'T GOT TO STAND AROUND HERE.

PRINCESS

WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?

MAJOR

IF SHE CAN GET IN, WE CAN GET OUT, RIGHT? WE CAN GO. WE AIN'T GOT TO STAND AROUND HERE. LET'S GO! BUCK!

BUCK

LEMME FINISH THIS. IT'S JUST ABOUT--

MAJOR

YOU DEFECT! COME ON. PRINCESS. PRINCESS!

PRINCESS

I HEARD YOU.

MAJOR

LET'S GO!

PRINCESS

GO WHERE?

MAJOR

HOME. WHERE WE WAS BEFORE--ALL THIS--

PRINCESS

AND DO WHAT?

MAJOR

WHAT'S WRONG WITH YOU? AIN'T NO CAMERA OUT THERE. AIN'T NOTHING OUT THERE. NOTHING. WE CAN GO HOME ANYTIME WE WANT TO.



PRINCESS

IT'LL BE THERE. WAITING. WHENEVER WE WANT IT.

MAJOR

WHAT'S THAT SUPPOSED TO MEAN?

PRINCESS

THE MOBILE HOME AIN'T MOBILE, MAJOR. IT AIN'T GOING NOWHERE.

MAJOR

WHAT ABOUT THE KIDS? YOU DON'T CARE NOTHING ABOUT THE KIDS?

PRINCESS

THE KIDS ARE GROWN, MAJOR. OUR KIDS--GREW UP.

[MAJOR tries to leave; is stopped by the 'nothing' he imagines]

EMMETT

I NEVER SAID SILVER.

BUCK

SILVER BE PRETTY.

EMMETT

JUST A KITE. A PLAIN KITE.

TAMARA

THEN WHAT?

EMMETT

*Go to the movies.*  
~~WE MAKE A MOVIE.~~

TAMARA

YOU DON'T WANT MUCH DO YOU. JUST 'MAKE ME A KITE' AND THEN YOU KILL EVERYBODY.

THAT YOUR IDEA OF POWER? MALE POWER? YOU COULDN'T EVEN LEAVE HOME, COULDN'T

EVEN SPEND A SUMMER IN THE COUNTRY WITHOUT TRYING TO IMPRESS SOMEBODY ABOUT

YOUR POWER. OVER A WOMAN. AND WHAT KIND OF WOMAN? YOU DIDN'T HAVE A PICTURE



OF A LITTLE COLORED GIRL IN YOUR WALLET. NOBODY DARED YOU TO MAKE A PASS AT A LITTLE COLORED GIRL DID THEY? BECAUSE YOU'D LOSE THE DARE. BECAUSE SHE WOULD BREAK YOUR ARM IF YOU DID AND WOULDN'T HAVE TO CALL NOBODY TO HELP HER DO IT. OR BECAUSE SHE'D TAKE YOU UP ON IT AND SMILE AT YOU, BE SWEET AND LOVE YOU HARD AND LONG AND MAYBE YOU'D LOVE HER BACK WHICH WOULDN'T DO BECAUSE WHERE WOULD THE POWER BE THEN? IF YOU LOVE HER BACK THAT'D BE WEAK. ONLY TWO POSSIBILITIES WITH A LITTLE BLACK GIRL. SHE BREAKS YOUR ARM--YOU LOSE. SHE LOVES YOU--YOU LOSE.

EMMETT

YOU WALKED UP HERE. YOU WERE NOT INVITED.

TAMARA

I KNOW, BUT I AM HERE.

EMMETT

I NEVER DREAMED YOU.

TAMARA

WHY NOT? [EMMETT turns away] WHY NOT?

EMMETT

I DONT 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?



TAMARA (cont'd.)

