

B-Side Man

A Play by Alonzo LaMont, Jr.

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Character:

Alonzo

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

Stage

One chair.

One Boombox

Two songs:

- 1) Gene Autry's "Back in the Saddle Again"
- 2) Generic R&B song from a free site such as creative commons (something danceable)
- 3) Aerosmith's "Back in the Saddle Again"

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 with the hit. And the B-Side.....when vinyl records were in their heyday the B-Side always seemed to have these **particular little gems**. And when you're young and stumble upon a discovery like that...it feels like the world is full of wonder.....surprise. See, you bought the record for the hit....but flip it over...and you got a song you didn't think you'd get, and it felt like dream you weren't spoiled to have. A track that was off-track. That's my life. I'm a B-Side Man.

(Pause)

Growing up, I didn't Smoke, Drink, Cuss, Party. My sensitive proclivities were front and center, my mother gave me a journal. And I loved retreating into that interior world where feelings become thoughts and vice-versa. I followed rules, and said my prayers, and when I didn't say my prayers, I felt sad for the whole world. My mom taught high school English, my father worked for the Post Office. My mother, she could dole out positive affirmations that'd work just as good for an ax murderer or her only beloved son. She'd say *(softly)* "YOU CANNOT CONTROL ANYBODY ELSE'S BEHAVIOR, YOU CAN ONLY CONTROL YOUR OWN." And my father, he'd make a simple suggestion sound like one of the 10 Commandments. He'd go: "a well-behaved young man **WOULD NEVER ALLOW** his mother to do dishes," or he'd go: "a young man who took pride in himself always kept a clean room."

(Pause)

In my family I saw respect daily. Most especially, I taught to respect girls and women. I didn't wanna do bad things. Bad things were for bad kids. Doing bad would bring a wrong equation to my mother and father. Back in the late 60's in Baltimore City, we had ourselves some riots. And if you know a little recent Baltimore City history you know that "the more things change, the more they stay the...." Anyway, we heard alot about black people rioting, but nobody I knew wanted to go riot. Too much Catholic

upbringing to riot. Beside.....what if it was a sunny day outside? What if my buddies wanted to have a wiffle ball championship? We wanted to play ball, go to movies, parks ---- ***we wanted the kinda fun bad kids could only dream about.***

(Amused)

Like that time, me, Mark and David were taking the bus home from school. David started talking about this CUTE girl he went to see the night before. BUT. The girl's father had come to the door. *(Dad's father: angrily)* "Son what're you doing ringing my doorbell, trying to see my daughter AFTER 9:00 o'clock onna school night?! *(David adds several angry barks)*" So...so there's David's giving his opinion 'bout the girl's father. (now remember, I didn't cuss --- but Mark and David sure did). "That crusty old Mary Franklin got all up in my face, I shoulda asked that Mary Franklin do he know who he dealing with, ***I shoulda told that crusty old Mary Franklin*** --- OUT THE BLUE --- OUT OF THE BLUE --- seat directly in front --- **THAT SAME CRUSTY OLD MARY FRANKLIN WAS NOW TURNING THE BLANK AROUND!**

(Illustrates)

"Yeah that was me!" Somebody shoulda yelled "INCOMING!" "INCOMING!" Cause even though they was just words, that girl's Dad proceeded to BOMBARD DAVID's ASS! Boom! Boom! Boom! Boom! Boom! Boom! David's whole upper torso was bobbin like a bobblehead.

(Imitates Bobblehead David)

"Yes sir, yes sir, I apologize, won't happen again, yessir sir I apologize, it won't happen again". And worse, and worse ---the whole bus was on Dad's side, they was laughing, screaming "yeah pops! Preach! Preach on his ass Pops!" --- just laughing, screaming. Me and Mark? All we could do was put on that Scooby-Doo "RUT-ROW, HE AIN'T WITH US" face. David, looked like the most embarrassed man in the entire History of Embarrassed Men. We all glanced at each other we knew--- WE GOTTA GET THE HELL OFFA THIS BUS! So, so there we are gettin off nowhere near our stop --- we just fell off the bus laughing. We just kept falling and laughing and falling --- we were down on the sidewalk --- people just staring at us flailing round --- lookin like little "snow angels" *(He illustrates)* David finally said, "WHAT ARE THE ODDS?! THE SAME BUS?! THE SAME BUS!"

(Pauses)

Lawdy.....I thought that was the most fun I would ever have in my life.

