B-Side Man

A Play by Alonzo D. LaMont, Jr.

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 Character:

Alonzo

African-American. Handsome. 50-ish, but could pass for younger. Well-built. Slender.

Stage

Bare stage, only several props are needed. A chair. A bicycle. Any “road” bicycle will do. If “Back In The Saddle” by Aerosmith can be utilized/negotiated, that would be ideal. If not, then any racy hard rock music will suffice.

Here are the list of sounds & images. All are very easy *(and cheap/cheap)* to collect.

1) Sounds of a train

2) Musical snippet from “60’s hippie peace and love material.

3) Sounds of an indoor basketball game (in a gym)

4) Sounds of a house party --- (folks laughing / enjoying themselves,

 music in background)

5) Sexy/racy music 6)

6) Silhouette of a man undressing

7) Montage of children’s pictures

8) Sounds from big-time college football game.

These few sounds & images along with a chair and bicycle are the only production elements.

Time:

Present

*(Lights come up. Alonzo, walks on stage and sits on a stool)*

 ALONZO

The B-Side. Think records. Music. Round. Vinyl. Two sides to every record. The main side. And the B-Side..........when vinyl records were in their heyday the B-Side always seemed to have the little gems. When we’re young, and you stumble across a discovery like that it shows us the world is full of surprise and wonder. You bought the record for the hit, but turn it over, “Damn, where’d THAT song come from?” A song you didn’t think you’d get, felt like a dream you weren’t spozed to have. It caught you dead on. A track that’s off-track. That’s my life. A swerve. A detour. I’m a B-Side Man.

***(Pause)***

In high school, I didn’t Cuss. Drink. Party. Sensing my sensitive proclivities, my mom gave me a journal to write my thoughts. Loved retreating into that interior world where my eyes and feelings become thoughts. I followed rules, grew up saying my prayers. When I didn’t say my prayers, felt bad for the whole world. My mother taught high school English, my father worked for the Post Office. My mother taught me to only worry ‘bout MY OWN BEHAVIOR. My told me a well-behaved young man **SHOULDN’T ALLOW** his mother to clean the kitchen. And that young men take pride in keeping their rooms clean.

 ***(Pause)***

I was taught to respect girls and women. Didn’t drink or do bad things. Bad things were for bad kids. Doing bad bring a wrong equation to my mother and father. Couldn’t understand black kids using foul language, not respecting women. In my family, I saw respect daily. In mid ‘60’s Baltimore, race riots was the talk of the town. We heard about black people rioting, but nobody I knew was gonna riot. Had too much Catholic school upbringing to riot. Who wanted to riot? What if it was a sunny day? What if my buddies wanted to have a wiffle ball championship? I knew black folks were angry, but I wanted the life I had. There was no HARD to my friends. We played ball, went to movies, parks ---- *f****un* *bad kids could only dream about.***

My buddies and me all went to the same high high school. One time white cafeteria lady said “yall niggas is all the same --- can’t never make up your minds.” We raised hell. Got Administration, parents, everybody in an uproar. We “rectified” the situation.

 *(Pause)*

Maybe that was our riot.

 *(Pause)*

At the time, I was pretty sure the Civil Rights Movement been a victory. Only nobody’d let us know who won. ‘Gardless of how many **thumbs down** you get from folks today, trust me: We won that bitch. Yeah, we won us some Civil Rights. But all you hear about nowadays --- we still facing impossible odds, barriers, obstacles --- **that’s a cave nobody can climb outta.** Cafeteria lady didn’t define us. It was a sideshow, not a main attraction. Our parents had already moved past so much, they didn’t expect us to stay stuck on stupid.

 ***(Pause, downshifts)***

I went to college in Vermont. Vermont was gorgeous. Magical. Quiet. Took a train to New England in early fall. Fall like I’d never seen. Leaves. Color. Mountains. Nature. SPACE. But everybody was so “beholding to Nature.” I couldn’t get on board. My vision was small, nature was too vast. So I ran contrary to acceptance.

***(Several pictures and music of hippie lifestyle are seen and heard)***

In Vermont girls wore long skirts and looked like gypsies. They talked folk art, folk dance, folk festivals n folklore. Unspoken law said Vermont women MUST make pottery mugs. City boys posed as lumberjacks, wearin plaid shirts, rolling cigarettes. Or whatever it was that looked like cigarettes. In post-Woodstock Vermont, TV, fashion, and food I’d been eating all my life didn’t pass the CULTURE TEST. Everybody was into Personal Freedom. Space. Individuality. ***What could be better than focusing on yourself? What was more true than that?***

***(Music and images stop)***

First week, a Professor walks over, says I look like a writer. “You look thoughtful, do you keep a journal?” Well of course I did, my mother had made it a point ot put my thoughts down on a daily basis. I was fully vested in my interior life. So when I heard the question --- visions of sugar plum writing success start dancing in my head. Little did I know…..AT THAT MOMENT my money-making potential took a crash dive. I ASSUMED my esoteric thoughts were far superior to the real world of cold logic. Cold logic being the hard lessons of learning Math and Science. A Drama teacher came along and said “with your dialogue you could be writing plays”. *“Well hell Sophocles, start writing you some plays.”* THINKING AND WRITING. EXPRESSIONS AND LANGUAGE. Screw Math and Biology. Thinking and writing could takedown **Numbers and Nature**.

 ***(Amused, then switches gears)***

But then, just as I was riding that wave, something happened. Something major.

  ***(Pause)***

I became a nude model for an art class. Least I TOLD MYSELF it was for an art class. How’d it happen? Glanced innna mirror one night “Boy! You done up and got handsome!” Mom didn’t share same enthusiasm.

