

THE WHISTLE "TRUTH AND REDEMPTION"

Written by

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Based on true events

EMMETT
I'm not s-scared.

EXT. THE WRIGHT'S HOUSE - EVENING

The dwelling is a meager, a small three bedroom shot-gun house. Meanwhile, Maurice and company speed up in Mose's car and slam on the brakes to park.

INT. LIVING ROOM

Elizabeth is sitting in her rocking chair and stitching up a hole in Mose's shirt. The SOUND OF THE FRONT DOOR OPENING AND CLOSING is heard as Emmett and crew return. Emmett darts straight into the room, with his cousins close behind.

EMMETT
Aunt Liz, c-can I have my t-train ticket back? I wanna g-go home.

ELIZABETH
What's wrong, Bo? Tired of Mississippi already? Or just homesick?

SIMEON
Bobo whistled at a white woman, Mama. Miss Bryant. At the sto'.

ELIZABETH
You know better than that, Bo. But you don't have to go. Just be good and mind yo business, child. Stay out from up there. It'll be all right. Yall boys just mind yo business and be good.

EMMETT
O--o-- okay, Aunt Liz, b--b-- but please don't tell uncle M--M-- Mose. Please don't t--t-- tell him.

ELIZABETH
Just be good like I tell you and we won't hear no more of this foolishness.

Emmett is relieved.

BACK TO PRESENT

INT. SOUL FOOD RESTAURANT

Clenora, Mr. Mooty, and Emmett's cousins have finished eating. WAITRESS takes their plates. Wheeler still has the floor.

WHEELER

Emmett was definitely scared, alright. He begged my Grandma Lizzy a couple more times, over the next few days, for his ticket home. She wouldn't budge.

Wheeler takes a sip of his water before continuing

WHEELER

So time passed, from Wednesday to Saturday. We almost forgot about everything... Then 2 a.m. Sunday morning, August 28, 1955, some people forced their way in--

FLASHBACK TO:

EXT THE WRIGHTS' HOUSE - LATE NIGHT (1955)

A pair of tall, dark, male figures emerge from the shadows and walk up to the front door. The two take turns banging on it, until they hear the SOUND of the door unlocking. The handle turns, the door cracks open, and Mose peeks out.

One of the mystery men has a flashlight and rudely turns it on in Mose's face, making his pupils dilate. Mose shields his eyes, unable to see who his uninvited guests are.

MYSTERIOUS MALE VISITOR'S VOICE

Open the damn door.

MOSE

What's wrong? What done happened?

The guy then brings attention to the .45 COLT AUTOMATIC HANDGUN in his right hand. Mose reacts and the front door creaks open wider for the two unknown bodies to enter.

INT. THE WRIGHTS' HOUSE

The front door area is dimly lit by a candle set on a table against the wall. Mose is in his pajamas, unwillingly standing aside as the two invaders invade his home.

The intruders are J.W. Milam and Roy Bryant, dressed in their same work clothes.

MOSE

What's wrong, Mr. Bryant, Mr. Milam? What's done happened?

Roy closes the door behind them.

ROY

Where that boy, the one from up norf, Chicago? The one that did all that smart talking.

MOSE

They in bed, Mr. Roy. What he do?

J.W.

Never you mind! Just where is he?

Elizabeth, after waking up, walks towards them.

ELIZABETH

What is it, Mr. Milam? Som'in wrong?

ROY

The boy, I ax you. Where is he? We ain't got all night. Just git him.

Without waiting, they force their way to the first room.

INT. ROOM #1

Maurice is sleeping and Wheeler is huddled in the bed, shaking and praying softly out of fear.

WHEELER

Lord, if you let me live, I'll straighten my life up.

Roy and J.W flash the light in their faces, and, not seeing their target, they exit the room, walking toward the next one.

INT. THE HALLWAY

Mose is the only thing that stands between the two invaders and the second bedroom.

MOSE
 (pleading)
 Mr. Milam... Mr. Bryant... please.

J.W. pushes Mose aside for a second time, clearing the path for Roy to visit the next bedroom. The door is slightly open, so Roy simply pushes it the rest of the way with his foot and steps inside.

INT. BEDROOM #2

Roy aims his beam at Simeon, who sits up. He recognizes him.

ROY
 Lay back down, and close yo eyes.

J.W. illuminates the final bed. Emmett is sitting up, not nearly as scared as he should be, shilding his eyes from the flashlight.

J.W.
 You must be the fat boy from Chicago?

EMMETT
 Y-yes, I'm f-from Chicago.

ROY
 Yes? Did I hear you say 'yes,' ya black sum-bitch?