(Pause)

We all went to the same Catholic high school. One time, standing in line, cafeteria lady said “youse niggas is all the same --- can never make up your minds ‘bout anything.” All hell broke loose. We didn’t have alotta black students at my school but we got everybody involved: Parents, administration. We rectified the situation. Cafeteria lady never saw it coming. After it was over, administration realized even though we were few in number, we’d spoken with a pretty loud voice.

(Pause)

Right there.....maybe that was our riot.

(Pause)

I was pretty sure the Civil Rights Movement been a victory. Only nobody’d bothered to tell us. ‘Gardless of how many **thumbs down** you get from folks today, trust me: We won that bitch. But nowadays all you hear is that we’re still facing impossible odds, barriers, hurdles, obstacles --- **oh hell, that’s a cave nobody can climb outta.** Cafeteria lady didn’t define us. That was a sideshow, not a main attraction. Our parents had already done so much, already come so far, they didn’t expect us to stay stuck on stupid.....

(Pause, downshifts)

I went to a small college: in Vermont. I took a train to New England in early fall. Saw fall like I’d never seen before. Leaves. Color. Mountains. SPACE. Outdoors like I’d never seen. But everybody was **just soooooo beholding to Nature.** I couldn’t get on board. My vision was small, nature was just too vast. So I ran contrary.

(Pause, then amused)

In Vermont: girls wore combat boots, long denim skirts all the way down to China, and looked like Amish Gypsies. Imagine: Tinker Bell inna pair of Doc Martens slogging through the Black Forest, searching for Dutch oven and a barn to raise. And some Unspoken Law said women in Vermont **MUST. MAKE. POTTERY.**

(Amused)

In Vermont: boys rolled their own cigarettes, and dressed like poetic lumberjacks. Imagine: Scruffy, ponytail, linguistic anti-heroes with a passion for flannel and just the

right touch of plaid. Post-Woodstock Vermont, had everybody jumpin into Personal Freedom. Space. Individuality. ***Focusing on yourself, what could be more pure than that.***

(Pause)

And I found out later them lumberjacks wasn't rollin no cigarettes. Freshmen year first week, a Professor walks over, "You look like a writer. "do you keep a journal?" AT THAT VERY MOMENT my future money-making potential took a nose dive. I started to embrace the esoteric concept that my own THINKING AND WRITING were faaaaar superior to the cold logic of Math and Science. Later on, same year a Drama Professor said "with your dialogue, you really should be writing plays". *"Well Sophocles, (Sophocles, Playwright, MacDaddy of Greek Theatre) go on n' start writing you some plays, make yourself some Dram-Ma."* Math n' Science. SCREW 'EM! SCREW 'EM! Thinking and writing could takedown **Numbers and Nature.**

(Amused, then switches gears)

I was riding that wave, riding that wave and then --- something happened.

(Pause)

Freshmen year I became a nude model for an art class. Least I TOLD MYSELF it was for an art class. How'd it happen? Glad you asked! I glanced innna mirror one night, "boy you done up and got yourself HANDSOME!" My mother, she --- she didn't share the same enthusiasm.

(Mom on the phone)

"Nude? Head to Toe? Yes I KNOW what ARTISTIC means. Right now it just means nakkid in art class. Yes, I still --- yes I still love you very much. Love you more with your clothes on --- AND PLEASE DO NOT TELL YOUR FATHER!"

(Conversation ends)

Don't blame me! NARCISSISM HAD COME A-KNOCKIN, all I'd done is open the door. Don't blame me --- **Do not blame me** --- blame it on the Age of Aquarius. Blame it on the Black Arts Movement. See, my friends said school up north would make me lose my blackness. At the time, there weren't alotta black students anywhere in Vermont, whenever I saw one or two my first thing was "where the hell did they come from?" My teachers seemed to share the same "losin blackness" anxiety cause they gave me alotta one-on-one tutorials --- and so while I was lovin me some Joni

Mitchell melancholy, I was also hearing and learning about Coltrane --- was lucky enough to catch Fugard's "Sizwe Banzi is Dead" off-Broadway --- it rocked my world to discover there was a yodeling, black jazzman name **Pharoah Sanders**, and Pharoah was chanting (*he chants*) "The Creator Has A Master Plan, Peace and Happiness for Every Man." I took a black drama excursion through Bullins, Baraka, Adrienne Kennedy, Samm-Art Williams, **Wole Soyinka** --- got all booked up with Ralph Ellison, Zora Neale, Langston, Chester Himes *and apologies to everybody else I'm forgetting.*

(Pause)

Historically, black artists have always been Swaggadocious. Rip roarin. Bodacious. They always had this "intoxicating Bad-Assery." And diving into their worlds let me know that **mentally**, my mind could compete on any level, physically, well (*indicates his body*) all this was just icing on the cake.