 ***(Mom on the phone)***

“NUDE? Head to Toe? Oh Lord. “Artistic” don’t mean my son goes nude…….. Noooo, I can’t tell you what to do, I’m just your poor mother…..yes, love you too. Love you more if you kept your clothes on”

***(Conversation ends)***

Narcissism had come-a-knocking. Don’t blame me----blame the Age of Aquarius. Blame the Black Arts Movement. Friends said school up north take me outta my own blackness. My teachers had same concern. Put it on themselves to ensure my identity --- so while I was lovin some Joni Mitchell melancholy, was also hearing my very first Coltrane while staring out at the Green Mountains --- Caught Athol Fugard’s “Sizwe Banzi is Dead” off-Broadway --- rocked my world realizing somebody’d created a jazzman name Pharoah Sanders. --- Pharoah yodeled like a Swiss Mountain man ---*“The Creator has a Master Plan”* At same time, the Grateful Dead’s “Friend of the Devil” became my tune-du-jour. One-on-one tutorials took me onna Black Drama excursion through Amiri Baraka, Adrienne Kennedy, Samm-Art Williams ---got all booked up with Ellison, Hurston, McKay, Bontemps and Chester Himes. ***None a them ring bells --- GOOGLE UP!***

 *(Pauses)*

Was amazed how many black artists had been bandits. Rip roarin. Swaggadocious. Got intoxicated over all that historical “Bad-Assery.” Felt my mind could compete on any level, which made my body icing on the cake.

***(Hesitates, then starts to sway and move, starts an impromtu dance)***

I started to dance. Alot. Alone. In public. In Bars. Didn’t worry ‘bout moves, styles --- best dancer in the world is the dancer who’s a RENEGADE. Who didn’t care about **PROTOCOL.** Get out there! Don’t need to LEARN SHIT! PRACTICE SHIT!

 ***(Smacks his forehead, continues his impromtu dance)***

It ain’t no contest --- lettum laugh, stare --- you ain’t come for approval! You came to celebrate, gyrate, get impromtu!!!

 ***(Smacks his forehead)***

All through college I was laughing at them Little House On The Prairie Pottery Chicks. God bless ‘em. Same with them Lumberjacks acting out rage against the machine. Inna few more years they probably BE THE MACHINE.

***(He stops moving, hesitates, switches gears. We hear sounds of a gym basketball game in progress)***

We had ourselves a motley crew of basketball players. Travelled to other small colleges, played whoever, barnstorming ‘round the New England countryside. Sometimes with female company……..

 ***(He’s now in the back seat of the convertible)***

We had a convertible --- 6 of us all scrunched up. Everybody’s recapping highlights, goofin on each other --- I feel a hand on my leg --- HOLE UP. HOLE UP --- *That ain’t my leg AT-Tall*…….nobody’d ever made a move like that on me. A world of possibilities sprang forth!

***(Laughs)***

Somewhere there might be a population of amazon women existing SOLELY TO DESIRE ALONZO.

***(Laughs again)***

I was fully initiated by someone older. Someone married. I stepped over lines like I’d been stepping over ‘em all my life. My mother always said---

 ***(Becomes his Mother)***

“Lonnie, there’s a little voice inside you. That voice can tell you to go right, or go wrong.”

 ***(Returns)***

I loved my mom, but being with someone UNATTAINABLE was an erotic highball, and I got good n’ liquor’d up. We got attached like circus acrobats. She was risque. Devil-may-care.

 ***(He laughs, hops around stage)***

My college only had 250 students, rumors ran amuk, whispers got loud. Lil’d I know all this was the genesis of a personal quest that’d repeat itself. I grew to love anything off-limits, outa bounds, Prohibited.

 ***(He pauses, draws audience in for a ‘secret’)***

………………... Sometime we’re not attracted who we spozed to be attracted to. We wanna leap the fence. Cross boundaries. Veer off. We want another color, culture, background --- if you’re a child stepping onto that merry-go-round, an adult in a position of authority may help you step off. If you’re an adult, chances are you stay on that ride. I stayed. Didn’t want normal. HA! Watched friends BURIED in Normal. Suddenly, I wanted some Taboo. I wanted women I had no business steppin to. As you go through your personal sexual history, if you are so inclined to step OFFA your own “sexual reservation”…...you’re probably opening doors shoulda stay closed.

***(Laughs)***

Freshman year got a ride back home to Baltimore. That first trip felt like I’d been tossed outta Paradise. Felt like black people were living in concentration camps. The east coast felt like a ghetto. Trains ran through ‘em, buses ran in ‘em, Alonzo wanted to run from ‘em. *Then it came to me --- I was on furlow from the Garden of Eden.*

 ***(Pauses)***

I was experiencing a great expeditionary treasure.

 ***(Sits Again)***

All the great Explorers --- Walter Raleighs, Cortez’s, Magellan --- at some point, kicked-back and say, “I’m richer than I’ve ever been”. Not rich from pirate booty, rich from Old World and New. Where they came from, where they headed. Baltimore was all black and white, Vermont was kaleidoscope. I was the single black male on campus, “the official curiousity.” Back in the day, Black was the new Black.

***(Party sounds, with music, voices all around)***

In B’Mo I went to parties sportin ideas and ***vo-cab-bu-lary.*** My approach ran counter to what I saw in clubs where brothers ***stared women down like they was Houdini.*** Black men grow up thinking females came under their spell when most times, theys the ones gettin spellbound. Did I have money? Employment? Career plans?

 ***(Party sounds fade away. Alonzo’s mood changes, darker)***

Nope. NADA. None-a-that. Didn’t have one, single employable skill. Vermont had worked it’s magic. I was an independent thinker.

 ***(Hesitates)***

But somewhere down the road........we realize our own gospel don’t play in every church.

***(Pause, re-groups)***

After graduation, hadda few temp jobs --- dressing mannequins, cleaning factory toilets, I was brought low. I decided maybe Grad School should be my next move. The Univ. of Iowa was big-time. Writing plays inna small school people treated me like a kid using crayolas for the first time.