YOU REMIND ME OF MY BROTHERS. THEY SHOW UP ONLY WHEN THEY WANT FIVE DOLLARS. EVEN THEN THEY STICK THIER FINGERS IN THEIR EARS. I DONT CARE. I KEEP RIGHT ON, BECAUSE IF IT 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-SHCOOL 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 BROTHERS. NOT YET. IT'S NOT MY GIRL FRIENDS'S BROTHER. OR MY BOY FRIEND'S BROTHER. OR EVEN MY BOY FRIEND. NOT YET. BUT IT GO AH! AH! AH! I WANT TO BREATHE NORMAL. THERE IS THIS LITTLE CUP INSIDE ME. LIKE A TEA CUP. LIKE THE CUP YOU DRINK THE REALLY BLACK OOLONG OUT OF. THIS WITH A LITTLE HANDLE YOU CANT GET YOUR FOREFINGER THROUGH SO YOU HAVE TO HOLD IT LIKE THIS. IT CLOCKS 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 AND YOU'LL NEVER HEAR THE CLICK. AH! AH! SO I TALK. I TALK. SO MY BREATH WILL GO IN AND OUT, IN AND OUT. OTHERWISE I'D BE HOLDING ALL THE AIR IN THE WORLD, RIGHT HERE. WHY YOU HAVE TO DARE EVERYBODY? TEST EVERYBODY? DONT YOU KNOW THEY'RE JUST WAITING FOR YOU TO MAKE A MISTAKE, STEP OUT OF LINE. DRAW ON THE WALL? LAUGH TOO LOUD? TURN THE VOLUME UP ON YOUR RADIO? ANYTHING. ANY LITTLE MISTAKE--

EMMETT

I DIDN'T DIE BECAUSE I MADE A MISTAKE. I DIED BECAUSE I'M BLACK.

TAMARA

NOTHING'S GOING TO CHANGE THAT. YOU'LL ALWAYS BE BLACK.



EMMETT

IT'S NOT SUPPOSED TO CHANGE. THEY ARE.

TAMARA

THEY WON'T.

EMMETT

I CANT. WHAT YOU WANT IS WORSE. A PAPER BOY. A LITTLE BLACK PAPER BOY. GET A PENCIL. SOLVE ALL YOUR PROBLEMS.

TAMARA

I JUST WANT IT TO STOP. BUT IT NEVER DOES. THAT'S WHY I--YOU WANT ME TO BE QUIET? SHUTUP? BLOW MY CUP TO SMITHEREENS? DONT TELL ME YOU DONT KNOW WHAT I MEAN. WHEN THEY HAD YOU DOWN. WHEN THEY KEPT ON HITTING YOU AND HITTING YOU. DIDN'T YOU TALK? DIDN'T YOU JUST KEEP ON TALKING? TALKING, TALKING. SO YOU COULD HEAR YOURSELF AND KEEP THE BREATH GOING IN AND OUT, IN AND OUT. WASN'T THAT IT?

EMMETT

WHEN THE WORLD IS LEAVING YOU--YOU HAVE TO MAKE A SOUND.

TAMARA

YES. THAT'S WHAT I MEAN. ANY SOUND. EVEN IF IT'S NOISE.

EMMETT

NO. NOT NOISE. TREES MAKE NOISE WHEN YOU CHOP THEM DOWN. CHICKENS HOLLER WHEN YOU BREAK THEIR NECKS. NO. NOT NOISE. YOU HAVE TO MAKE A HUMAN SOUND. WORDS. SENTENCES. THEY HAVE TO KNOW THAT WHAT'S DYING IS--HUMAN.

TAMARA

SO YOU KEPT TALKING. EVEN WHEN THEY---

EMMETT

I NEVER SAID A THING. NOT A THING. NEVER HAD THE CHANCE.



TAMARA

BUT THEY SAID--

EMMETT

WHAT DO THEY KNOW? THEY KILLED ME AND THEY DONT 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  
CANT BREATHE, YOU SAY, BECAUSE OF A NEWSPAPER HEADLINE. SOME PICTURE IN  
THE NEWSPAPER? I'M NOT A HEADLINE. I'M A MAN.

TAMARA

I DONT KNOW WHAT THAT MEANS.

EMMETT

I'M A MAN.

TAMARA

I DONT KNOW WHAT THAT MEANS.

EMMETT

I'M A MAN.

TAMARA

I DONT KNOW WHAT THAT MEANS. I DONT KNOW WHAT THAT MEANS.

EMMETT

I'M A MAN.

TAMARA

YOU MEAN YOU HAVE THE POWER AND I DONT?

EMMETT

NO. NO. I DONT HAVE THE POWER. I AM THE POWER. I CANT HELP IT. I AM POWER!

I RUN! I POP! I TWIST! I HIT! I BITE! I ROARRR!

(screams)

*Not identified  
yet -  
doesn't say  
his name.*



TAMARA

STOP!

EMMETT

YOU CANT BREATHE? YOUR CUP WONT CLICK? I KNOW ALL ABOUT BREATH. I BREATHE  
MUD. I LET IT FILL ME. FILL ME.