(We hear music, Alonzo starts to sway, move)

I felt like I belonged to a creative history. Like I had the right to create a brand-new space. The discovery of all that artistic righteousness, told me that I was a new-found man. My mind had seen the light, and my body followed through. I took on the world. I was fearless. Unafraid. Awake. I started to dance. Alone. Alot. In bars. Clubs. At that age no worries 'bout moves, partners, parameters --- the best dancers in the world is the ones who think they is. **RENEGADES. REVOLUTIONARIES. WITH NO EFFING PROTOCOL.** Just get out n' go! Besides: it ain't no contest -- - you ain't come for approval! Just celebrate n' gyrate. I was now a new-found-freed-up man, and couldn't nobody nowhere tell me a blessed thing about how to walk through this life.

(He stops moving, hesitates, switches gears)

OK, OK, Ok.....so we had ourselves a motley crew of basketball players. And we'd travel round to other small colleges, barnstorming 'round the New England countryside. Playing pick-up games, whatever.

(Amused)

So one night, a bunch of us was all scrunched up in this convertible. And there was **some female company, too.** And everybody's just goofin on each other, recapping our highlights. Suddenly I feel a leg on my hand --- HOLE UP. HOLE UP. No, no, maybe that's a hand --- on my leg --- **No, that hand's on somethin that's not my**

leg at tall. Nobody'd EVER made a move like that on me. A world of possibilities sprang up.

(Laughs)

Cause if this one woman could desire me, then somewhere there might be a whole **population** of women, EXISTING SOLELY TO DESIRE ALONZO. *Ohhhhhh*
Bingo Bango Bongo Baby!!!

(Laughs, quickly transitions)

But, as I recollect, it was Sophomore year when I was fully initiated into the "hotsprings of desire." Yesssss. Someone older. Someone married. Professor's wife. Boyyyyyyy. I started stepping over lines like I'd been doing it all my life. I told my mom, and again, she didn't seem to share the same---

(Becomes his Mother)

"MARRIED! Lonnie (nickname)....now there's a little voice inside you. And that little voice can tell you to do tell you to do the right thing or the wrong thing. Now, what's that little voice telling you?"

(Makes "don't know" face)

I'd damn sure heard that little voice before, but being with someone UNATTAINABLE was an erotic highball, and I got myself good n' liquor'd up. Me and Miss Wrong Thing got attached like circus acrobats.

(Laughs)

But. Here's the problem. My college only had 250 students, rumors ran amuk, whispers got loud. **Little did I know that THIS kinda scandalous behavior would be the genesis of a personal quest that would repeat itself.**

(Pause, 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 race, 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. But if you're an adult, chances are you stay on that ride. I stayed. I wanted women who were off limits, outta bounds. I didn't want normal. HA! I watched friends get BURIED UP TO HERE in Normal. I wanted me some Taboo. Now, as you move through your own romantic history, if you are so inclined to step OFFA your own "sexual reservation".....you're probably

opening doors shoulda stay closed.

(Puts leg onna chair, stands like a majestic EXPLORER)

Came to realize I was on a great expedition.

(Sits Again)

All the great Explorers n' Conquerors --- your Walter Raleighs, Magellan, Hannibal, Genghis Khan --- at some point, all probably kicked-back and said, "I'm richer than I've ever been". Not rich from some plundered booty, rich from Old World and New. Rich from where they came from, to where they headed. Baltimore felt all black and white, Vermont felt like a kaleidoscope. And I felt rich in both worlds.

(Pause)

In B'Mo I went to parties armed with only ***ideas and vo-cab-bu-lary***. I watched these hard-working, 9-to-5 corporate endicotts stare down women like they was Houdini, BRAGGIN BOUT their flashy new putt-putts and pocket cash ---

BRAGGIN BOUT their net worth like it was oral foreplay. *(playboy seductive)* ***"Oh baby, baby, now you know you wanna get with all this right here (laughs)***

Growing up black men think females will just fall under our spell when most times, we's the ones gettin spellbound.

(Alonzo's mood changes, darker)

Even though thinking and writing felt like my only employable skills, I felt proud! Uniquely proud!