 *(Awestruck)*

“Look at him using all those colors!”

*(Pause)*

I needed to find if Alonzo was notable, noteworthy or nothing.

  ***(Pauses)***

Quickly discovered with Playwriting I’d Metamorphisizzzzd from Caterpillar to **Butterfly**. But something else sprang up in Iowa.

 ***(Pauses, moves closer to audience)***

***Something subversive. Singular.*** ***Pagan. And Seductive…….***

  ***(Pauses)***

I took a dance class. I was no professional dancer, Ionly took dance cause I was too pretty **NOT** to take dance.A friend in class said she knew a place where I could dance and make a few bucks. I went to this Bar. Owner told me: dance 45 minutes, make $150 bucks. **SURE-SURE**. “And Bring your own music.” **SURE-SURE.** Had alotta my own music but when I was alone, dancing with myself --- it was ArrowSmith’s “Back in the Saddle Again” **that brought out the demon.** Wasn’t no black men humming Areosmith. “Back in the Saddle Again”----in 1939 an American movie star-cowboy name Gene Autry wrote “Back in the Saddle Again”. It’s a bout moseying long the open range. Arrowsmith sang about a rootin-tootin-ass up-face-down sex BAZAAR.

***(Pause, he takes a swig of water)***

I shows up at the Bar, notice this long line. Mostly women. See a poster “FIRST TIME! ONE NIGHT ONLY! MALE DANCER!” Ohhhh Shimmy-shake! Alonzo was THE FIRST TIME ONE NIGHT DANCER. So I’m there inna dressing room my nerves all backed up. Hadda remember --- *“this moment is exactly who you are, and exactly where you wanna be.”*

***(Sexy/racy music is heard)***

I walk out, get up on my tiny, square platform. It was tiny and it had a carpet. Didn’t have room to romper-stomp around. That’s alright. A little goes a long way. I surveyed the crowd.

 ***(He gets up on a platform, He smiles, He does a little dance)***

Everybody was now in my world. They’d paid to be there. Know what I felt? *A****roused****.*

 ***(Amused)***

It started in my head, but I was so jacked-up, couldn’t tell if ***Aroused*** ---

 ***(Peeks at his crotch)***

***…….Had worked it’s way down***. Maybe I was. Maybe I was not.. They’d probably NEVER seen a naked black man up close n’ personal. Noise. Faces. Expectations. And then my song came on. And Alonzo was back in the saddle.

 ***(Pause, and we see a silhouette of a male dancer, dancing quite erotically)***

The Owner said ---

***(Owner)***

“Gotta line 3 blocks round the corner, gotta get that money in here. GET OFFA THAT PLATFORM, GO DANCE ON THE BAR --- NAKED --- I DOUBLE EVERYTHING!”

 ***(Hesitates, Stuns)***

Didn’t come to dance naked. Didn’t come to get extreme. Modeling was one thing, Rated-X was another……..But there was a DANGERBOY dying to get out. I’d mentioned to another Playwright I was dancing. They ran tole told my whole Playwriting class. Did you know Chippendale’s got started in 1979, but they were in Vegas. I was in Iowa City. Cowboy boots, a red thong and this was 1977.

 ***(Pauses)***

My mother usually calls me “Lon”. When she was really upset would she call me ---

***(Alonzo’s mother talks to him on the phone, more than a little disturbed)***

“***LONNIE, what possessed you to take your clothes off again…..***No, I’m not mad. I’m just your poor embarrassed mother.” Well……………...how much DID you take off? I hope nobody you knew came to......YOUR ENTIRE CLASS?”

***(Hears answer, moves the phone away to catch her breath, regroups, now calm)***

*“Don’t tell your father, your sister or any family members who’s last name ends with LAMONT”*

 ***(Conversation ends)***

Blackness, Vermontness, Goodboyness --- wanted all of ‘em under the same roof. “It’s all about you.” For my generation that was practically an anthem. **Be as much YOU as YOU can possibly be.”**

***(Music now rises. We see the projected shadowy silhouette of a man stripping)***

That night --- Up on that platform --- I thought --- musta been this way for Josephine Baker in France, Paul Robeson in Europe---Marian Anderson at the MET! Did I have their talent? **Hell to the No!** BUT THAT WAS THEIR PLANET --- THIS HERE WAS MINE! ME --- DANGERBOY! The best dancer in only place that mattered --- IN MY OVER-INFLATED, OVERBLOWN, OVER-EDUCATED EGO! DANCIN IN MY OWN GALAXY! ***DANGERBOY ON THE LOOSE!***

***(Music ends. Alonzo hesitates. Is still. A full pause. Slowly, his demeanor changes. Slowly an air of defeat settles in)***

Sadly…….as time went on….

 ***(Pause)***

I discovered that MY “galaxy” …….was much same as one back on earth. And Theatre had **TURNED ON ME**. Theatrical conformity applied the CRUNCH to my ass. Never realize what a commodity your race is, til your talent gets on the open market. I shoulda capitalized on the all the artistic portraits of racism that was making serious bank. You know the territory. Single Moms in the Ghetto. Black youth no direction. Black women without Hubbys. Systemic root causes. Put images to it, put music to it, blenderize and BINGO! You put ***black suffering on display*** out there and somebodys GUARANTEED to say the magic words:

***(Utters the words as though mesmerized)***

*“…...It’s so Powerful”*.

 ***(Laughs)***

Ain’t a Grants Manager, Foundation Big-Wig, Artistic Director, Arts Donor, Fiduciary Rep or Guggenheim Official ALIVE can resist***black suffering on display***.