MA (holding or restraining him)

NO MORE. BABY, NO MORE. IT WAS JUST A KITE. I'M NOT MAD AT YOU FOR DYING.  
AND I'M NOT MAD AT ME FOR NOT GIVING YOU THE DOLLAR. I USED TO BE. I USED TO  
THINK YOU'D BE ALIVE IF I LET YOU HAVE THE DOLLAR. BUT NO MORE. NO MORE.  
NOBODY SHOULD DIE 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 ON MILK OR MEAT OR SOMETHING.

[OTHERS begin to move toward MA and EMMETT]

THERE IS A PLAYGROUND IN OUR NEIGHBORHOOD IN CHICAGO. NOT A REAL ONE. NOTHING  
THE CITY MADE. JUST A LOT THE KIDS USE. THEY USED TO DRAG STUFF IN THERE TO  
PLAY WITH. MUST HAVE BEEN TWO OR THREE KIDS GOT LOCKED UP IN REFRIGERATORS THERE.  
THAT'S THE KIND OF PLAYGOURND IN WAS. BUT IT WAS WIDE OPEN WITH GRASS IN  
PLACES, AND WIND. THEY ALL PLAYED THERE. FLEW KITES AND THINGS.

PRINCESS

YOU TALKING ABOUT EMMETT TILL?



MA

YOU OUGHT TO BE SHAMED OF YOURSELF. YOU DONT EVEN REMEMBER WHAT EMMETT TILL LOOKED LIKE. NONE OF YOU. HE AIN'T EMMETT TILL. HE'S MY SON. MY SON.

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. IA ASKED THEM: DID HE CALL? DID HE CALL? THAT WAS 1957. HE AIN'T CALLED YET. SHOT HIM AND WENT ON ABOUT HIS BUSINESS. SOME WOMEN WORRY ABOUT WHAT KIND OF JOB THEIR BOY IS GONNA HAVE. IF HE FINISH HIGH SCHOOL, WHO HE MIGHT MARRY. ALL THOSE KINDS OF THINGS. WOMEN LIKE ME--BLACK WOMEN LIKE ME, WE JUST WONDER WILL HE MAKE IT HOME? WILL HE GET THROUGH THE DAY? WHEN THE POLICE CAME BY I THOUGHT WHAT NICE BOYS. THEY SAT DOWN AND TALKED REAL NICE TO ME. I WONDERED IF THIER MAMA WONDERS IF THEY'D COME HOME AT THE END OF THE DAY TOO. BUT THEN, THEY HAVE THE GUNS. AT THE HEARING ALL ANYBODY WANTED TO KNOW WAS WHETHER THE STOREKEEPER HAD A LICENSE FOR HIS GUN.

GEORGE

DID HE?

MA

OH YES. OH YES. HE HAD A LICENSE FOR EVERYTHING. THEY ALWAYS DO. IF YOU GOT A LICENSE WHEN A CHILD TAKES A KITE YOU CAN TAKE HIS LIFE.

MAJOR

YOU MEAN TO TELL ME THAT AIN'T THE BOY WE TAUGHT A LESSON TO? I KNEW IT!

MA

YOU DIDN'T KNOW IT. YOU DONT EVEN KNOW THE FACE YOU SMASHED.

EUSTACE

SO WHAT YOU DO IT FOR? WHAT'D YOU SAY YOU WAS EMMETT FOR?



EMMETT

EVERYBODY KNEW ABOUT HIM, REMEMBERED HIM. THEY WROTE HIM UP AND PUT HIS PICTURE IN MAGAZINES. FOR A WHILE HE WAS SOMEBODY. HE WAS YOUNG--LIKE ME. AND HE, AND HE-- WHEN THAT BULLET HIT ME I NEVER SAID A THING. NOT A THING. I DIDN'T HAVE TIME. I WANTED TO SAY SOMETHING. MAKE A SOUND. LIKE EMMETT. LOUD. LOUD!

MA

ELECTRICITY HUMS, BABY, HUMS. BUT GOOD GOD, DONT CROSS IT!

MAJOR

WELL, LOOK HERE, IF YOU AIN'T TILL. WELL WE AIN'T GOT NO QUARREL, DO WE? STEADLING A KITE. SHOTT. I MEAN. WELL, WELL, ~~WE'RE ACTORS.~~ JUST ACTORS. YOU KNOW?

