

ASHES OF ANOTHER MAN

a short play by

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CAST (7M, 2W):

TONY: Junior in high school. On the swim team. African-American.

ALTHEA: 30s-40s. African-American. Tony's mom.

ARTHUR: 50. African-American. Former tennis great.

JEANNE: 40s. African-American. His wife.

BIRK: Senior in hs. Captain of the swim team. White.

WOOD: Senior in hs. Birk's co-captain. White.

JIMMY: Freshman on the swim team. White.

ULTIMATE FIGHTER 1: African-American.

ULTIMATE FIGHTER 2: Not African-American.

SETTING:

Arthur's living room, Tony's room, Wood's basement. 1993.

NOTE ON FORMATTING:

A double-dash (--) indicates no pause. If it's embedded within a character's line, it means (s)he's accelerating from one thought to the next.

If a double dash occurs at the end of the line, this indicates overlapping dialogue. The next line should begin on the last syllable of the previous line.

Lights rise on a split stage.

Tony's stage left, seated, playing Sega Genesis.

Arthur's stage right, seated, on the phone. Jeanne is seated nearby, watching him.

ARTHUR

(on phone)

You have no right to do this.

No -- it is not news. I retired in 1980 -- I'm not a public figure any --

(cut off)

No.

No -- listen to me. I have committed no crime -- I'm not running for office -- my health is no one's business but my --

(cut off; beat)

Well I'm sorry you feel that way. But I'm neither confirming nor denying the rumors -- do you understand?

ALTHEA

(entering Tony's room)

Coach tells me you weren't at practice this morning.

Tony continues to play.

ALTHEA

Can you pause the game please?

He does; doesn't look at her.

ALTHEA

And I thought you had a team function tonight.

TONY

It's just a card game.

ALTHEA

What's going on?

(no reponse)

What are you doing here -- you love swimming.

TONY

Swimming's gay, mom.

ALTHEA

Don't say that --

TONY

Our people don't swim --

ALTHEA

Our pe -- okay -- well thank you -- I'll be sure to stay away from water --

TONY

I'm playing basketball.

(Beat)

Althea cracks up.

ALTHEA

Oh c'mon -- you are the saddest basketball player I ever seen --

TONY

Mom --

ALTHEA

You don't even like basketball.

(quick beat)

Oh but the girls do, is that it?

(no response)

Back when I was in school, all the girls had a thing for Magic -- and hey, who knows -- given all these women he's saying' he slept with -- it prolly worked out for some of them.

Not me -- I was totally, madly in love with this world famous... tennis player.

Oh but he was so cute -- wearin' his tight polo and these little white short shorts --

(Tony groans)

Oh, my girlfriends used to mock me so bad -- Thea our people do not play tennis.

Tony looks up at his mom, holds the look.

ALTHEA

When Nelson Mandela got out of jail, the first American he called was Arthur Ashe.

See, this tennis player -- he'd risked his life to make South Africa a better place; he got himself arrested, standin' up for the rights of Haitians -- you think that kind of man cares what sport his people say he should play?

JEANNE

(to Arthur)

Before we met, I used to watch you play. Your very first tournaments.

(quick beat)
It was the saddest thing I ever seen.

ARTHUR
Excuse me?

JEANNE
You were a pusher.

ARTHUR
I was not a --

JEANNE
Waitin' back at the baseline --
(imitates a lame, lazy swing)
Tha-bum -- pushin' the ball back --
(imitates a lame, lazy swing)
Tha-bum -- you were like a backboard -- that's what you were --
-- you were the wall -- just pushin' the ball right back --
never takin' a big shot, never chargin' the net -- just
sittin' there, waitin' for the other guy to do somethin' --

ARTHUR
That's not entirely --

JEANNE
(imitates a lame, lazy swing)
Tha-bum, tha-bum, tha-bum -- you were a coward.
(beat)
Then somethin' changed.

One day... I don't know why... you took the biggest swing I
ever seen... and then you charged the net. You raced right
toward it -- as if there was a little voice in your head, 'No
I will be the one to dictate how this plays out.'

ARTHUR
That was different.