***(Laughs)***

Ain’t enough for you to be a minority your work gotta represent a minority. During my theatrical lifetime the profitability of racial slash cultural slash “otherness” hadd arrived with a bang, but gettin somebody to produce that otherness, you best have music and dancing cause i***f ain’t got no singin,*** ***ya ain’t sellin no tickets.***

***(Alonzo now sits at a desk and becomes an “elite” Artistic Director on the phone)***

“We LOVE LOVE LOVE that it’s so very gritty, so very URBAN. But wouldn’t it work best with some hip-hop. How about a rapper?! Or a rapper and his crew.” *(Aside) True Biz: Next play they produced was a homeless graffitti artist who loved to rap.*

 ***(And another)***

“For Black History Month we’d like to portray the HARDSHIP that stems from the African diaspora” *(More True Big: They plugged in “South Pacific” with a black cast.*

 ***(Returns to himself)***

The down‘ dirty ‘bout writing plays is nobody gotta like ‘em, read ‘em or produce ‘em. Don’t nobody want, need or care ‘bout your great ideas. Time goes on you feel like a **gamer off the grid**. Ease days **“Writers of Color”** gotta create social justice programs. Gotta have 3rd World Street Cred, gotta adopt a Village, fly in supplies, fund research ---

 ***(“Illustrates”)***

“The Kontiki Jones Theatre Rescue Project, Kontiki’s village was pillaged by dictators --- but Kontiki raised 9 siblings, rescued 3 girls from a prison camp, just did his 10th TedTalk and received his second Pulitzer for “The Perils of Poverty.”

 ***(Laughs, amused)***

“Sarcastic?” What --- Who --- How --- Me? Get outta here --- Stop it”

 ***(Pause)***

………...At some point, Life starts telling you **NO**. And it’s in ALL CAPS. We take for granted we’re having same dreams as everybody traveling with us. But as 25 moves to 26, 27, 28 --- you bearing witness to something else. Your struggle ain’t taking you politically, culturally n’ socially where others going. Life turns into hard rock candy. You bite down, hope nothing cracks or breaks. Over time, the contrary side of your brain says ***“get the fuck outta that lane.”*** You losing jobs, grants, monies, opportunity, bill-paying capacity JUST because “Kontiki” got hisself a global story, and all your cynical sorry-ass got is “a play.”

***(Pause)***

Took me time to realize black folks didn’t care for educated playwrights. In theatre, movies, TV black folks with education are usually pompous clowns. Alwasy brought down to earth by hip-talking streetbrothers. Keepin it real.

 ***(Pause)***

I got bogged down in my own sex muckety-muck. Neighborhood Valentino. Playwriting wasn’t making big enough waves so I crazy-glued my johnson onto the only success I knew. “Inappropriate behavior.” I wanted a new Taboo. I was a nutcase for headcase women. Somewhere around the end of my first marriage I decreed Alonzo should have sex every goddamn day of his life. There’s nothing **WRONG** with making women orgasm. **WRONG** happens thinking you the only one who can.

 ***(Big Laugh)***

 I enjoyed women between the ages of ***(garbles his words)*** to 50.

 ***(Big Laugh)***

Alotta men never throw away that pretty gaze they see around themselves. That gaze fixes onto your young adult image and maybe stays the rest of your life. But at some point, **maturity** asks you to throw onna new light. It’s like taking a shower.

***(Suddenly, he now ‘takes a shower,” bathing in the warmth of falling water)***

When the shower’s over, we wanna step out and dry off. Maybe you still wet, but you gotta step out. If you don’t refocus, don’t start to see truth through grown-up eyes..........then the bigshot you thought you was, becomes the littleshot nobody ever heard of. That shower’s awful safe. Can we take that step? Can we send the child away?

 ***(Finally, ‘steps’ out of the shower, then pauses)***

The real problem was all I knew how to do was write. Not promote. Sell. Evolve. Hadn’t grasped the true grandness my situation required. Had no scope for my survival. No bold strokes.

***(He pauses. And then begins to pace)***

For a while, I lived with a girlfriend in Florida. She had a job, I didn’t. We fought. I left. *(Aside: this was no afterthought, I left but kept the flame burning --- eventually she became my first wife. But after a few married years, flame went out)* Back home. Jobless. But started having productions round the country. Enjoyed good reviews in the quietude of my parents’ basement.

***(Pause)***

***Waiting for the world to come my way.***

***(Pause)***

Finally was getting some praise, compliments, ADVENTURE --- HIJINKS --- ENJOYING MYSELF --- then I up and treated this neighborhood cutie to an ice cream cone. *(SideBar: While I was keeper of the flame for girlfriend who became First Wife, she didn’t want to move up to Baltimore right away, she stayed down south --- that’s when I met the ice cream cutie. Wasn’t married yet. Technically, still single. So I was alone and there was this --- “pussy gap” --- and I was bad).* Anyway, here comes the ice cream cutie. Here come FATHERHOOD. A boy. His name was Charles. I was a father, as they say, “in my own way.”

***(Arrogant)***

“I’ll change some diapers, I’ll spend some time --- but I got a life TAH lead, plays TAH write, awards TAH win and fame TAH GET! Get on outta here with that baby mess!” Never said those words, but if you a new Daddy thinking those thoughts, what’s the dif.

***(Pause)***

You never know how much STRUCTURE’S in your world till CHAOS comes-a- calling. I was still a Raw Dog. Slipping girls down my folks basement. Finally landed a college job. Taught in African-American Studies. This was when African-American Studies still had that...........“SCHOLARLY CACHET”. Taught 20th Century Black Lit, Theatre, Black Theatre, Playwriting, Theatre Production. Over 13-14 years, 4 colleges. From Assistant Professor to Adjunct, I rode them rails.