[begins to wipe his makeup off]

BUCK

KITE'S FINISHED. IT'S RIGHT HERE. IF YOU WANT IT, THAT IS.

PRINCESS

I'M SORRY. I'M REAL SORRY. →

MAJOR

WHEN YOU AH--GO BACK, CAN YOU GET ANY SLEEP? I MEAN, CAN YOU REST NOW?

EMMETT

CAN YOU?

[MAJOR, PRINCESS , and BUCK disappear]

Buck →  
EUSTACE

I THOUGHT THERE WAS SOMETHING FUNNY ABOUT YOU. TILL WOULDN'T A DONE THIS. HE WAS A NICE BOY.



well,  
Things happen, and, ~~none of us,~~  
~~nobody knows why or even how~~  
nothing turns out like it's  
supposed to ~~I mean,~~

Buck! ~~Pr---~~



GEORGE

SORRY, KID. I MEAN WE JUST ACTORS, LIKE THE MAN SAID. I WAS IN "CABIN IN THE SKY." MAYBE YOU REMEMBER ME? WELL, NICE MEETING YOU, MA'AM. AND YOU MISS. TAKE CARE LITTLE BROTHER.

[EUSTACE and GEORGE turn to go]

EMMETT

SAY. YOU TRIED, DIDN'T YOU? TO SAVE HIM I MEAN?

[EUSTACE and GEORGE exchange glances]

EUSTACE

WE DID ALL WE COULD.

[Turns away, pauses and turns back]

YOU GOT TO REMEMBER. WE WAS BLACK BOYS.

GEORGE

(Holding a mask before his face) IN MISSISSIPPI. IN 1955.

[They toss the masks away and exit]

EMMETT

NOTHING IS DEADDER THAN A THIRTY-YEAR OLD HEADLINE. EXCEPT ME. I AM DEADDER THAN THAT. DEADDER THAN THAT.

TAMARA

AW, NO. NO.



EMMETT

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, YOU HUG YOUR DEATH, MAKE IT INTO SOMETHING. HOW ELSE COULD I KNOW I LIVED?

MA

A KITE CAN FLY ALL RIGHT IF YOU HOLD ON TO THE STRINGS (looks at her hands). BUT IF YOU LET GO, WHOOSH, THAT'S WHEN IT BECOMES WHAT IT REALLY WANTS TO BE.  
[She exits]

EMMETT

WHAT'S THAT?

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

EMMETT

MOVIE'S OVER. YOU DON'T HAVE TO STAY.

TAMARA

I KNOW. CAN I ASK YOU SOMETHING? IS THIS WHAT IT'S LIKE? I MEAN IS THIS WHAT THE DEAD DO. RE-LIVE THEIR DYING?

EMMETT

IT'S WHAT THE YOUNG DEAD DO. THE YOUNG MURDERED DEAD.

TAMARA

BUT NONE OF IT HELPED. IT DIDN'T DO ANY GOOD. NOBODY CHANGED. EVERYTHING'S THE SAME.

EMMETT

NO. IT'S NOT. IT'S NOT THE SAME. I'M MORE REAL, MORE ALIVE THAN THEY ARE. WHO KNOWS? MAYBE THEY ARE WORTH MY ATTENTION. BUT ONE THING FOR SURE: THEY



EMMETT (cont'd)

ARE NOT WORTH MY IMAGINATION.

TAMARA

WILL YOU KEEP ON--DREAMING EMMETT? DO YOU HAVE TO?

EMMETT

NOT IF YOU DO. IF YOU REMEMBER, IF ANYBODY DOES. I WON'T HAVE TO. I CAN  
GET ON!

TAMARA

ON?

EMMETT

YEAH. ON. DO YOU KNOW THAT THE GRASS IN THE SEA IS ALWAYS GREEN AND MOVING?  
AND THERE'S DARK VELVET ALLEYS IN BETWEEN SNOW CAPS? YOU CAN LOOK AT THE SUN  
AS AN EQUAL AND THEN YOU FEEL SORRY FOR IT BECAUSE IT ONLY HAS ONE WORLD. JUST  
ONE! TOMATOES SCREAM WHEN YOU CUT THEM, AND THERE NEVER WAS A BEGINNING. THERE  
NEVER WAS A NOTHING. AND THERE NEVER WILL BE A NOTHING. IT'S NOT EMPTY! IT'S  
NOT! IT'S, IT'S--LOADED! YOU DREAM IT. I HAVE TO GET OUT OF HERE. I HAVE  
TO GO!