(Hesitates)

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

(Pause, re-groups)

After graduation, after studying ***(playful mocking)*** Theatre....Playwriting. I hadda take more than my share of temp jobs --- I was dressing mannequins, cleaning alotta factory toilets. I was brung low. I decided that maybe Grad School should be my next move. See, writing plays in Vermont....people treated you like a kid using crayons for the first time (*"Oh look! Look! He's using ALL THE COLORS!"*). I got into the University of Iowa. I needed to find out if Alonzo was notable, noteworthy or nothing.

(Pause, then brightens)

And at Iowa, I quickly realized that with Playwriting I'd Metamorphisizzzzzd from Caterpillar to **Butterfly**. Little did I know that THEATER didn't really need "black playwrights" studying no grad school "form and structure." Nope. Naw. Na-Da. They wanted you to be a street brother. Giving the finger to white society. Passing along the some angry urban groupthink. Black playwrights were spozed to beat the revolutionary tom-tom. "Hey brother, if you can't deliver some genuine racial outrage, don't nobody need your educated ass!" That was the message I was hearing by time I got to Iowa. But at Iowa....I'd also found out something else.

(Pause)

Something Singular. Seductive.....

(Pauses)

I took a dance class. Now, I'm no professional dancer, I only took dance cause at the time I felt too pretty **NOT** to take dance. Anyway, a friend of mine in class said she knew a place where I could dance and make a few bucks. So I went to this Bar. And the Owner said "young fella, bring your own music. Dance 45 minutes, I give you \$150 bucks." **SURE THING.** \$150 for 45 minutes! Hey, I had alotta my own music, but I had one song that brought out the nasty demon in me: AeroSmith's, "Back in the Saddle Again" Back in the late 70's wasn't nobody black humming them no Areosmith! "Back in the Saddle Again." In 1939 an American movie star-cowboy name Gene Autry wrote "Back in the Saddle Again". It's about a cowboy and his horse moseying long the open prairie.....and Gene throws in a couple "whoopie-I-ohhhs," and "whoopie-I-ehhhhs". But Aerosmith

(Alonzo turns on Gene Autry's song)

sang about a ROOTIN TOOTIN ASS UP FACE DOWN SEX BAZAAR.

(Pause, he takes a swig of water)

So I shows up at the Bar, and I notice this line. This very long line. And then I see a poster *(He reads)* "FIRST TIME! ONE NIGHT ONLY! MALE DANCER!" Holy Shimmy Shake! I was THE FIRST TIME ONE NIGHT ONLY DANCER. **COME TO FIND OUT:** Previously, they'd only had female dancers. I was the grand experiment! I was the young Frankenstein! So I'm in my dressing room, and my nerves was all backed up on me. And then I had a thought --- *"this moment is exactly where you want to be. This moment is exactly who you are"*.

(Hesitates)

So I walk out, I get up on this tiny platform, this tiny square platform. Not alotta room to romper-stomper around but that's OK, cause I a little goes a long way. I was in cowboy boots and a red thong. **Unbeknownst to me**, my friend from dance class had told my entire Playwriting class and THERE THEY WERE. My Playwriting class had told my Playwriting Professor and THERE HE WAS. And here I was. I surveyed the crowd.

(Serious)

Everybody was now in my world. They'd paid to be there. You wanna know what I felt?***Aroused. Mentally and physically.....Aroused.***

(Amused)

But. I'm wondering if AROUSED had worked it's way down? I didn't wanna look down. Maybe it had. Maybe it had not. But, this was Iowa City. This was 1977. These folks had probably NEVER seen a half-naked black man ***Aroused. Before.*** And then my song came on. And I was back in that saddle again.

(Alonzo turns on Aerosmith's "Back in the Saddle Again", dances, abruptly stops)

I danced the first 45 and the Owner said ---

(Owner)

"Young fella! I got a situation. I gotta line outside goin round the block, I gotta get that money in here. I NEED YOU TO GET OFFA THAT PLATFORM, GO DANCE ON THE BAR --- NAKED --- I DOUBLE EVERYTHING!"

(Hesitates, Stuns)

I didn't come to dance naked. I didn't come to get extreme. Nude modeling in art class was one thing. Rated-X was another.....But that night, there was a DANGERBOY dying to get out.

(Laughs)

That night --- Up on that platform --- I thought --- this musta been what it was like for Josephine Baker in Paris, for Paul Robeson in Europe, AND NINA SIMONE ANYWHERE! Did I have their talent? **Hell to the No!** BUT THAT WAS THEIR PLANET --- THIS HERE WAS MINE! ME --- AND I INTENDED TO BE THE BEST DANCER IN THE ONLY PLACE THAT MATTERED --- MY OVER-

INFLATED, OVERBLOWN, OVER-EDUCATED EGO! **DANGERBOY ON
THE LOOSE! DANGERBOY IN HIS OWN GALAXY!**

(He dances for another full beat. Then, slowly, his demeanor changes. Turns off music. An air of resignation settles in)

(Pause)

Sadly.....as time went on....

