

Watching Over Me

A Short Feature Screenplay

By James M. Kemp and Derrald Etheley

Watching Over Me

Scene 1 - San Francisco Retirement Day in 2016

Shot 1 - Black background with white letters fades in showing the title of the movie for 5 seconds, fade in grandmother cookie jar image.

(Fade to shot 2)

Shot 2 – Panoramic view of San Francisco from Marin showing the Golden Gate Bridge.

(Fade to shot 3)

Shot 3 – Portrait video of a San Francisco streetcar pulling into a stop at the foot of California Street.

(Fade to shot 4)

Shot 4 – Panoramic video of Civic Center exterior.

(Fade to shot 5)

Shot 5 – Closeup of an interior office door.

(Fade to Shot 6)

Shot 6 – Interior of that office, zoom out from desk with a banker’s box on top where Derrald is putting away the contents of his office on his retirement day.

(Zoom out to Shot 7)

Shot 7 – Long shot of Derrald removing treasured items from the walls of his office and carefully placing them into the banker’s box.

(Zoom in to Shot 8)

Shot 8 – Head and upper torso of Derrald removing framed photos of specific famous friends from his past career in public service including a mayor’s proclamation on Derrald Etheley Day.

(Fade to Shot 9)

Shot 9 – Long shot of Derrald carrying banker’s box out a building door.

(Fade to Shot 10)

Shot 10 – Stock footage of Derrald television interviews from 1978 through 2013.

(Fade to Scene 2 Shot 1)

Scene 2 – Oregon Retirement

Shot 1 – Moving camera shot from vehicle interior of highway 101, focusing on a road sign that reads “Welcome to Oregon”.

(Fade to Shot 2)

Shot 2 – Long exterior shot of building exterior focusing on signs reading “McMenniman’s Hotel Oregon”.

(Fade to Shot 3)

Shot 3 – Series of still shots experiencing Oregon retirement.

Derrald’s prerecorded narrative.

They say over time, bad experiences fade in our memories.... yet the good ones remain. Especially the warm and meaningful memories. But perhaps more importantly, we remember the impressions those memories have left upon us. For its more those impressions we remember, than the memories themselves. Those impressions become who we are inside. And over time they become the kindness we give, and the love we pass on to others. They’re sweet like Tupelo honey that pours over your memories, thick and warm. And as the years pass, feelings and emotions blow in the wind like pollen. Like seeds from a dandelion drifting on a summer breeze. And those feelings stick to the honey, sometimes completely covering the memories that brought them about.

But those impressions hold darkness as well. And if you befriend that darkness ...if you stay when it’s time to move on. If you stir the sediment of those angry, bitter, and better forgotten memories, they too blow and drift through the air. For the darkness and hurt in life if only left alone will naturally fall and settle into the earth whence they came. And when enough tears have fallen upon this settled dust and darkness, there in its

place the petals of wisdom and kindness will grow.

But if stirred a dustbowl will blow... and those impressions will bear only the grit of one's life, like sand in a spoonful of honey. And over time that anger will be laid open for all to see. The hurt and regrets relived over and over again, until forgiveness is left for dead... what then? Darkness, ashes to ashes... dust to dust.

Placeholder photos during prerecorded narrative.



(Fade to Scene 3)

Scene 3 – Derrald’s brother Buddy speaks from present time.

Setting – Derrald’s older brother Buddy as an adult, speaks from an abstract image of scene and prop items from the plot.

Characters –

Adult Brother Buddy – Michael Chenault

Shot 1 – Gauzy, out of focus torso shot of the adult Buddy. He wears sporty, contemporary clothes.

ADULT BUDDY

That summer of 1955 was something else. Our poor mother was moving us around from one relative to another. I don’t know why she wanted to leave our home in San Francisco. But first, she packed us all up, me and my younger sister we call Sissy, and my younger brother Derrald and off we went to Texas.

I don’t recall much about the trip. I know Texas has a lot of cock roaches. That’s where I first used a rubber band to snap those boogers. So, I was glad when we packed up again and went off to my Granddaddy’s old slave cabin in Tennessee.

But we didn’t stay long in Tennessee either before Mama decided it was time to go back to San Francisco.

What do I remember about Tennessee? Not much. It was late summer and there was lots of corn growing

everywhere, Grampa’s cabin was kind of small for him and the four of us. There was an old wood-fired stove in one room where Mama fried up eggs and bacon for breakfast and fried chicken for dinner and supper.