[He disappears. The kite rises and gleams.]

THE END



MAJOR

We took all the chances.

EUSTACE

You all broke the horse and they sat saddle?

MAJOR

Yeah. Like that.

GEORGE

You shoveled manure and they made hay?

MAJOR

We shoveled, we, we--

TAMARA

That's what trash is for.

PRINCESS

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

TAMARA

Woman, if you say one more word about your hard-working mother...

PRINCESS

She was!

TAMARA

Her children walk ground? Then shut your damn mouth!

MA

What you all talking about?

ALL

(Taken aback; they exchange looks.) Till. Emmett Till. Till. Emmett.

MA

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

GEORGE

Sure.



What you know?

MA

He was big for his age.

GEORGE

Was?

MA

Now. He was small for his age. 'Bout five three.

EUSTACE

He was husky. Looked like a man.

PRINCESS

Act like one?

MA

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

MAJOR

Used to laugh all the time. Always laughing.

GEORGE

Could hear him screaming all night.

EUSTACE

He leered at me. You should have seen him.

PRINCESS

That so?

MA

He was stuck on white girls.

TAMARA

Oh, he was just a sweet, easy going kid.

GEORGE

Didn't like no flies, though.

EUSTACE



MAJOR

Said he had lots of white girls.

EUSTACE

He never had no girl.

TAMARA

Real macho. Always profiling.

BUCK

Said he was more man than we was.

MAJOR

He was scared to death.

GEORGE

He was no coward. Not him.

EUSTACE

Real nice kid.

PRINCESS

Awful mean.

MA

Not my son. I know my son. My son was a prince. None of you know a thing about him. I didn't always understand him. Sometimes I didn't even hear him. But I always knew when he was there. Like electricity--plugged in and humming. [EMMETT rises. Shedding his "EMMETT" armor.] He sang, my son. A beautiful voice. And he could draw anything he saw. And dance? He slept with his arm over his eyes. Had a smashed thumb. His nail never grew straight after that. One time a teacher slapped him in school. I was going to tear her up and you know what he said? He said "She didn't mean it. Her hand did it, but she didn't mean it." He was six years old. [Beat.] Sometimes I dream him. He comes to me and he says "Ma, what's to eat?" And I get up and go to the stove. But by the time I get it on the table, he's gone. Gone. Now. He asked you to make him a kite. So make it.

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

EUSTACE

get off the ground. Too big. Wrong shape.



GEORGE

It ain't all that bad.

EUSTACE

Need a hurricane to fly that thing.

BUCK

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

EUSTACE

What's all that stuff?

BUCK

That's the lightening. It's gonna have lightening bolts here and here. Silver. Be pretty. Shazam. Like Captain Marvel. Standing like this with a big old lightening bolt.

TAMARA

Captain Marvel? A fat blonde in tights?

BUCK

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

TAMARA

Captain Marvel. That explains you.

MAJOR

Ought not to have a white man on it.

TAMARA

Put Shange on it.

BUCK

This ain't your kite.

TAMARA

Or Jessie Jackson. Shazam. Shoot.

GEORGE

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

TAMARA



EUSTACE

What about Muhammed Ali? You could put him.

TAMARA

Please.

EUSTACE

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

GEORGE

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

EUSTACE

You reckon he run across him--up there?

TAMARA

Dr. King wouldn't be nowhere near him.

EUSTACE

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

[As the black people take over the kite building, and the atmosphere becomces "full" of blacks, MAJOR chafes.]

MAJOR

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

PRINCESS

What are you talking about?

MAJOR

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

BUCK

Lemme finish this. I'm just about--

MAJOR

You defect! Come on. Princess. Princess!

PRINCESS

MAJOR



PRINCESS

Go where?

MAJOR

Home. Where we was before--all this--...

PRINCESS

And do what?

MAJOR

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

PRINCESS

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

MAJOR

What's that mean?

PRINCESS

The mobile home ain't mobile, MAJOR It ain't going nowhere.

MAJOR

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

PRINCESS

The kids are grown, Major. Our kids--grew up.

[MAJOR tries to leave; is stopped by the "nothing" he imagines. EMMETT watches MAJOR leave without interest. His manner is different.]

EMMETT

I never said silver.

BUCK

Silver be pretty.

EMMETT

Just a kite. A plain kite.