(Pause)

I discovered “Dangerboy’s new galaxy”was much the same as the one back on “Earf”.....

(Pause)

And Playwriting conformity had applied the CRUNCH to my ass. See, you never realize what a commodity your race is til your talent gets on the marketplace. I shoulda been smart and started writing one of them sad-sack slave narratives that was gettin soooooooooo popular. Or writing some angry manifesto condemning “the system.” “The system” must be more powerful than Jesus cause apparently my people been falling into it, trapped by it, victimized by it, caught up in it and dropping dead from it. If Ida had any good sense Ida wrote me a play called it “SEE WHAT THE SYSTEM DID TO US” Ida made slavery sizzle like a 1940’s Busby Berkeley musical. Make it grand! Make it sing! Make it Wall-to-Wall IMAX injustice. **Hey, make no mistake** --- in the artistic arena, you gotta put some serious **black suffering on display**. You put some black suffering on display and white people --- black people -- - they’re all GUARANTEED to say the magic words:

(Utters the words as though mesmerized)

“It’s just.....so powerful”.

(Laughs)

C’mon now, you and I know --- suffering, racism, oppression are like cotton candy at a carnival. They’re all freakin commercial mainstays. ***Lemme ask: What the fucks good being a Writer of Color if you can’t share a lil pain and suffering? That’s what we do.”***

(Laughs)

“Sarcastic?” Who? Me? What? Stop! STOP IT! GET OUTTA HERE!”

(Pause)

I danced a few more times in Iowa. Later on, I danced some in D.C. But that was a harder scene altogether. I loved going in and out of the sensual realm.....but I only wanted to make a point, not have a career. I guess, growing up.....I'd been living inna pretty safe harbor. I only wanted to see how far from shore I could swim. That's all.

(Pause, turns serious)

.....Eventually, for most of us, Life starts telling you **NO**. And it's in ALL CAPS. We take for granted we're having the same dreams as everybody traveling along with us. But as 27 moves into 28, 29, 30 --- you realize the only place your plays are being worked on is your own computer.....then as 31, turns into 32, 33....you start to bear witness to something else. See, your struggle ain't taking you artistically, culturally, socially into the circles you wanna be in. Your day-2-day turns into hard rock candy. You bite down, hoping nothing cracks or breaks. You losing jobs, grants, **bill-paying capacity** cause somebody else got theyselves a genuine slave narrative and all your cynical ass got is “a play.”

(Pause, Shifts gears)

OK. Segue....Round the end of my first marriage I decided to celebrate by declaring that Alonzo should have sex every goddamn day for the rest of his life. **A FUCKIN MAN.....ONNA FUCKIN MISSION.**

(Laughs, Parades about)

Focusing on myself: what could be more pure than that? And for the record: there's nothing **WRONG** with making women orgasm. **WRONG** happens thinking you the only one who can.

(Big Laugh)

You see, there's alotta men like me who never throw off that pretty gaze we build around themselves. But at some point, maturity asks you to stand inna new light. It's like taking a shower. Shower's over, we wanna step out. We may not be dry. May still be wet, but your urge is to step out. Move on.

(Pause)

...if you don't step outta that pretty gaze...don't start seeing your own truth through grown-up eyes.....then the bigshot you thought you was, becomes the littleshot

nobody ever heard of.

(Pause)

My real problem was all I knew how to do was write. Not promote. Sell. Evolve. Hadn't grasped the true grandness my situation. No scope for my survival. No bold strokes. ***Waiting for the world to come my way.***

(Pause. Then begins to pace)

For awhile, me and a girlfriend, ***at the time***, were living in Florida. She had a job, I didn't. We fought. I left. Came back to B'Mo, mid-30's, living in my parents basement, **DOING WHAT???** ***Thinking and Writing.....***

(Pause)

But just like that.....I landed a college teaching job. Taught in African-American Studies. African-American Studies has such a "SCHOLARLY CACHET". Taught Black Lit, Black Drama, Theater Playwriting. 14 years, 4 colleges. Assistant Professor to Part-Timer to Adjunct, Ohhhh, I rode them rails. Anyway, round time I landed my teaching job I started having a few productions 'round the country. Getting me some praise, some kind words, **having a few ADVENTURES**. Then one day, I treated this neighborhood cutie to an ice cream cone. Turn Page/Turn Page.