Roy gets close to his face and yells a serious threat.

ROY
 You say 'yes' to a white man down here, sum-bitch, and you a dead nigger. It's 'yassuh,' you hear me, boy? 'Yassuh.'

J.W.
 Got damn you. Git yer yellow ass up and watch how ya talk.

Emmett says nothing. He gets up and starts putting on his clothes, then his socks.

J.W.
 Git a move on ya, boy. Ya won't need no socks where you's going, you sum-bitch!

J.W. grabs Emmett and takes him out of the room.

INT. HALLWAY

Elizabeth tries to stop them.

ELIZABETH

Please, Mr. Roy, Mr. Milam. Don't hurt 'im. I'll give you money if you just don't hurt him. Just whip him if you gotta, but don't kill 'im. Please, suh. If you just leave 'im with us, we'll whup 'im. We'll whup 'im good suh.

J.W.

Look here, old woman. Git back in that bed and let me hear that mattress squeak. Yer hear?

MOSE

Com on, Liz. Com on.

Mose carefully moves Elizabeth and himself out of their way.

INT. BEDROOM #1

Maurice and Wheeler are groggy. Frightened and confused, they stick their heads out of the bedroom to see what all the commotion was about.

WHEELER

(calls out)

Uncle Mose!

MOSE (O.S.)

Boys, get back inside yo room and close de doe!

Afraid and nervous, they close the door.

EXT. THE WRIGHTS' HOUSE

Roy forces Emmett outside through the door. Just before J.W. can join them, Mose pleads with him once more.

MOSE

Mr. Milam, what he do?

J.W.

Never you mind, preacher!

MOSE

If he did something wrong, give him
to me and I'll whoop 'im.

J.W.

If he ain't the one, we'll bring
'im back.

Roy shoves Emmett towards the truck. Too-Tight Collins sits on the back of the truck. Roy shows Emmett to Too-Tight Collins.

ROY

Is this the one?

Roy shines his flashlight on Emmett. Too-Tight nervously looks at Emmett for a few seconds.

ROY

Well...?

COLLINS

Yassah. He's the one.

Roy turns and pistol-whips Emmett in the face, knocking him to the ground.

ROY

You sum-bitch. You gon' pay for
this.

J.W. (O.S.)

Git up, boy! Git yo ass up!

J.W. reaches down and jerks Emmett up by the arm and back onto his feet. He then shoves Emmett into the back of the truck with Collins.

ROY

First we'll drop Carolyn off.

INT. J.W. TRUCK

J.W. takes the driver's position, as Roy climbs in the passenger side door and Carolyn slides between them. SOUNDS of the run-down truck engine trying to start. Several tries later and it still won't start.

ROY (O.S.)

This piece a' shit!

The engine finally starts. They speed off into the dark.

INT. THE WRIGHTS' HOUSE - LIVING ROOM

Elizabeth is screaming hysterically, confused, guilt-ridden.

ELIZABETH

Get me out of here! Get me out of here! Please, I can't take it. Please, Mose, get me out of here!

MOSE

Hold on, baby. Take it easy. We got ta think 'about this thing a minute. We don't know what's gonna happen. Let's just wait a little while, baby.

ELIZABETH

I tell you, I got to get out of here. I got to go. Take me to Crosby! Right now, Mose. Right now!

SIMEON

Mama. What's da matter? Where's Bo?

ELIZABETH

Should of give 'im back his ticket. Oh my God. Lawd have mercy. It's my fault. It's all my fault, Mose.

MOSE

Naw baby, you didn't know.

ELIZABETH WRIGHT

Yes. I should of knowed better. Bo knew they were going to git 'im. That's why he axed me. Three times he axed. I didn't give it to 'im. It's all my fault.

MOSE

Why? Why did Bo want his ticket?

SIMEON

Bo whistled at a white woman, daddy. Miss Bryant. At the sto the other day. An' he was skaid when we tol 'im dey was gonna kill 'im.

MOSE

Why didn't yall tell me. I should of knowed what happened.

WHEELER

Bo begged us not to tell ya,
granddaddy. we didn't know.

ELIZABETH

Please, Mose. Get me out of here!

MOSE

Okay, baby. Yall boys get together
and let's go. Hurry up now. Liz
can't take no mo of this place.

Everyone in the house start scrambling to get out.

EXT. THE MILAM'S HOUSE - TOOL SHED

J.W.'s truck has been recently backed in and parked beside the shed entrance. There is a gap in the boards that comprise one of the walls of the shed, revealing a light on inside.

The shed features an OLD DOOR, made of rotting wood with a rusty handle, which is currently closed.

J.W. (O.S.)

