

## Out of Body

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A play in One Act

By Shawntai Brown

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## CAST LIST

LAUREN - A Black middle school math teacher in her 30s-40s who is queer but not out at work. She heads the Virtual After-school Club Committee. She is able to relax with Keith, but remains very reserved at work.

KEITH - A playful Black social studies teacher in his 30s-40s. Always trying to minimize himself as a perceived threat, he is neat, well put together and tries to hold his tongue..

JAMELL - Girlfriend of Lauren. In her late 20s-40s.

MEGAN - Middle school history teacher who leans deeply conservative. She may be any race or age.

BRENNA - An eager creative writing teacher who prides herself on her self-proclaimed progressiveness. She tends to be presumptuous and miss the mark. She may be 20s-early 40s. She may be any race or age.

WINONA - A science teacher in her 40s-60s with a colorful sense of humor, often lacking sensitivity or awareness to others. She may be any race.

## SETTING

Present day virtual video conference call for an East Michigan middle school. In the virtual video conference, characters other than those casts, such as pets, children, housemates and partners, may walk through the background of any video (except for Lauren'). The casted characters may briefly respond to these cameos in character to the effect of "I'm in a meeting."

## SYNOPSIS

Lauren fears exposing her private life on the job when a student request for a Queer Student Alliance opens an opportunity for transparency and leadership.

## PRODUCTION NOTE

Definition: Out of Body Experience - 1. a phenomenon in which a person perceives the world from a location outside their physical body. *Example:* 1. Discussion of your identity as an idea, a talking point, a moment for one to prove one's woke-ness, an evil to fight against, or a exemplar to fight for -- rather than a lived and alive reality. 2. When the world speaks around you, for you, about you and not to you ; or when you begin to speak as if you are not yourself to preserve yourself. 3. Chat boxes.

## SCENE 1

The play begins in the middle of a video conferencing call between LAUREN and KEITH. Each character appears in their own virtual window. LAUREN 's space is full of plants and light, calming colors. She may even have a diffuser in the background creating a fragrant mist. Somewhere in her space is a symbol of LGBTQ+ culture (may be one of the many flags or supportive organizations), subtle but visible. She feels free in her own space, and moves in this way, letting herself stretch and walk around the space as she speaks with candor to KEITH. KEITH's space is clean and professional, perhaps with sports or music memorabilia. They both snack on veggies or nuts and talk with the rapport expected of their years of friendship.

KEITH

And so Antonio unmutes himself and just starts burping into the computer like he has a symphony of Faygo rising up out of him.

LAUREN

Not a symphony. I can't with you, Keith.

JAMELL enters LAUREN's room as KEITH and LAUREN talk, coming in and out of the view of the camera. KEITH smiles at this. JAMELL searches under items looking for something.

KEITH

I can't with this virtual teaching, Lauren. I keep muting him and Antonio somehow hacks the system, makes himself an administrative host, and starts burping all through my lesson.

LAUREN

(Laughing.)

I miss Antonio. I loved having him last year. As much as he interrupted my class, the kid was funny as shit. Future icon.

(To JAMELL.)

What's up, babe.

JAMELL

Trying to find my phone. My mother said she would call me with her lab results at 4:30 and now it's about to hit five. And I can't even find my phone to call the hospital.

KEITH

Hi, Jamell.

JAMELL

Oh, shit! I'm sorry. I didn't know you were in a meeting.

LAUREN

This is our Vent and Veg time. It's just me and Keith for the next, shit, 45 seconds or so before After-school Club Committee meets.

(Beat.)

I'll yell when it rings, baby.

JAMELL

Thanks. I'm gonna take a shower, try to relax.

JAMELL kisses LAUREN on the cheek.

LAUREN lifts her hand to hold JAMELL's face to hers for just a second longer. JAMELL exits.

KEITH

Let me ask you something. In all the ten years you have been with Jamell, how come you ain't hooked me up with one of her cute straight friends yet? Or bi? I don't discriminate.

LAUREN

Shut up! Get your own dating pool! You always want somebody to hook you up!

(Hearing a notification and looking to her screen.)

Ugh. It's the rest of the committee waiting to be admitted.

LAUREN cues up a virtual background that is a stark living room setting.

KEITH

Here you go with your Martha Stewart background.

LAUREN

I don't need everyone in my life like that. Especially them. See you in the chat.

LAUREN admits BRENNNA, MEGAN, and WINONA into the meeting, each in their own window, showing their homes. They wave as they enter, adjusting their lighting and view. LAUREN cues her work smile and voice. She and KEITH's demeanors transform slightly into a more annunciated, measured speech lacking some of the flow and ease with which they have been speaking.