FATHERHOOD. A son. Name Charles.

(Arrogant)

But I wanted to stay on Alonzo time. "Hey-Hey, I'll change me some diapers --- 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!" Now, I never said those words. But if you a new Daddy thinking those thoughts, what's the dif cause you compromised either way.

(Pause)

Soon discovered my little man had some serious ADHD or something everybody ***thought*** was ADHD and his mother acting like she got the same. But fate stepped in. In 1990, I hadda play being performed in Los Angeles. A TV producer saw it, thought I had serious one-liner potential. Offered me a job on a Top-10 NBC-TV show. Flying me out. First class. TO HOLLYWOOD!

(Big laughter)

You couldn't tell me nuthin after that! LATER! SEEYA! YOU CAN HAVE YOUR REGULAR LIFE --- **I got me some old-fashioned Success. And that Success**

told everybody, told all them local-yokel clauddiddlehoppers they could KISS --
- MY --- ASS!

(His laughter peaks, then fades away)

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

(Turns serious)

A couple more years pass, and that's when gravity waylaid my ass. Anybody over 40 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, that 100 pounds is wrapped round your ankles like **Corleone quick cement**. Daddy duty had tracked me down like a bounty hunter. Charles' mother ran away with drugs --- or drugs run away with her --- *Whatever* --- she out the picture. I was now Mommy Daddy, and my circumference was the Wonderful World of Disney and Mickey D's Kiddie Cups. And DISNEY Channel had put some voodoo on my behind. I found 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.

(Pause)

Despite my best efforts...I was now the ADULT IN CHARGE. If you've ever 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 who's now AROUND. Your people will die and it's YOU gotta gettum in the ground. Most folks don't see that coming till it's on top of 'em.

Charles' ADHD had morphed into a Transformer With Tentacles cause now they'd changed his diagnosis to Asperger's --- Autism and Asperger's got theyselves a whole spectrum, sounds colorful, but it ain't. There's practically entire Encyclopedias devoted to Asperger's, but that's all ON THE PAGE --- IN THE BOOK --- my problems was present and living out loud. Charles' brain was on fire but nobody hadda drop of water. Plus --- PLUS my Valentino Days n Nights Be Over. With a special needs child---you need a sitter with patience, at least a 30 minute orientation, a

hard return time, a grandparent, alternate grandparent --- can't break curfew to save your life. Ain't got time to romance a turnip.

(Pause)

You develop a bad case of 3:00 AM WIDE AWAKE. If you're mid-life and haven't carved out some big victories --- then failure starts to shadow. You don't sleep alone, you sleep with everything didn't go your way. Everything you couldn't make right. I remember one night at a party, a voice nearby --- "so Alonzo, what are you working on? What are you writing?"

(Pause)

---In your glorious "flower of youth" you leap to answer something like that. **TO HOLD FORTH --- TAKE STAGE!** But without them big victories --- that question's spittin in your face. That question was for real artists heading out into the land of important work. Charles and me was camped out in child therapy, school counseling and a hard n' fast child 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? What time had I volunteered? And now here I am getting mad at my son for being belligerent, manipulative, ungrateful --- ***and for having no capacity whatsoever to appreciate his father.***

(Pause)

I was.....way too angry realize what good could come from sacrifice.

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

Wasn't his fault didn't have two parents. Wasn't his fault my design for living was all crafted around "SELF." Throughout history there's entire cultures, civilizations, tribes, empires--- **ALL MODELED AROUND RESPONSIBILITY TO SOMEONE.** I'd been seduced by Freedom! FREEDOM TO BE WHATEVER, DO WHATEVER. My whole generation was the original SELFIES! And 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, pause, shifts to a warmer recollection)

One day my buddy Jake calls me up. Says let's ride our bikes out to a park near his way. So I ride my bike to Jake's and then we ride to the park. So we're at the park, and we start talking like guys been known to talk. Women and events, events with women.