Found out I hadda son with serious ADHD or something everybody ***thought*** was ADHD and his mother acting like she got the same. But fate stepped in. Round 1990, hadda play being done in Los Angeles, and a TV producer thought I had serious one-liner potential. Was offered a job on a Top-10 HOLLYWOOD TV show. They were flying me out. First class. Finally achieved some traditional, conventional success. This was the blueprint I’d been trying to construct.

 ***(Big laughter)***

You couldn’t tell me nuthin after that! LATER! SEEYA! I’M AUDI! GONE! YOU CAN HAVE YOUR REGULAR LIFE -- I got me some old-fashioned Success. This blueprint told everybody: **KISS --- MY --- ASS!**

***(His laughter peaks, then fades away)***

I left my mark out there, but didn’t last a whole season. In Hollywood years I was a dinosaur. They wanted a hardscrabble new jack playa, I was a college professor from back east. I was let go. I was back to B’Mo.........

***(Turns more serious)***

A couple years pass, and that’s when life started to hurt. Gravity waylaid my ass. Anybody over 30 knows how that works. We stay the same person, but gain 100 pounds of “shit happens”. That 100 pounds changes appearance, alters personality---before you know it, 100 pounds wrapped round your ankles like **mob-boss cement**. Fatherhood tracked me down like a bounty hunter. I was divorced by then. Charles’ mother ran away with drugs --- or vice-versa --- Whatever --- she out the picture. Dropped outta sight. **For many, many years.** I was now Mommy Daddy, Micky D’s Kiddie Cups and DISNEY characters. DISNEY put a Cartoon Brand on my ass. Caught myself eyeballing “The Little Mermaid” inna wrongful manner. Sure, Jessica Rabbit was animation but god help her she back that thang up in on me in ‘Toon Town.

***(Alonzo makes “goo-goo” faces. The crying silences)***

Despite my best efforts I was now the ADULT IN CHARGE. If you’ve seen your mom and pop struggle with Thanksgiving food prep --- you know when it’s time to seize the day. Your family don’t care how REMOVED you been, cause YOU the one AROUND. People in your family will die and it’s YOU gotta get ‘em in the ground. Most folks don’t see that coming till it’s on top of ‘em.

My little man’s ADHD had morphed into a **Transformer** **With Tentacles:** “Asperger’s and Autism”, “Asperger’s Syndrome”, “Asperger’s Disorder”, “Diagnosis of Asperger’s Disorder”, “The Autism Spectrum” --- there’s Encyclopedias devoted to Autism and Asperger’s, but that’s all ON THE PAGE --- IN THE BOOK --- my problems was present and living out loud. Charles’ mind was in flames and nobody had a drop of water. And --- my Valentino Days n Nights Be Over. With a special needs child---you need a sitter, 30 minutes of orientation, an alternate plan, a hard return time, a grandparent, an alternate grandparent --- you can’t break curfew to save your life. You ain’t got time to romance a turnip.

  ***(Pause)***

Develop a case of the 3:00 AM Rude Awakening. If you’re in your 30’s or 40’s and you haven’t carved out some big victories----victories big enough to show how much of a conquering hero you is, then failure starts to shadow. You don’t sleep alone, sleep with everything didn’t go your way. Everything couldn’t make right. What’d I have to show for writing plays? Nice reviews? Some grants? I remember one night at a party, a voice nearby --- “so what are you working on?”

  ***(Pause)***

----In college you leap to answer something like that. **Take stage. Extemporize.** **HOLD FORTH……..**.But gettin older, without them victories --- that question’s spittin in your face. What right did I have to extol the virtues of **Playwriting** when week-after-week I’m camped out in child therapy, daily counseling and a medication schedule. I took it as punishment. Took it as the Great Man Above taking me to task. For what?

I’d had love affairs, all kinds of affairs, but what emotional “leg work” had I done? And here I was getting mad at my son for being----impaired. Belligerent. Manipulative. Ungrateful. Disrespectful----***and for having no capacity whatsoever to appreciate his father.***

***(Pause)***

I was…........Too angry to realize what good could come from sacrifice.

 ***(Pauses, is hit with a blunt truth, becomes quite animated, demonstrative)***

Wasn’t his fault didn’t have two parents. His fault my design for life was all crafted ‘round SELF. Cultures, civilizations, Tribes, Empires--- are modeled on **RESPONSIBILITY TO SOMEONE**. I’d been seduced by Freedom! FREEEDOM TO BE WHATEVER, DO WHATEVER. The joke was on me! My whole generation was the original SELFIES! Never devoting a moment in the service of anything greater than myself. Most of my quality time had all been spent on me

 ***(Starts to angrily stomp around)***

And now I can’t get what I want when I want. **WHAT I WANT WHEN I WANT! WHAT I WANT! WHEN I WANT!**

 ***(Hesitates, pauses, shifts to a warmer recollection)***

I got a buddy, Jake. Jake and I decide to go for a bike ride. Jake lives outside the city and it’s two hours ride to his house, another hour to where we’re going. We’re headed to a park. We get there and it’s the loveliest day. It’d been a hard ride, so we’re breathing like mountain men who’ve crossed a peak. Finally, relaxed, we start talking like guys been known to talk. Go from women and events, to events with women. Bringing up hijinks and **some naughty recollects**. *(Years back Jake had a flat driving some pretty honey home the next morning. He has a flat. He calls me up. I come help fix the flat. “Jake, where you drivin from?” He says “the Hyatt”. “THE HYATT?! --- you spent the night at THE HYATT?! The expensive, concierge HYATT?! That’s not where you go to pursue nighttime nookie! THE HYATT?! What ---* ***A STATELY MANOR*** *wasn’t available?! What ---* ***The Castle Keep was booked! Negro, what are you the Royal ArchDuke of Fuck-En-berry.*** *That pootie ain’t carte blanche. You and your Highness betta git-go over to Motel 6”)* That’s how it went. Had ourselves a time. Finally storytelling comes to an end. Ride back to Jake’s house.