I fetched the eggs from the hen house. I watched Grampa kill a rooster once. Grampa took the oldest rooster in the barnyard, laid him down with a crow bar across his neck and then pulled on his feet. That rooster’s head came right off and the headless rooster ran around the barnyard for a minute or so without his head.

Then. Mama and Sissie had a tub of boiling water outside the cabin. Mama dunked the headless rooster in the boiling water and soon, it was easy to pull off his feathers. Supper time!

Anyway, my younger brother Derrald was a pain back then. Always whining about how I mistreated him. I thought Grampa took Derrald’s part most of the time and blamed me for everything.

So, when the day came for us to pack up and take the train back to San Francisco, I was glad. Then, all of a sudden this young friend of Grampa’s named Driver, shows up with this magazine. Driver shows it to Grampa and they both got real serious. Something about a murder that took place just across the state line in Mississippi. They said a 14 year-old male who had also come South from Chicago, to visit relatives like we did, was kidnapped and beat to death and thrown into a river. His name was Emmet Till.

(Fade to Scene 4)

Scene 4 – Exterior of a Tennessee Slave Cabin, Summer of 1955

Setting – Tennessee former slave cabin of Derrald’s grandfather. Derrald’s mother has brought her children to her father’s cabin after her attempts to get along with family in Texas have been unsuccessful. Derrald and his older brother Buddy are outside the cabin.

Characters –

Young Derrald – Dawsen Williams

Grandfather – Frederick Walker

Older Brother Buddy – Not Cast yet

Shot 1 – Fade in from Senior Derrald’s daydream in reaction to seeing photo of Darnell and Dawsen posed with paint guns after paint gun tournament, to a close up of Young Derrald seated on the cabin porch, using a stick to stir up a colony of ants.

Shot 2 – Close up of Young Derrald with a shadowy figure approaching him from behind.

Shot 3 – Closeup of two hands with a rubber band stretched between the fingers and pulling back on the rubber band.

Shot 4 – Close up of Young Derrald as the rubber band is snapped against the back of his neck.

YOUNG DERRALD

Ouch! Buddy, that hurt, Buddy. Stop it or I’m tellin’ Mama.

Shot 5 – Torso shot of Buddy repositioning his rubber band between his fingers.

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BUDDY

You ain't gonna tell Mama nothin', Derrald or I snap you again when Mama ain't lookin'. And leave those ants alone. They be comin' in the cabin before you know it. Just like them cockroaches down in Texas did.

Shot 6 - Torso shot of Young Derrald as he stands up and shakes his stick at Buddy.

YOUNG DERRALD

See this here stick, Buddy? Less you leave me be, you know what I do with it?

Shot 7 – Torso shot of Buddy stretching out the rubber band and calculating its next snap.

BUDDY

What you gonna do with that stick, Derrald?

Shot 8 – Long shot of the porch with the two boys turning toward a shadow that fill the porch. Buddy hides the rubber band behind his back as Derrald hides his stick.

Shot 9 – Torso shot of Grandfather.

GRANDFATHER

Well, well. What we got here any how? Cain and Abel all over again?

Shot 10 – Long shot of the three characters facing off on the porch steps.

YOUNG DERRALD

Who is Cain and Abel, Grampa?

Shot 11 – Torso shot of Grandfather.

GRANDFATHER

Who was Cain and Abel? Buddy, can you tell your little brother who Cain and Abel was?

Shot 12 – Close up of Buddy.

BUDDY

I had a friend named Cain in my Sunday School class back in San Francisco. But I ain't got no idea who Abel was.

Shot 13 – Close up of Grandfather.

GRANDFATHER

Well, Buddy, I ain't talkin' 'bout no friend back in San Francisco. I'm talkin' 'bout the two sons of

Adam and Eve. You know who they was don't cha, Buddy? Adam and Eve?

Shot 14 – Close up of Buddy.

BUDDY

I heard of them in Sunday School. They was the first man and the first woman.

Shot 15 – Close up of Grandfather

GRANDFATHER

That's right, Buddy. Adam and Eve had two sons name of Cain and Abel. And one day, when they was out watchin' sheep, Cain got real jealous of Abel and hit Abel over the head with a log and killed him.

Shot 16 – Close up of Buddy.

