

Culture Shock – The Death of Emmett ‘Bobo’ Till
By Cleveland O. McLeish

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SETTING

There is just one setting that will represent three different places.

There’s a door SL that leads backstage.

A table is set at SR closer to the audience with a checker board on top.

For scene changes, just add store name, or Lot number on or above the door SL.

LIST OF CHARACTERS

MAMIE TILL-BRADLEY – Female, Emmett’s mother

EMMETT ‘BOBO’ TILL – Male, 14 years old, stocky, muscular, 160 lbs, five feet four inches tall.

CURTIS – Male, Emmett’s cousin

ROY BRYANT – Male, 24 years old, Husband to Carolyn.

CAROLYN BRYANT – Female, 21 years old, 5 ft tall, 103 lbs. Irish girl with Black hair, black eyes.

JW MILAN – Male, 36 years old, 235 lbs...wears khaki trousers, red sports shirt, cap and dark glasses.

ELIZABETH – Female, Preacher’s Wife

PREACHER – Male, Relative to Emmett

LUCIEN - Male

GREG - Male

JOHN - Male

NARATOR - Female

JUANITA – Female, Carolyn’s Sister-In-Law

EXTRAS

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THE SCRIPT

ACT 1 WEDNESDAY

Lights up.

Two African American boys are seated at the checker table playing checkers in Silence.

Roy exits the store carrying a suitcase.

He stops to look at the boys with a slight disgust.

Carolyn comes out behind him. Roy turns to face her.

ROY: Your sister-in-law Juanita should be here soon.

CAROLYN: I know.

ROY: I’ll be sure to bring something back for you and the boys from Texas.

CAROLYN: I know that too.

ROY: Where are them boys by the way?

CAROLYN: In the back!

ROY: Make sure they’re in bed by 7:00 and remember to lock the doors before you leave and turn off all the lights ‘ccept that one on the front porch.

CAROLYN: Ok.

Pause.

ROY: Carol, look...I’m sorry ‘bout what I said back there. It’s just that...

Roy looks at the boys, he speaks a little softer.

ROY: I don’t like having colored people hanging around out here. It makes me nervous.

CAROLYN: Roy, just go. I can take care of myself.

ROY: I wish you wouldn’t be so naïve.

CAROLYN: Stop calling me naïve!

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ROY: Sorry. But one a them days those colored people is gonna get outta line.

CAROLYN: Just go, Roy...don’t let us have another argument.

Roy considers.

He nods and kisses her on her cheek. He picks up his suitcase and exits.

*Carolyn watches him leave. She then turns and goes back into the store leaving
The door half open.*

NARATOR: I’ve long considered the whole concept of death. I have even concluded that no one can die before their appointed time and in most cases, as you carefully examine all the events leading up to that time...it seems like pieces of a puzzle being placed in its exact position. (*slight pause*) Yet, in the case of Emmett ‘Bobo’ Till, let every man be his own judge.

GREG: Mr. Bryant don’t like us being around.

LUCIEN: Yeah, but he ain’t got much choice in the matter. Without us colored folks his shop wouldn’t have customers.

GREG: But he always talking mean and I hear he sometimes beat up on some of the other folks when they don’t do what he says.

LUCIEN: He’s just ignorant. But he knows he needs us just as much as we need his service.

GREG: Yeah.

LUCIEN: As long as we stick to just business, we a’right.

Emmett and his cousin, Curtis enters.

*They stop a little way from the checker table where Lucien and Greg are deep in
The game.*

CURTIS: Bobo, remember mama’s warning.

EMMETT: I remember...but I ain’t let nobody take me for a liar.

CURTIS: I really think we should just leave.

EMMETT: Not yet.

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Emmett takes a photograph from his pocket and stares at it.

EMMETT: A couple more minutes, cous....that’s all I’m asking.

CURTIS: Ohhh...

EMMETT: Will you try to relax.

CURTIS: Oh, I’m trying....

They join those at the checker table.

EMMETT: Hey...

LUCIEN: Hey...

EMMETT: Whose winning?

LUCIEN: Who do’ya think?

EMMETT: Right, right! Maybe you need to teach Greg how to play.

LUCIEN: So he can start winning. I ain’t think so. Whatcha doing here anyways?

GREG: Yeah, you come to spread more lies.

LUCIEN (*speaks without looking up from the table*): What say you, Chicago boy.

EMMETT: I brought proof that I ain’t lying.

LUCIEN (*looks up this time*): Yeah, go ahead...make your case.

Emmett hands them the pictures.

LUCIEN: Whoa!

GREG: You ain’t kidding.

EMMETT (*smiles triumphantly*): Told ya. (*folds his arm*)

LUCIEN: But...you got to do better than that, Bo.

Just then Carolyn Bryant steps from the store with a broom in hand.

She starts sweeping the curb.

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EMMETT (*grabs his pictures*): Man you guys are hardheaded.

CURTIS: What more proof do ya need?

LUCIEN: Them just pictures man. You expect us to swallow your story that you been with white girls because you took a picture standing beside one of ‘em.

EMMETT: Its proof, ain’t it?

Lucien glances over at Carolyn.

When he looks back, Greg nods at him with a sheepish smile.

LUCIEN: We know how you can prove yourself beyond any shadow of a doubt.

EMMETT: Yeah, how. Tell me and I’ll do it.

LUCIEN: You talking mighty big, Bo...there’s a pretty little white woman over there. Since you know how to handle white girls, let’s see you get a date with her.

CURTIS: Ohhh...Bobo, bad idea.

LUCIEN: You ain’t chicken, are you Bo?

EMMETT: I ain’t chicken.

LUCIEN: Go ahead.

Emmett walks boldly over to Carolyn.

CURTIS: Ohhh...

GREG: Stop winning, you sissy!

Lucien and Greg chuckles.

Curtis is almost wetting his pants.

EMMETT: Halo, ma’am.

Carolyn stops sweeping.

CAROLYN: May I help you with something.

EMMETT: Apart from two cents worth o’ bubble gum, how’s about a date, baby.