LAUREN

Thanks for being on time everyone. Welcome.

KEITH types in the private chat to LAUREN. These appear in italicized text.

*KEITH: count down til brenna mentions her husband*

MEGAN

Hello.

BRENNNA

Hi, everyone!

*LAUREN: Be nice.*

WINONA

Hello fellow inmates. Get it? Because we're stuck in our own cells. Yeah, the kids didn't laugh at it either.

*LAUREN: She's really greeting OUR children as "inmates" : /*

*KEITH: tone deaf*

LAUREN

Hello, team. Thank you everyone for meeting. It's dinner time, so let's decide the virtual after-school clubs and get off this call.

BRENNA

Sounds, great. My husband and kids would love to have me at the table for once.

*KEITH: boom! that's one*

LAUREN

Winona, you were on student surveys.

*LAUREN: Do not count. I can't focus if I'm laughing.*

WINONA

Yes, the top choices include gymnastics - I mean, virtual gymnastics? Are these kids dumb? How does that work?

MEGAN

It won't. You need a physical coach.

BRENNA

Oh, I can totally see how it could work virtually.

LAUREN

Let's just get through the entire list before we give commentary, or this is going to take twice as long.

WINONA

In a hurry? You must have a hot chocolate boyfriend waiting for you.

LAUREN

The lists, Winona.

*LAUREN: Hot chocolate boyfriend! Really?!!*

*KEITH: you know that's winona's fantasy*

WINONA

Fine: Gymnastics, Coding,, Chess, Music, Hair Braiding Club, Book Club and something called QSA.

BRENNA

It stands for Queer Student Alliance.

MEGAN

Oh, God.

*KEITH: u should advise*

WINONA

Makes sense. That was a write-in request from our special kid.

*LAUREN: Too close. You know I'm not out at work.*

LAUREN

We are not calling him the special kid. His name is Antonio.

*KEITH: this is y u need to advise*

WINONA

So you knew who I was talking about, then. Like I said: Special.

BRENNA

You can say gay. My husband's friend has a gay son. It's not a big deal.

*KEITH: twice!*

*LAUREN: lol*

MEGAN

I don't know. I mean. We are talking about 6th graders. That seems a little early for a gay club.

*KEITH: do you hear this?*

*KEITH: step up! #BayardRustin #HarveyMilk*

KEITH

It's a supportive group, Megan. Not a gay club. You don't have to be 21 to get in.

*LAUREN: People get paranoid. I don't want to open myself to that. #AnitaBryant*

MEGAN

Kids are impressionable. I don't know. I mean should 6th graders even be talking about sex? Isn't that like grooming?

*LAUREN: See. Paranoia.*

BRENNA

I never thought of that.

KEITH

Because it's a reach.

WINONA

They're already talking about sex. Do you remember the filth written on the bathroom walls? I mean, it's poorly spelled erotic fiction.

MEGAN

I'm just saying. We should be careful not to put ideas into their heads? Kids should be kids.

*KEITH: Lauren, be hope for these kids.*

KEITH

Kids can be gay, Megan.

*LAUREN: And their parents' worst nightmare. You don't know hear the things I hear.*

BRENNA

Keith. You are so right, and we should all really be following your lead.

KEITH

(Slightly surprised.)

Thank you, Brenna.

LAUREN

(Taking a deep breath.)

Antonio has had some mental health scares. I think it's important we as a school support him with this QSA. If Antonio requested it, we aren't introducing or promoting anything to him.



KEITH

Agreed. Let's move on to the next step. We need someone to be the advisor, Lauren.

*KEITH: nudge nudge*

BRENNA

It's obviously going to be you, Keith, isn't it?

KEITH

(Caught off guard and taking slight offense.)

Why obviously?

WINONA

Come on, Keith. Don't be shy. You direct the school play, you dress well.

KEITH

Oh, but I'm not-

*KEITH: do i read gay?????*

LAUREN: Worried?

BRENNA

Oh, my god. This was not to embarrass you, Keith. I'm an ally. I just figured: Handsome single African-American man meets successful single African-American woman. That you and Lauren haven't become the Obama's was clue number one.

*LAUREN: Ooh clues!*

*KEITH: this is bs*

Then, I realized you and Lauren have like a fag-hag situation. Can I say that?

KEITH

I wouldn't know.

LAUREN

No.

BRENNA

I would be advisor, but you know I just figured having a strong African -American gay man advisor would be powerful to our double-minority students.

*KEITH: double minority?*

KEITH

(With adamancy bordering on insulted.  
His body code switches a bit, regaining a  
defiant masculine widening.)