BUDDY

Grampa, I didn't hit Derrald with no log.

Shot 17 - Close up of Grandfather.

GRANDFATHER

No, but you done somethin' to Derrald or Derrald wouldn't of yelled ouch. What you got behind your back there, Buddy?

Shot 18 – Torso shot of Buddy’s back as he quickly slips the rubber band into a back pocket and then holds out both hands for inspection.

BUDDY

Grampa, I ain’t got nothin’ back there. I don’t know why Derrald yelled ouch. Maybe one of them ants bit him.

Shot 19 – Close up of Derrald.

YOUNG DERRALD

Wasn’t no ant what bit me. Buddy snapped me with somethin’. And it weren’t the first time. He snapped me before.

Shot 20 – Long shot of the three characters on the porch steps as Buddy and Derrald argue back and forth,

YOUNG DERRALD and BUDDY

Did not! Did too! (Etc.)

Shot 21 – Torso shot of Grandfather, Buddy and Derrald. A galvanized bucket can be seen.

GRANDFATHER

STOP! Both of you stop. One of you is lyin', but I don't spose we gonna find out who any time soon.

Buddy, your poor mama and your sister is inside there workin' like dogs to get you all packed up and ready to go to the train station in Jackson, so's you all can get back home to San Francisco. Buddy, you take this bucket and go on down to the creek and grab us some crawfish for supper. Derrald you come on with me.

Shot 22 – Long shot of Grandfather taking Derrald's hand and walking toward the back of the cabin as Buddy goes inside through the front door.

(Fade to Scene 5)

Scene 5 – Derrald’s sister Susie speaks from present time.

Setting – Derrald’s older sister Susie, speaks from an abstract image of scene and prop items from the plot.

Characters –

Adult Sister Susie – Lemon Marin

Shot 1 – Gauzy, out of focus torso shot of the adult Susie. She wears sporty, contemporary clothes.

ADULT SISTER SUSIE

The day before we took the train back to San Francisco, I was in Granddaddy’s kitchen bakin’ cookies with Mama. Derrald come in a couple of times and tried to grab some out of the cookie jar in the kitchen. Well, it wasn’t really a kitchen room as such; just apart of one big room that happened to have a wood stove in it,

Me and mama managed to keep Derrald from getting’ any cookies. Then, Mama got tired of Derrald’s contrariness and she sent out to sit on the porch.

About an hour or so after that, Driver showed up in a brand new station wagon with wood panels. Driver was Granddaddy’s young friend. So I seen Driver park the car in the driveway. He got out and I was seein’ he was wearin’ some mighty fine men’s clothes. Sun glasses. Saddle shoes. Suit with a vest. The whole glamour thing.

ADULT SISTER SUSIE (continues)

Driver was close to Mama’s age. But I liked to think he was more like an older brother. Anyway, that day Driver walked over to where Granddaddy and Derrald was sittin’, with Granddaddy who was whittlin’ on a piece of wood.

Driver had a copy of a magazine rolled up under his arm. He stood in front of Granddaddy and handed the magazine to him. Granddaddy set down the piece of wood and grabbed the magazine. Granddaddy opened it and read some and then closed his eyes and bowed his head.

Then a batch of cookies was ready and I had to get back to baking.

The next day, while we was ridin’ to the train station in Driver’s station wagon, this real sad song came on the radio. It was a sad woman, singin’ a sad song ‘bout bloody fruit hanging from trees. I know I heard Mama choke back a sob. Then Driver told us ‘bout what had happened a few days ago down in Mississippi along the Talahatchee River, ‘bout some boy from Chicago who came down to visit his cousins, kindas like we was.

Driver said the boy wasn’t bloody fruit like the fruit in that song.. Just plain bloody and beat to death and drowned.

I was glad when we ‘ventually made it back to San Francisco.

Scene 6 – Derrald and Grandfather discuss Derrald’s problems.

Setting – Immediately after Grandfather has sent Buddy to look for crawfish. Grandfather and Derrald are seated in the side doorway of the cabin.

Characters –

Grandfather – Frederick Walker

Young Derrald – Dawsen Williams

Shot 1 – Torso shot of Grandfather and Young Derrald sitting side by side on the doorway floor of the cabin. Grandfather is finishing the whittling of a wooden object which Derrald cannot see entirely.

YOUNG DERRALD

Granddady, what you doin’?

GRANDFATHER

Whittlin’ something for you.