It’s a good 8-9 hours since I’m last home. Come in, Wiffee --- “didja have a good time with Jake?” I say “we had a GREAT time”. Wiffee --- “yes, I heard.” That ain’t the return volley I expected. ***“Yes, I heard”*** isn’t a reply it’s a PRE-CURSOR. A FORETELLING. A HARBINGER OF DOOM. ***“I HEARD EVERYTHING”*** Wifee motions to the answering machine. **“It’s all on there. DID *YOU* EVER TAKE ANYBODY TO MOTEL 6?”** Answering machine only ‘bout 2 steps from where I’m standing, I’m trying to figure how to EXTEND THEM 2 STEPS. PUT DISTANCE ‘tween me and the machine. But it’s right there. I can reach it. Don’t wanna it. Want it to be the longest 2 steps I ever took. Want each step to be half-a century. I reach the machine, gotta press play. Don’t wanna PRESS PLAY. PRESS PLAY GOD KNOWS WHAT I’M HEARING. ***SHE WANTS ME TO******PRESS PLAY***. CAN’T PRESS PLAY. Take two steps. PRESS PLAY.

 ***(Amused)***

But here’s the injustice. I travelled 4 hours by bike, sat in nature, saw birds in flight, water cascading, wasn’t a solitary soul around. ***Jake and I had removed ourselves*** ***to talk*** ***in private.*** So I’m listening and thankfully machine has Jake doing most of the talking. I didn’t provide much at all. Finally it’s over. My thoughts turn to Jake. Jake had butt-dialed me into the Valley Of A 1,000 TINY DEATHS! Waited till late that night, then made the call. Soon’s I started, Jake was laughing through the phone. He says, “your name begins with an A, and I guess I musta rolled over?” Rolled over?! “Jake, that stuff is straight outta the Corleone Family --- put bomb inna car, kiss me on the cheek” My marriage hung in the balance cause his ass rolled over.

 ***(Amused)***

***My name began with an A. And that puts things in motion.***

  ***(Pause)***

If you’re standing at the abyss, when comes time to PRESS PLAY……PRESS PLAY. But do so at your own peril.

 ***(Hesitates)***

***At your own peril………...gotta press play. For your own sanity. Survival.***

  ***(Hesitates)***

Years pass again, I have another girlfriend who thought it’d be good to getaway for a few days. Girlfriend arranged a trip. Weekend getaway. We went to the beach.

Stayed at a B&B. As my girlfriend and I walk in, we’re greeted by this very competent, petite little girly-woman. Early 20’s. Confident. Straight-forward. Different race. The kinda person who’d already tackled the world and won. I was drawn. So was she. But as previously mentioned, I was “accompanied”.

 ***(Pause)***

If I hadn’t been stepping over inappropriate lines all my life, would I have stepped over this one?

 ***(Hesitates, now paces)***

If you’re in a relationship, no matter how comfortable you are, matter how happy you feel ***if you don’t see taking the next step with the person you’re with-----next step ain’t gonna be taken.*** When I met that world-beater she only knew me as a guest who arrived with his girlfriend. She ***could have*** turned out the lights on the entire enterprise. I should havedone same.

 ***(Pause)***

No stranger to indecency, I slipped away and found moments with her. *Not those kinda moments* --- Conversational moments. Talking. Smiling. Finally our eyes really met and it was over. What kinda world we live in where staring at someone can bring you to your knees. Bring you rightside-up. I came to her in such a wrong way --- such an illegitimate premise --- but she didn’t run. We both --- lingered. And in that hypnotic dance that attraction bestows, we both began weaving the web.

  ***(Pauses)***

I got home from that weekend and wrote a love letter. 10 pages, front to back. I wrote about who I thought she was, who I thought I was. 10 pages front to back. It looked like calligraphy and it felt not-of-this-time. The more I wrote, the more my handwriting stood up on those pages ---- it just stood up to all the places I’d come from --- this was not a moment in time, it was thee moment. It was rapture. Little world-beater moved me like church on Sunday. She wasn’t big-city, wasn’t an artist.

 ***(Amused)***

Told her I had a son in trouble, a career at the crossroads and destructive tendencies --- *To womanize.* **She didn’t budge**. We were married within the year.

***(Pause)***

With Charles, we ran into various “mis-Conceptions” that walked into the room with us first times we met with social service folks. They saw Charles’ problems sitting right in front of ‘em. ***“What’s that young white girl know about raising a black child?”*** Nobody ever said that. ***Nobody ever had to****.* Everybody was reading from the same script. My parents had the same “psychologics.” Apparently I had a young wife who didn’t understand the racial dipsy-do’s of a complex black child --- my parents never said that. ***Never had to****.*

 ***(Pauses)***

Every teacher Charles had sounded the alarm. They didn’t know what exactly he had, but whatever it was he had it. Got in trouble once cause I said Charles was a little “walk around crazy.” A psychiatric grad student at Hopkins leaped in my grill.

  ***(Becomes the voice of student)***

“We try and refrain from HURTFUL expressions, Mr. LaMont.”

  ***(Pauses)***

Know what hurts more than expressions. Time in Juvy Court when babyboy starts taking wrong turns. When behavior becomes borderline criminal. Hours pass and you’re a kept audience for outta control YO BOYS. YO’s stand for “youth offenders”. I’m sitting with stick-up boys, group home runaways, drug-running look-outs rap sheets longer than the Magna Carta. One afternoon --- like that Thanksgiving moment --- watching my parents --- my own camera snapped a shot. It was on ME to get him help. ME to stop playing by the rules. Listening to experts. ***IT DON’T MATTER HOW MUCH THEY WANT YOU RELYING ON DIAGNOSIS ---***

 ***(Pauses)***

***Mr. LaMont --- Mr. Alonzo LaMont --- Get the fuck outta that lane!***

 ***(Pauses)***

It got ugly. I became a bad man. An angry Daddy. I was a tough-lovin prison guard. All he knew how to do was scream, tantrum, yell and run to grandparents. People thought I didn’t love my son. People were wrong. I knew children were a gift. Just took me a minute to unwrap my own. But hard to discipline when grandfolks reward bad behavior with **lobster sushi.** Days, weeks, years passed. Days, weeks, years passed --- again.