TAMARA

...uch, do you? Just "make me a kite" and then you kill  
... of power? Male power? You couldn't even let  
... mer in the country without trying to



TAMARA [Cont'd.]

impress somebody about your power. Over a woman. And what kind of woman? You didn't have a picture of a little colored girl your wallet. Nobody dared you to make a pass at a little colored girl did they? Because you'd lose the dare. Because she'd break your arm if you did and wouldn't have to call nobody to help her do it. Or because she'd take you up on it and smile at you, be sweet and love you hard and long and maybe you'd love her back which wouldn't do because where would the power be then? If you love her back that'd be weak. Only two possibilities with a little black girl. She breaks your arm--you lose. She loves you--you lose.

EMMETT

You walked up here. You were not invited.

TAMARA

I know, but I am here.

EMMETT

I never dreamed you.

TAMARA

Why not? [EMMETT turns away.] Why not?

EMMETT

I don't know.

TAMARA

Yes you do.

EMMETT

Yes. I do. Your mouth.

TAMARA

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



TAMARA [cont'd.]

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 and you'll never hear the click. Ah! Ah! So I talk. I talk. So my breath will go in and out, in and out. Otherwise I'd be holding all the air in the world, right here. Why you have to dare everybody? Test everybody? Don't you know they're just waiting for you to make a mistake, step out of line. Draw on the wall? Laugh too loud? Turn the volume up on your radio? Anything. Any little mistake--

EMMETT

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

TAMARA

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

EMMETT

It's not supposed to change. They are.

TAMARA

They won't.

EMMETT

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

✓

I'm a man.

EMMETT

TAMARA

I don't know what that means.

EMMETT

I'm a man.

TAMARA

I don't know what that means.

EMMETT

not needed  
he hit it  
just right



TAMARA

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

EMMETT

I'm a man.

TAMARA

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

EMMETT

No. No. I don't have <sup>the</sup> power. I am the power. I can't help it. I am power!  
I run! I pop! I twist! I hit! I bite! I roarrrr!

TAMARA

Stop.✓

TAMARA

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

EMMETT

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

TAMARA

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

EMMETT

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

TAMARA

So you kept talking. Even when they--

EMMETT

[He moves toward the stage center, getting ready to leave.] I never said a thing.  
[He looks back over his shoulder and 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 listened, I watched. Them. You. Nothing is deader than a thirty-year-old headline. Except me. I am deader than that. Deader than that. A human sound. A picture, maybe. A piece of music. A movie. That was all. Something to go with the headline. But if your killers don't remember you, and your friends don't either, I have to remember my death. How else could I know I lived. I have to go down in the water. Watch my eye hang out of my socket. Feel my teeth in my nose. You can't breathe? Your cup won't click? I know all about breath. I breathe mud. I let it fill me. Fill me. My eye hurts. I can't swallow. (reaching) I can't find my eyes.

Keep on  
going  
down in  
that water

MA

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

PRINCESS

What about Emmett Till?

MA

If you don't even remember what



MA [cont'd.]

Emmett Till looked like. None of you. He ain't Emmett Till. He's my son. My son. A grown man. A fully-grown man with children of his own. He didn't even call the hospital--just the police. My son died on the curb. Never made it to the emergency room. I asked them: Did he call? Did he call? that was 1957. He ain't called yet. Shot him and went on about his business. Some women worry about what kind of job their boy is gonna have. If he finish high school, who he might marry. All those kinds of things. Women like me--Black women like me, we just wonder will he make it home? Will he get through the day? When the police came by I thought what nice boys. They sat down and talked real nice to me. I wondered if their mama wonders if they'd come home at the end of the day too. But then, they have the guns. At the hearing all anybody wanted to know was whether the storekeeper had a license for his gun.

GEORGE

Did he?

MA

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

MAJOR

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

MA

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

EUSTACE

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

EMMETT

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

MA

Good God, don't cross it!



Well, who are you. If you  
aint Emmett who are you?

[Masks above]

E: ~~What do you care?~~ The man who.  
If I tell you  
what will  
you know?



TAMARA

I know. Can I ask you something? Is this what it's like? I mean 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. I'm more real, more alive than they are. Who knows? Maybe they are worth my attention. But one thing for sure: they aren't worth my imagination.

TAMARA

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

EMMETT

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

TAMARA

On?

EMMETT

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

[He disappears. The kite rises and gleams.]

THE END