Git over there!

Emmett's body slams against the door and rattles the walls in the shed.

INT. TOOL SHED

Roy is still covering Emmett with the handgun, while J.W. uses a piece of rope to tie Emmett's hands behind his back. Just as J.W. finishes tying the knot, he discovers the wallet in Emmett's back pocket and opens it.

J.W.

So, you little bastard, you come
down here wid a picture of a white
woman in yer bill folder, bragging,
huh?

He pushes Emmett towards the wall he's facing, but Emmett leans to the side, minimizing the force of the blow. He turns to face his captors.

EMMETT

That p-p-picture was in the
bill-folder when I bought it.
That's a m-m-movie star. R-r-Rita
Hayworth.

J.W.

An' as if that ain't enough, I hear you say you's as good as whites. Is that right, nigger?

Emmett looks at him.

EMMETT

Y-y-yes, my mama a-a-always told me w-w-we're all equal in the s-s-sight of God.

Roy launches himself towards Emmett and, without warning, throws a right hook to his face that lands high on Emmett's left cheek and knocks him back against the wall. The walls rattle as Emmett maintains his balance.

J.W.

Oh, is that right. Well that's it, nigger. You still ain't learnt how to talk or think like a nigger. Let's get rid of this uppity-yaller nigger, right now!

Roy spins the gun around in his hand and hammers the butt of his pistol on the top of Emmett's skull. Dizzied about, he's just about to regain his footing, when J.W. sends a mean right hook that sends Emmett tumbling down.

ROY

Yeah, I heard 'bout how he dress like them folks up norf.

Emmett slowly gathers the concentration and coordination needed to climb back onto his feet.

J.W.

He's dangerous, all right, thinkin' he's important. Why, if we don't watch out, he'll have all the niggers down here thinkin' they's as good as whites. Next thing you know they're all be sayin' 'yes' and 'no' to us just like we one of them. That ain't gone work. Naw. No way.

ROY

It's 'yassah' and 'nossah' to us. You git that, nigger? We white an' ya bet' not forgit it.

J.W.

Think you can just come down here
and not respect our laws an'
women?! Well, we'll see. We'll just
see, nigger. We'll show who's
better, shit ass.

J.W. takes a little longer on his aim this time, since he
can, and punches Emmett square in the mouth, knocking out
two of his teeth and his body back to the ground.

Emmett tries to shake the dizziness out of his head from
getting socked in the face.

EMMETT

(yelling)

Mama! Mama! Lord have m-m-mercy!
Mama! S-s-somebody please h-h-help
me! Please! Please!

INT. J.W. MILAM'S LIVING ROOM

MRS. MILAM'S KIDS, 7 & 8, are peering out the window. MRS.
MILAM, 36, worried, walks towards them.

MRS. MILAM

What are you doing awake? Go back
to your rooms.

EMMETT (O.S.)

Mama! s-s-somebody please h-h-help
me! Help me!

KID #1

Mama, who's that? Somebody's
calling 'Mama'!

MRS. MILAM

Don't you worry 'bout that, let's
go back to bed.

Mrs. Milam takes the kids by their hands and leads them
towards their bedroom.

INT. KIDS BEDROOM

Mrs. Milam puts them back to bed and turns the radio on. The
kids are still unsettled as they lay in bed. Mrs. Milam
exits the room.

INT. TOOL SHED

Emmett is badly beat up.

EMMETT

Mama!

ROY

Shut up, shit ass.

Roy puts his knee on Emmett's chest and leans over the top of him. Again he uses the butt of his gun like a hammer, bashing Emmett's face and head one time each. Emmett is bruised and bleeding and cries out with all of his might:

EMMETT

Mama!

CUT TO:

INT. MAMIE'S HOUSE - KITCHEN

A SMALL GROUP OF MAMIE'S GIRLFRIENDS, all around her age, are seated at the kitchen table and joining her in a fun evening of cardplaying. The music is on in the background as they gossip, eat, drink pop, and take turns in their card game.

TITLE INSERT: Meanwhile...

Just as Mamie is about to play her turn, she suddenly gets the chills and her mind and expression go blank. She looks like a deer caught in headlights. Mamie's friends can't help but notice her strange behavior.

MAMIE'S FRIEND #1

Mamie, hello.

Mamie's friend #1 waves her hand in front of Mamie's face.

MAMIE

If Emmett had his feet on Chicago soil right now, he'd be one happy kid.

MAMIE'S FRIEND #1

What?

MAMIE'S FRIEND #2

Go, Mamie.

Mamie's mind is still drawing a blank.