I'm not gay.

(Trying to convince.)

I'm not.

*KEITH: A lil help?*

LAUREN looks away from the screen afraid to  
see herself in KEITH.

BRENNA

Keith, I am so sorry for assuming. My husband says I need a filter.

*KEITH: 3!*

KEITH finally stops shaking his head no.

KEITH

Listen, I don't mind helping. I just think it should be advised by someone who is actually  
gay, who can get to the heart of issues and really be able to understand what the kids are  
going through. I'm a cis. Straight. Man. They need their own role model.

*KEITH: nudge*

MEGAN

Well, if you aren't gay, we don't have any gay staff.

KEITH

How do you know?

*LAUREN: Stop.*

BRENNA

I'm a little bi-curious. Ruby Rose. I mean, don't tell my husband, but anyone would have  
a crush on her.

*KEITH: 4*

MEGAN

(Mumbling to self, but audible.)

I'm never going to be alone with you in the bathroom again.

LAUREN downcast her eyes.

*LAUREN: She just needs us to all know she's straight. Sound familiar?*

KEITH

What do bathrooms have to do with anything?

*KEITH: :(*

WINONA

Erotic fiction.

MEGAN

It's just weird to think another woman might be looking at me, you know, like *that*.

*KEITH: who is checking for megan?*

LAUREN

Back to the QSA.

*KEITH: who can advise better than u?*

WINONA

Shoot. I'll be the advisor. May as well. I'm single with cats so that's about the closet thing to a lesbian we've got in this school.

LAUREN

This is supposed to be about Antonio!

*LAUREN: I have my own trauma. I'm not taking on anymore. Let Brenna do it.*

JAMELL's phone begins ringing. It increases in volume as it rings. LAUREN's eyes widen.

That must be Lauren's hot chocolate date calling. We better end this meeting soon.

KEITH

Lauren already has a bond with Antonio. He was her student last year. She should supervise the Queer Student Alliance.

The ringing increases in volume.

*LAUREN: STOP*

MEGAN

I don't think we should use the word queer. It's really ugly.

LAUREN

(Whispering nearly.)

No it isn't.

Ringing intensifies. LAUREN begins having an out of body experience.

MEGAN

What if we call it Rainbow Club or Peace Club. I feel like that sounds less scary.

The ringing increases in volume.

BRENNA

Queer is not scary. The word queer is, like empowering, or whatever, like the N-Word.

KEITH

Not like the N-Word.

MEGAN

Let's not make this racial.

BRENNA

I only meant -

JAMELL rushes into the room wet in a towel, interrupting the green screen. She follows the sound of the ringing and frantically lifting things.

WINONA

Whoa! Naked lady alert!

LAUREN is panicked and clicks her video off and presses mute on her computer, but not her conference mic. LAUREN and JAMELL continue to be heard off camera.

JAMELL

(First heard off screen.)

Baby, I thought you were going to yell for me when she called.

LAUREN

I'm sorry baby. It's just that the meeting -

KEITH

Mute. You are not muted, Lauren.

JAMELL answers the phone.

JAMELL

It's fine, Lauren.

(Speaking to the doctor.)

Hello. Hi, Dr. Jenkins. Is she ok?

LAUREN

Baby?

*KEITH: MUTE! MUTE! MUTE!*

JAMELL

What does that mean?

LAUREN

Don't cry baby.

JAMELL

I'm her Power of Attorney. No, I can head to the hospital right now. My wife can drive me. 10 minutes. Yes, we're on our way.

LAUREN

Don't cry. Don't cry. I love you, baby. She's going to be fine. Come on. Put on clothes and I'll meet you in the car.

LAUREN turns her camera back on, unmutes her computer. JAMELL is out of the frame..

LAUREN

Um. I have a family - I have an emergency. I need to go.

WINONA

Everything ok with your sister in law, Lauren?

MEGAN

Obviously, from the sound of the conversation, that's not her sister.

LAUREN

(Flushed with fear.)

You could hear me? Who unmuted me? I'm the administrator. Only I can unmute me.

BRENNA

You never turned on mute. You only turned your camera off.

*KEITH: I'm so sorry.*

LAUREN

(Swallowing hard, and then not having the bandwidth to respond. LAUREN shakes her head, managing words.)

Um. I need to go. Email we whatever you come up with.

LAUREN logs off. The remaining characters absorb the shock of the situation.

BRENNA

Well, I'm definitely putting Lauren down as QSA advisor. I think we all agree.

WINONA

Works for me. Should we move on to gymnastics?

END.