YOUNG DERRALD

For me? Really, Granddaddy? But what is it?

GRANDFATHER

Yes child. It’s for you. It’s somethin’ that’s gotta be a secret ‘tween you and me.

YOUNG DERRALD

How come, Granddady?

GRANDFATHER

‘Cause it’s somethin’ that’s gonna help you to keep Buddy from pickin’ on you. You gotta tell everybody you found it out by the shed.

YOUNG DERRALD

OK, Granddady. But what is it?

Shot 2 – Grandfather stops whittling and holds out a wood carved children’s pistol. Grandfather reaches in his overall pocket and pulls out a rubber band.

Shot 3 – Closeup of Granfather’s hands inserting the rubber band onto the pistol which has an old wooden clothespin at the area of what would be the pistol’s breech. Grandfather loads the rubber band and then triggers the clothes pin as the rubber band flies off the barrel.

Shot 4 – Closeup of Derrald’s expression of joyful surprise.

YOUNG DERRALD

Wow! Granddaddy, it’s a gun! A rubber band gun!

Shot 5 – Torso shot of Grandfather and Derrald still seated with Grandfather still holding the gun.

GRANDFATHER

Child, let's call it what it is. It's a rubber band shooter. It's not a gun.

YOUNG DERRALD

OK, Granddaddy. Rubber band shooter. But is it mine?

GRANDFATHER

It is yours if you make me a promise.

YOUNG DERRALD

I promise, Granddaddy! I promise!

GRANDFATHER

Wait child. You hasn't heard the promise yet.

YOUNG DERRALD

I'm listenin', Granddaddy. I'm listenin'.

GRANDFATHER

Derrald, you gotta promise not to shoot anybody so's to hurt them.

YOUNG DERRALD

Like in the eye or somethin’?

GRANDFATHER

Like in the eye or anywhere’s it might hurt.

YOUNG DERRALD

But Granddaddy, when Buddy shoots me with a rubber band, it hurts!

GRANDFATHER

Child, Buddy ain’t got no rubber band shooter. So, you also gotta promise you only shoot from far away.

YOUNG DERRALD

Only shoot far away and don’t hurt nobody. Is that all, Granddaddy?

GRANDFATHER

And you can’t tell nobody I made the shooter for you.

YOUNG DERRALD

I found it behind the shed. I don’t hurt nobody and I shoot far away. Is that all, Granddaddy?

GRANDFATHER

Almost. There's one more thing, child.

Shot 6 – Close up Grandfather's hands as he pries up nearby floor boards, revealing some jewelry and small boxes beneath the floors.

Shot 7 – Close up of Derrald's surprised expression.

Shot 8 – Close up of Grandfather's hands as he pulls a small jewelry box from beneath the floor and opens it, revealing silver dollars inside. Grandfather removes three silver dollars and holds them up.

GRANDFATHER

Child, these here silver dollars is also yours. And you don't ever show them to nobody.

Shot 9 – Torso shot of Grandfather and Young Derrald still seated in the doorway.

YOUNG DERRALD

I promise, Granddaddy. I won't show them dollars to nobody.

GRANDFATHER

Hold on, child. Here's the thing. If I ever hear of you hurtin' anybody with this here rubber band shooter, you gotta give me back one of them silver dollars. You get that, Derrald?

Shot 10 – Torso shot as Young Derrald stands up and faces Grandfather.

YOUND DERRALD

Granddaddy, I pinky swear I will never hurt anybody with my rubber band shooter. But if I ever do, I will give you back one of them silver dollars.

Shot 11 – Long shot of the driveway to the cabin as Driver can be seen from behind the steering wheel of his late model station wagon.

Shot 12 – Torso shot of Grandfather and Derrald standing up in front of the side cabin door as Grandfather hands Young Derrald the rubber band shooter and dollars.

GRANDFATHER

OK, Derrald. We got us a deal. Now you run off and play whiles me and Driver have us a chat ‘bout him drivin’ you and your brother and sister and your mama to the train station tomorrow.

Shot 13 – Long shot as Driver emerges from his car and walks toward Grandfather as Young Derrald runs off with his new gifts.

Shot 14 – Fade to Shot 1, scene 7.

Scene 7 – Driver and Grandfather news from Mississippi.

Setting – Grandfather and Driver stand in the side doorway of the cabin. Driver carries a newspaper with the story of Emmett Till’s murder on the front page.