(NOW: Jake's the same guy who....one morning driving some pretty honey he'd met at a club back home, he has a flat. But Jake don't have the whasis to fix the flat. He calls me up, I got the whasis so I come help. I go, "Jake, where'd you and the honey spend the night?" "the Hyatt". "THE HYATT?! --- you spent the night at THE EXPENSIVE CONCIERGE HYATT?! That ain't where you take nighttime nookie! What --- Edinburgh Castle wasn't available?! You couldn't book a "FRENCH CHAP-POE?!" NEGRO --- You out here spending money like you the Royal ArchDuke of Fuck-In-Ham. That pussy ain't Carte Blanche! You and the Princess betta get yourselves to a Motel 6")

(Laughs)

So anyway.....me and Jake enjoy the day. Hours later I'm back home. Another girlfriend, **at the time**, was staying over. She goes, "didja have a good time with Jake?" She motions to the answering machine, "it's all there." Jake, had butt-dialed me into the Valley Of A 1,000 TINY DEATHS. That Answer machine ain't but 2 steps from where I'm standing, but I'm trying to EXTEND THEM 2 STEPS. I want them two steps to be the longest 2 steps I ever took. Want each step to be half-a century. I don't wanna PRESS PLAY. I PRESS PLAY GOD KNOWS WHAT I'M HEARING. But...Finally...I PRESS PLAY. Thankfully, the machine has Jake doing most of the talking. I didn't provide much at all.

(Pause)

All that happened cause --- **My name began with an A, and that put things in motion.** Moral of story: facing a moment of truth, a time of crisis: you just gotta PRESS PLAY.

(Pause)

Years pass again, another girlfriend, **AT THE TIME**, thought it'd be good to getaway for a few days. So we go to the beach. Arrive at this B&B, and we're greeted by this very competent, petite little girly-woman. Early 20's. Confident. Different race.

The kinda person who'd already tackled the world and won. I was drawn. So was she.

(Pause)

(Again, pulls the audience into his "little secret")

.....In relationships, no matter how comfortable you are, matter how happy you feel ---- ***if you DO NOT see yourself taking the next step with that person you with --- that next step ain't gonna be taken.*** When I met that little world-beater she knew me as a guest arriving with a girlfriend. She ***could have*** turned out the lights on the entire enterprise. I should have done same. But....

(Pause)

No stranger to indecency, I slipped away and found moments with her --- ***Noooo, not those kinda moments.*** Conversational. Talking. Smiling. Ohhhhh Jesus, what kinda world we live in where just staring into a stranger's eyes can bring you to your knees? I came to her in such a wrong illegitimate premise --- but she didn't run. We both --- lingered. And began weaving the web.

(Pause)

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. More I wrote, more my handwriting stood up on those pages, stood up to all the places I'd come from. Good n' bad. Lil world beater had moved me like the Holy Ghost.

(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 both ran into various "Mis-Conceptions" every time we walked into the room 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.*** Apparently I had a young wife who didn't understand the racial dipsy-do's of a complex black child --- Grandparents were reading from the same script. They also never said, ***never had to.***.....

(Pause)

Charles and I were spending alotta time in Juvenile Court cause his behavior was taking wrong turns. So we're sitting with stick-up boys, group home runaways, drug-running look-outs, rap sheets longer than the Magna Carta. And one afternoon, just like that Thanksgiving moment watching my parents, the lightning bolt struck --- "Alonzo. Stop painting by numbers. Ain't no court, no mental health professional no diagnostic fantasia can rescue your son. ***You are the load bearing vehicle.....and you gotta get outta this lane***"

(Pause)

It got ugly. I became a bad man. An angry Daddy. 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 always 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.

(Pause)

But slowly it all came around. His birth mother finally re-appeared, and he came to know himself better. I give credit to her for that.

(Pause)

Charles realized he'd had one sweetheart of a life. His Dad had exposed him to "cafe society". We went to coffee shops, drank lattes, and watched the passing parade. We strolled the boulevards of Baltimore discussing the value of gummy bears vs. fruit roll-ups. I introduced him to a few artists, writers, musicians. Exposed him to a certain metropolitan je ne sais quoi.

(Pause)

Asperger's don't have cures, but over time, personal development peeks out and says **hello**. He was present when it did.....he came to know he was a son that existed in a family. Came to know his father and stepmother were not his enemy. Families take for granted that everybody understands the dynamic. But if you're born emotionally blind, you have to learn it. Baby steps. By the time Charles hit stride, we all hit it. The three of us father, wife, son. We saw blue sky. ***All felt connections take hold***. We'd all climbed outta one of them caves nobody could climb outta.

(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. 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."

(Long Pause, grabs chair, sits)

Time I'd put into my son helped me see writing plays was a wonderful overture, but not a full symphony. He started to understand how people with Asperger's react, handle things. He became independent, had his own apartment. Became an outspoken gay advocate. Started working with other troubled youth, blooming like the yellow rose of texas and finally realized his father loved him very, very, very --- And then at 21, he died.....

(Pause, walks back and forth, stops, bows head)

He had a seizure. Never came out of it. Never returned.....