JEANNE
It wasn't different with Haiti.

ARTHUR
Yes it was.

JEANNE
It wasn't different with Soweto.

ARTHUR
Yes it was --

JEANNE
How --

ARTHUR
 Because this is the last thing I'll ever do!
 (beat)
 They'll say I cheated on you.

JEANNE
 You didn't.

ARTHUR
 That I shared needles --

JEANNE
 You didn't --

ARTHUR
 Yes, but they'll say --

JEANNE
 And the people who cheated and shared needles -- they don't
 deserve someone to stand up and speak out --

ARTHUR
 Maybe I don't want to speak out.

I may only have a few weeks left -- I want to spend them with
 you and Camera -- in peace and quiet.

JEANNE
 It's what I want, too.

ARTHUR
 And we haven't earned that? -- I haven't earned that?

JEANNE
 Is that why did all those things -- so you could earn
 something later on?

(beat)
 The news will break --

ARTHUR
 Not necessarily --

JEANNE
 Arthur --

ARTHUR
 He's not going to run the story unless he has factual
 confirmation.

(Quick Beat)

JEANNE

Then I guess you have a choice. We can get up each morning, open the paper and hope it's not there on the front page. Or...

ALTHEA

(to Tony)

You have a choice. And I'm not even talkin' bout whether you quit that team. Cuz people are always gonna speak trash -- but sooner or later, you're gonna have to choose to give in, or stand up for what you believe.

BIRK

(to Tony)

Pick it up.

Lights rise on the rest of the stage.

We're in the basement of Wood's house.

[Here's what I'm seeing: a desk and chair, upstage right, with an old school PC and old school phone. I'm talking like those phones that lit up when they rang.

Downstage right is a card table, set for a game of Euchre (meaning 4 chairs and the appropriate cards).

Far right is an old school CD player.

Down center and right is wide open. This is where the scenes on the TV will play out.

There are a few cans of beer on the table and one on the desk near the computer. A tub of Red Vines somewhere.

A couple of the boys wear swim team sweatshirts and warm up pants; another wears a warm up jacket and jeans; another sears a swim team t-shirt and pajama pants.]

BIRK

Tony.

TONY

Hm?

BIRK

Get your ass over here and pick it up.
 (hollering to Wood as Tony
 finds his seat at the table)
 Dickhead, let's go.

WOOD

(in front of the computer)
 Hold on, it's loading.

BIRK

You been sittin' in front of that thing for --

WOOD

Wait whoa hold on --

We hear the old school sound of dial up
 internet.. you know, the 'rr rr rrrrr'

WOOD

Yeah here we go.

Wood flashes a look of expectation...
 then nothing happens.

WOOD

What the...

He punches a few keys on the keyboard.

BIRK

Okay can we play the fucking --

Wood picks up the phone.

WOOD

Bobby get off the phone. Get off the phone. No -- get off the
 -- I don't care who you're -- hey, how you doing, what's your
 name? Oh hey Julie, Bobby's told me all about you -- yeah, he
 thinks you're really really great -- and hey listen, my
 little brother's a super sweet guy and he knows I need the
 line so he's gonna call you in an hour but you should really
 give him a chance okay cuz he's a great guy. Okay. Yeah you
 too.

(quick beat)

Hey bitch you still there? You ever use the line again when I
 tell you not to I will call Julie up and tell her how you
 sneak downstairs every night and watch scrambled porn -- now
 get off the fucking phone.

(he hangs up)

BIRK

Wood, seriously --

WOOD

IT IS LOAD-ING.

(quick beat)

Just turn the thing on, man.

BIRK

It's not on yet.

Jimmy heads to the stereo, plays Pearl Jam's "Elderly Woman Behind the Counter."

Without even looking at Jimmy, Birk switches the music off with the remote.

Jimmy doesn't pick up on it, turns it on, Birk turns it off. Again on again, off.

TONY

Birk c'mon man --

JIMMMY

(realizing it's Birk)

C'mon dude I like Pearl Jam.

BIRK

That is not Pearl Jam.