 ***(Pauses)***

But slowly it all came back around. His birth mother finally re-appeared, and he came to know himself better.

  ***(Pauses)***

Charles finally found himself. Realized he’d had one sweetheart of a life. His Dad had turned him into a “cafe society” boy. We went to coffee shops, drank lattes, mochas and watched the passing parade. Exposed to the hustle/bustle of a certain metropolitan je ne sais quoi.

Charles was an urban troubadour, a bon vivant with Sonic-The-Hedgehog proclivities. Asperger’s don’t have cures, but over time, personal development peeks out and says **hello.** He was present when it did. And then, he bloomed. Wires sparked. **Connections took hold.** Came to know he was a son that existed in a family. Came to know that his father and stepmother were not his enemy. Families take for granted that everybody understands the dynamic. If you’re born emotionally blind, you have to learn it. Baby steps. By the time Charles hit stride, we all hit it. ***We were all Cake-Walking Like Mr. Heidi-Heidi-Heidi-Ho-Cab Callaway himself***. We were all long-striding. The three of us father, wife, son. We saw blue sky. ***Connections took hold.*** Each of us --- still standing. That cave nobody could climb out of? We climbed out.

  ***(Pause)***

I saw Charles do a poetry slam with some of his friends. Before he started I saw him wrestling with that jittery person he used to be. He was all over the place.

 ***(Pause)***

Then he composed, read his poem. But the rap poetry he recited for the slam, wasn’t the poem I heard. The poem I heard was one he gave me for a birthday present. He was 10 years old:

“I love my Dad

He’s not so Bad

He’s never sad, but always glad

That’s why I’m his little com---rade.”

 ***(Amused)***

Regular Grand Master Lil Boy Flash.

  ***(Long Pause, he paces, then grabs his chair, sits)***

Before they passed away, my parents finally saw that my wife Nicole was time and a half for everything. Got to enjoy my mother again. She’d finally taken that step back. Time I’d put into getting Charles helped me see writing plays was a wonderful overture, but not a full symphony. Charles started to understand how people with Asperger’s react, handle things. He got independent. Became an outspoken gay advocate. Worked with other troubled youth. Finally started to realize his father loved him very, very, very --- And then at 21, he died.............

 ***(Pauses, walks back and forth, stops, bows head)***

I got a call. Police arrived at Charles’ apartment. Picked up his cell. Who to call?

**My name began with an A…............and that put things in motion**.

 ***(On phone with Police)***

My wife said they asked more questions. I kept repeating mysonisdead. I don’t remember. I don’t remember. He had an epileptic seizure. Never came back. Never came out of it.

  ***(Pause)***

*Noooooo…..I can’t walk that out. It’s point blank --- bang --- shots fired --- man down.* ***Man. Down.***

  ***(Pauses)***

*Breathe it in. Stare it down. Own it. You’ve cried before ---* ***but ain’t cried THESE TEARS.***

 ***(Pauses)***

Pro athletes play through pain. People lose their child play through the moment that change their life. What you did before a piece of you dies, what you do after-----dots don’t connect. Geography ain’t marked.

 ***(Pauses)***

You join a Special Fraternity. Special Order. Congregation. Only nobody convenes. Takes minutes. Asks for dues. Trust me. You paying dues.

 ***(Pauses)***

You now live inna strange land. Quarantined. Exiled. See ghost of your child in other children. Stare out no reason. Look away no reason. Justify things you mighta done wrong --- wrongs mighta done right. Trouble keeping your head up --- seems to drop, droop, wobble. Shoulders slump, eyes fall, glance down, stay down. Go back to ---the first OH MY GOD when you found out, first OH MY GOD flying outta your mouth, OH MY GOD that’s chasing you down---***OH MY GOD mysonisdead.***

***(Now physically turns around and stops, turns around and stops, repeats***

**SOMEBODY PRESS PLAY! BETTA PRESS PLAY!** **GODDAMNIT PRESS PLAY---**

  ***(Pauses, composes)***

My wife and I sit on the couch, drink coffee, talk --- “so whaddya you think Charles might be doing onna summer day?” There’s so much upside to playing this game. Your mind has a wide periphery. But then….

  ***(Hesitates)***

Truth don’t catch you reminiscing onna couch.

  ***(Pauses)***

Truth catches you alone. Speaks inna voice you don’t wanna hear. Spoke like it’d probably spoke to many before me, many after.

  ***(Whispers)***

**“You. Failed.”**

 ***(Grows louder)***

You heard right.

  ***(Hesitates, then reacts as though the lightbulb went off)***

It’s coming for you --- schemin --- eatin away --- “I gotta get to work, gotta get back on schedule --- **“Fuck schedule………YOU FAILED”**

 ***(Whispers “you failed,” hesitates)***

Did you tackle his disorder the right way? Did you provide best you could? ***Did you leave no fuckin stone unturned?****”*

***(Stage goes dark)***

Pass a certain age, pass a certain tragedy --- we’re all alone in a dark room. No windows. Just dark. We can stay there. We can be safe there. Nothing in that room will hurt, will do damage. You don’t choose to be there, life and age made that choice for you. Older we get, nobody look twice at some sad sack with blahblahblah tale to tell. Your story ain’t trending. P**opular.** *Bury your child see how much* ***popular*** *you need in your life.*

***(Lights return, Alonzo pauses)***

Funny. The beauty of life, joy of living, an afternoon breeze, the absolute perfection of being born so lovely, so innocent----can slowly, disappear. How’d it happen? How’d we all get gone like that?