(Pause)

His neighbors heard. Something. Police arrived. Picked up his cell. Who to call? **My name began with an A.....and that put things in motion.**

(Pause, starts to move, stops)

Noooooo.....I can't...I can't....walk that out. It's point blank --- You gotta take face front. Lookit in the eye.....Cause it's damn sure lookin back, it's damn sure all up in you.....You don't know can you move? Do your legs work? What's holding you up?! What's stopping your fall.

(Pauses)

Yeah you've cried before --- but you ain't cried THESE TEARS.

(Pauses)

What you did before a piece of you dies, what you do after-----dots don't connect. Geography ain't marked, cause 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 the rights you mighta done wrong --- wrongs mighta done right. Trouble keeping your head up --- Shoulders slump, eyes fall. And take you back to ---first OH MY GOD when you found out, first OH MY GOD flying outta your mouth, first OH MY GOD still chasing you down---**OH MY GOD mysonisdead.**

(Angry)

PRESS PLAY! PRESS PLAY! PRESS PLAY---

(Pause, 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.

(Pause)

Truth catches you alone. Speaks inna voice you don’t wanna hear. **A voice you don’t wanna hear.**

(Whispers)

“You. Failed.”

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

YOU FAILED.

(Hesitates)

Did you tackle his disorder the right way? Did you provide best you could? Get the best help? ***Didja Leave no stone unturned? Did you.***

(Pause)

Pass a certain point, a certain tragedy --- we’re all alone in a dark room. No windows. Just dark. We can be safe there. Nothing in that room will hurt, will do damage. You don’t choose to be there, life and age make that choice for you. They put you there cause you, your story, your “circumstance” ain’t trending. Ain’t Popular. **POPULAR! Bury your child see how much popular you need in your life.**

(Pause)

When we get in that dark room, it’s easy to start wondering how....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 so GONE from all that?

(Pause)

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 child. But now, them same people saw you every day --- can't find you.

(Now stands, paces)

Hadda stop thinking I was owed success so big, it'd smack down all the **insignificance** somebody'd attached to MY dreams.

(Hesitates)

Hadda start enjoying the destiny that got me right here. A world let me come this far.

(Pause)

I went for another bike ride and I saw.....Leaves. Color. Nature.
SPACE.....

(Pause)

Right there. In Baltimore, and it was just like stepping into that first New England fall. Only now.....my vision'd finally caught up.

(Pauses)

And I saw that before you lost a part of yourself, you had a lifetime's allotment of unconditional love to give. Whether you wuz aware, whether you wasn't --- it was there, it was BANK. Somebody'd made a huge deposit in your account. All you hadda worry 'bout was distribution. Wife. Son. Family. That deposit was a rainy day 401K. But one of your people left. What happens to their share --- Do you let it go? Fade away? ***Those who showed you how the bank worked --- parents, aunts, uncles, greats, grands, they wouldn't look too kindly on that..... I didn't*** know the particulars of my own account, but I knew I had one.

(Pause)

Losing Charles made me think --- No. NO.....

(Pause)

Losing Charles made me ASK --- **"WHY KEEP WRITING?"**

(Pause)

You already done lost more than you ever gonna gain!

(Sarcasm)

If nobody never created another play, think there'd be ---- what? Some "public outcry!?" **Do not make me laugh.**

(Pause)

Hear me out.....

(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)

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 account.**

(Pause)

See cause "why keep writing" was on the table. Was staring me down. Me in the dark room.

Hearing the voice I didn't wanna hear --- (Grabs his head, covers his ears, yells, repeats "The Voice I don't wanna hear") THE VOICE I DIDN'T WANNA HEAR! THE VOICE I DON'T WANNA --- HEAR!

(He stops, collects himself)

Finally.....something broke through.....**"Keep Writing.....Keep Writing"**. Zora Neale gave you words. Coltrane gave you sound. **Charles gave you....**

(Laughs)

Charles! Charles!!! Charles was already there! In my writing!

(Pause)

Speaking truth so loud it made me say the words.

(Hesitates, whispers)

"Expose.....Your.....Heart"

(Pause)

"Expose your heart" And if it's lost. If it's out there somewhere.....go get it. It's yours. Hadda get mine back. Hadda track it down.

(Pause)

Go get yours.....go embrace everything you come into the

world with. Bring back that “wonderful child”. Go hear that song you didn’t think you’d get. Have that dream you weren’t spozed to have. Maybe we’re all tracks.....who’re just a little off-track.

(Major Beat)

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

(Stares at audience, bows)

(Lights drop. The End)