Characters –

Grandfather – Frederick Walker

Driver – Darnell Williams

Shot 1 – Close up of a well-dressed Driver pulling a newspaper from beneath his arm.

DRIVER

Evenin’ Mr. Chambers, sir.

GRANDFATHER

Evenin', Driver. You ready for the trip into Jackson tomorrow?

DRIVER

I hope so, sir. I mean, I'm ready. But is the world ready?

Shot 2 – Close up of Driver handing the newspaper to Grandfather.

GRANDFATHER

What you got there, son?

DRIVER

The local news and a whole lot of trouble down over the border in Mississippi.

Shot 3 – Close up of Grandfather opening the newspaper.

GRANDFATHER

I heard 'bout the murder of that young man from Chicago. Found him in the Tallahatchie River at the end of August. They caught the good old boys what killed him, didn't they?

Shot 4 – Close up of Driver removing his fedora.

DRIVER

They caught ‘em alright, sir. They even put ‘em on trial. But this here story says they might get off Scott free.

Shot 5 – Close up of Grandfather reading the newspaper and shaking his head.

GRANDFATHER

Um-um. This here picture is one of the killers and his wife. She say that Till whistled at her or some such.

Shot 6 – Close up of Driver.

DRIVER

She say shit, excuse me sir. That Till was a good lookin’ boy. Only 14. Come down from Chicago and didn’t know nothin’ ‘bout Jim Crow and the white man’s laws.

Shot 7 – Torso shot of Grandfather and Driver standing in the doorway.

GRANDFATHER

Kinda like my two grandsons, huh? They from San Francisco. Never heard ‘bout the way things is done here in the South.

DRIVER

That’s what scares me, Mr. Chambers sir. I gives them a ride to the train station in Jackson tomorrow morning, and what if we needs to stop and pee along the way? Or stop for anything else out there in Jim Crow country?

GRANDFATHER

You ain’t backin’ out is you, Driver?

DRIVER

No sir, Mr. Chambers. It’s just me bein’ concerned is all. We gonna like an uppity Black family tomorrow. I already get enough crap from Johnny Law ‘bout my car and my drivin’.

GRANDFATHER

So you got anythin’ in mind for the trip tomorrow?

DRIVER

No sir, Mr. Chambers. We just gotta stay down low somehow. Not draw any attention to us. Drive slow. Not too slow. No stops along the way. Dress respectable and just look like a peaceful family. No fightin’ or arguin’ kids. No loud music on the radio.

GRANDFATHER

You want me to tell this stuff to my family tonight? They already upset at havin' to leave.

DRIVER

With all due respect, Mr. Chambers. I would rather it come from you. They respect you. They barely even know me. I'm just the driver.

GRANDFATHER

You wanna join us for dinner tonight? Buddy is grabbin' crawfish outa the creek. Eleanor makes a fine gumbo.

DRIVER

All due respects again, sir. I need time to be alone tonight. Maybe I think of somethin'.

GRANDFATHER

I get it, Driver. I'm gonna do some serious prayin' tonight. I pray for you and my family and I pray for that poor woman back in Chicago what lost her son to Jim Crow.

DRIVER

Thank you, sir. I'm glad you understand.

GRANDFATHER

I do understand, Driver. See you tomorrow bright and early?

DRIVER

You will sir. And my prayers will be that your family understand what’s goin’ on down here where we got all this strange fruit hangin’ from the trees.

GRANDFATHER

The children is still pretty young. Derrald is ‘bout to turn six. But maybe it’s time for Granddaddy to have the talk with his grandchildren. You know, that talk were we tells them how we have managed to survive the past 400 years in captivity.

DRIVER

Blesings on you and your family, sir. I see you all in the morning.

GRANDFATHER

You be safe, Driver. You be brave, but sometimes, that bravery can work the wrong way for us Black folk.

DRIVER

Mr. Chambers, I survived Korea. I can survive anything.

GRANDFATHER

Driver, you a good man. I only wish Eleanor knew that. Anyway, you get along now.

Shot 8 – Long shot as Driver puts on his fedora and salutes Grandfather, before getting into his car and driving off.

DRIVER

Sir, yes sir!

Shot 9 – Close up of Grandfather reading the newspaper, shaking his head as a tear falls from one eye.

Shot 10 – Fade to Scene 8