***(We now see various pictures showing a variety of children projected)***

When you was little, “that wonderful child” you heard so much about---that was you. You through someone’s eyes. For a minute, day, week, year --- you were that innocent. You were that child. But not, them same people saw you every day --- now can’t find you. Who snatched you up?

 ***(Now stands, paces)***

Hadda stop anticipating a certain life would come my way. That I was owed success so big, it’d smack down all the ***insignificance*** somebody’d attached to MY dreams.

***(Hesitates, speed walks round stage, he darts, feints, stops)***

Keeping score everything what done me wrong. Been reading everybody else’s Book of Success, not WRITING MY OWN.

 ***(Angry)***

***When was somebody giving me my own “it’s so powerful” moment!***

 ***(Pauses)***

Hadda throw away the scorecard I’d been playing with……….hadda start enjoying the destiny that got me here. A world that let me come this far.

***(He climbs onto a bicycle, and starts to ride around stage)***

Loved to ride bicycles when I was young. Along the way, we all just give it up. We wanna GET. Wanna GO. Automobiles tease with speed and gimmicks --- so I went for a bike ride.

 ***(Pauses, stop riding)***

And I saw…………….Leaves. Color. Mountains. Nature. SPACE.......

 *(Pause)*

*(Pause)*

And it come to me. Been chasing conventional success from an unconventional standpoint. My blueprint was false. The simplicity of my folly made me smile. And just like that, my own formula wrote itself. I need to embrace everything I come into the world with. I need to be that wonderful child again.

  *(Pause)*

And it come to me. I’d been chasing conventional success from an unconventional standpoint. My blueprint was false. The simplicity of my folly made me smile. And just like that, my own formula wrote itself. I need to embrace everything I come into the world with. I need to be that wonderful child again.

  ***(Pauses)***

Before you lost a part of yourself, you had a lifetime’s allotment of unconditional love to give. Whether you knew, whether you wuz aware --- it was there, it was bank. Somebody’d made a huge deposit in your account. All you hadda worry ‘bout was distribution. Making sure it went to the right principals. Wife. Son. Family. That deposit was a rainy day 401K. But one of the principals left. What happens to their share --- Do you let it go? Fade away? *Those who* *showed you how the bank worked --- Who made deposits for you --- And kept on makin ‘em?! They wouldn’t look kindly on that……………...* **I didn’t know particulars of my account, but I knew I had one.**

***(Pauses)***

After personal tragedy many folks have these confessional moments, epiphanies, raw expressions. For me,losing Charles made me think ---

 ***(Pause)***

**Losing Charles made me ask** --- **“WHY KEEP WRITING?”**

 ***(Pauses)***

That was the question. That’s what I heard. It was there. Facing me down. Straight on. “Why keep writing plays? ***You already done lost more than you could ever gain”***

 ***(Sarcasm)***

 If nobody never created another play, or another playwright who’d miss it? Think there’d be “Public Outcry!?” “**Do not make me laugh.**

 ***(Pauses)***

All my life writing just became this BIG DEMAND--- Spent most my life answering the demand, redoing the demand, trying to crack open a blueprint won’t let me in?

 *(Turning Hysterical, but finding clarity)*

***“Coltrane sang to you! Zora Neale spoke to you ---******You was an Outlaw all along!******Look where you come from?!”***

 ***(Now upset, stomps about, then plays “Devil’s Advocate”)***

But writing got nothing to do with Charles! It’s separate --- private --- one thing got nothing to do with --- **but just like that you lost him --- just like that** --- Much as I may wanna think writing plays was way in one place --- and Charles was way over in another --- losing him broke the geography.

***(Shifts gears)***

But reality said the more I’d divided the two, the more they came together. ***One thing, started to* *inform the other.***

 ***(Pause)***

**When Wintertime come**……..all of us throw on Coats, Scarf, gloves, hat. Bundle up. Keep warm. Especially up here --- **right up around here.**

***(Touches his heart and chest)***

We gotta protect all this. We don’t want our hearts exposed. To the cold. The bitter air. In the morning when you leave out, nobody hollers “protect your heart.” But we do. We hold it close. Hold it dear. And this is where Charles and Writing showed me**……….*the details of my own account*.**

 ***(Pauses, Hesitates, Silence, He downshifts, hesitates even more)***

Losing Charles forced me to face the question, losing Charles forced me to see that my inner map was busted n’ broke. “Why keep writing plays” was staring me down. ***Waiting on an answer!******Not gonna budge till it get one! Standing in your doorway not leaving till this bill get paid?! Is an adult at home? I need a responsible party! A signature! Cash-in-hand! Promisory Note! Verification of a transaction! Show me the account particulars! PROOF!***

 ***(Pause)***

And finally…….

 ***(Pause)***

Something broke through………………...“**Keep Writing**……….**Keep Writing”**.

 ***(Whispers)***

**Expose……….Your……Heart.**

 ***(Pause)***

And if it’s lost. If it’s out there somewhere………...go get it. Find it. Retrieve it. It’s yours. To have and to hold. I hadda get mine. Hadda track it down. Repossess. **Take ownership**. Go get yours……………………………Go bring back that wonderful child. They’re not lost……they’re just waiting.

 ***(All is quiet. All is still)***

I’m Alonzo Lamont. Playwright. Father of Charles. Grown-Up. African-American. Son of Alonzo and Gwendolyn. I’m a “B-Side Man.” And just like all of you here with me now……..just like all of us here this/right/now…….still as beautiful as the day we was born. Thank you.

 ***(Stares at audience***, ***bows)***

***(Lights drop. The End)***