MAMIE'S FRIEND #3

I think we have been playing for too long. It's three in the morning. She must be tired.

She finally seems to snap out of it.

MAMIE

Okay, sorry, girls.

Mamie plays her turn and the card game resumes. She still seems unsettled, but tries to match the light mood of her friends anyway.

INT. TOOL SHED

Emmett is on the floor and laying on his side. Roy kicks Emmett in the stomach, almost knocking the wind out of him.

J.W.

When we git through with you, ain't no nigger gon' try this trick again.

EXT. TOOL SHED

Moving further down the yard, beyond the shed area, down past their property line, there lies a large grassy field equipped with a community water pump. There are some trees around the area as well.

Currently working the pump is WILLIE REED, a tall, bony, dark-skinned male, 20s, who is almost done filling his bucket. He hears Emmett's cries for help from inside the shed and becomes cautiously concerned.

EMMETT (O.S.)

M-Mama! Help!

INT. TOOL SHED

Roy stands over Emmett, who is still lying on his side on the floor.

J.W.

Just shut 'im up! I'm done.

Roy leans down over Emmett again, so he can bash him on the head several more times with the butt of his gun. With the final whack, some of Emmett's blood splashes up on Roy's face.

ROY

Aw, shit - nigger blood.

Roy jumps onto his feet and uses his shirt to wipe it off, then kicks Emmett for getting blood on him. Somehow Emmett is still conscious after all this, so J.W. and Roy take turns kicking him until he's knocked out. All of a sudden, they hear a THUD come from outside. Roy and J.W. freeze and look at each other in alarm, aware that a potential witness may now be on the scene.

EXT. TOOL SHED

The door to the shed opens and out pops Roy, who hides the gun behind his back while investigating the sound. He uses his flashlight to look around and spots Willie Reed leaving the water pump.

ROY

Whatchu doin' out here, boy?

WILLIE REED

Jus' gettin' some water, suh.

ROY

You hear anything?

WILLIE REED

Nossuh.

ROY

Awright, then, git on outta here.
Go on now, git.

Willie Reed starts walking carrying his bucket full of water.

INT. TOOL SHED

With full hands, Roy still manages to slam the door shut behind himself as he reenters.

ROY

It was just the niggah from across
the way.

J.W. is kneeling down beside Emmett's face. He's holding his hunting knife, which has fresh blood on it, and is wearing a proud expression.

J.W.
Bet he never looks at no white woman again.

ROY
You fixed 'im good. Think he's dead?

J.W.
Naw, he's still alive - for now.

ROY
We can't let 'im go out lookin' like this.

J.W.
Yep. We gotta get rid of 'im for good.

ROY
What should we do?

J.W.
We'll weigh his body down and sink it to the bottom of the Tallahatchie and be done with it. I got everything we need. Even a cotton gin fan I picked up just for this from the Mississippi Valley State campus to hold him down.

INSERT:

Coils of barbed wire and a thick, heavy, rusty, old cotton-gin fan lying nearby on the shed floor.

CUT TO:

J.W. and Roy stand over Emmett and look down at him.

J.W.
I'm tired. Let's get this over wit'.

J.W. turns Emmett on his back to prepare him for execution. Roy takes aim with the gun and stops at Emmett's heart. J.W. gently moves Roy's arm to make the gun point at Emmett's head instead.

Roy nods in agreement. He grips the gun tightly, steadies his aim, and pulls the trigger.

The bullet enters the right side of Emmett's head and blows his brains out.

J.W.

Nice shot.

Emmett's corpse is lying on the tarpaulin. J.W. and Roy struggle a bit as they lift and roll his body up inside the tarp in order to conceal it.

EXT. TOOL SHED

J.W. and Roy carefully load the truck together, putting the barbed wire and cotton-gin fan into the truck bed. That's when J.W.'s wife exits the back door of their house and heads towards them, yelling.

MRS. MILAM

What's the matter with you?

J.W. rolls his eyes. Mrs. Milam stops about halfway to the shed to continue her tirade.

MRS. MILAM

Don't you know it's Sunday mornin',
and you exposin the kids to all
this.

ROY

Sorry, sister. We'll be leavin'now.

MRS. MILAM

Right now. Just leave. Just leave,
I'm telling you. The kids don't
need to hear all this ruckus.

She turns and storms back into the house. J.W. and Roy move to load the final item onto the truck, Emmett's body, wrapped in the blood-soaked tarp.

EXT. TOOL SHED

Willie Reed is hiding behind one of the trees closer to the Milam property.

Willie can see it's a corpse they're loading into their truck, even though it's loosely wrapped in the tarp. He looks concerned but seems uncertain what to do about it.