JIMMMY

Yeah-huh --

BIRK

Nooo the rest of the album is Pearl Jam -- that is the fucking lame-ass slow dance song they made to sell records.

JIMMMY

But --

BIRK

Bring me the remote, freshman.

JIMMMY

I have a name.

BIRK

Nooo next year you have a name -- this year you fetch me the remote.

Jimmy goes to retrieve the tv remote.

BIRK

(to Wood)

Hey you sure your parents are cool with this?

WOOD

I told em we were ordering A Few Good Men.

BIRK

Dude, they're gonna see it on the bill.

WOOD

No man I checked -- it comes up as 'Paid Program.'

BIRK

(raising remote; to Jimmy,
sharply)

Get out of the fucking way.

TONY

Hey man, I thought it's not --

BIRK

I'm just seeing what else is on -- is that all right?

He pushes a button on the remote.

Lights rise on Arthur, standing before
(an imagined) podium.

BIRK

The fuck is this shit?

WOOD

(without looking up)

Dude put on ESPN.

BIRK

This is ESPN.

ARTHUR

Some of you may be wondering why I called this press
conference.

(quick beat)

George Steinbrenner has asked me to manage the Yankees.

(beat)

People often don't laugh at my jokes.

BIRK

Dude who the fuck is this guy?

WOOD

He looks like a science teacher.

BIRK

He looks fucking gay.

TONY

It's Arthur Ashe.

Arthur clears his throat, gathering the strength to continue.

BIRK

Who?

JIMMY

Um, Arthur Ashe? He's only one of the greatest tennis players ever.

BIRK

You play tennis?

JIMMY

Yeah.

BIRK

You would.

ARTHUR

(reading from a card)

Beginning with my admittance to New York Hospital for brain surgery in September 1988, some of you heard that I had tested positive for HIV, the virus that causes AIDS.

That is indeed the case.

BIRK

See what'd I tell you -- he is fucking gay.

ARTHUR

I am truly grateful to all of you -- medical and otherwise -- who knew but either didn't even ask me or never made it public. That has meant more to me and Jeanne and Camer --

At the mention of his daughter's name, he can't continue.

BIRK

Dude is he fucking crying?

Without missing a beat, Jeanne walks next to Arthur, takes the card from him, continues his speech. She takes his hand.

JEANNE

I have been an activist on many issues in the past -- against apartheid, for education and the athlete, the need for faster change in tennis. I will continue with those projects in progress, and will most certainly get involved with the AIDS crisis.

The alternative is to remain silent, and that is a choice I cannot make.

BIRK

Apparently it is -- dude needs his woman to talk for him.

JIMMY

What is your problem, man?

BIRK

What the fuck is your problem -- you got a little crush on this guy?

JIMMY

I just like tennis.

BIRK

I bet you do -- seein' all those guys in their little white short-shorts.

JIMMY

Dude we wear Speedos.

Birk springs out of his chair, makes like he's going to attack Jimmy.

TONY

Dude it's on! -- it's ON!

Birk stares at Jimmy for a second.

TONY

Dude it's time -- can we watch the fuckin' thing already?

(Beat)

Birk looks back at Tony.

BIRK

So turn it on.

Birk heads back to the table as Tony raises the remote right at Arthur.

Tony and Arthur share a look, then Tony flips the channel, and Arthur backs away...

As two ultimate fighters appear and take his place.

BIRK

(to Wood)

You gonna watch this, bitch?

WOOD
 (like, 'seriously, are we
 watching this lame shit?')
 Dude I don't know...

BIRK
What?

WOOD
 Dude isn't it just like WWF?

BIRK
 Yeah dude it's like WWF, except you know, not fucking gay.

WOOD
 Dude --

BIRK
 It's the Ultimate Fighting Championship -- I'm telling you --
 this shit's gonna be bigger than wrestling -- it's gonna be
 bigger than boxing -- you know why? Because nothing is out of
 bounds.

Welcome to the Octagon, bitch -- 54321 --

(This is a routine. When one of the
 captains says 54321, all the guys have
 to shake their beers, smash them
 against the side of a table, and
 shotgun them (i.e. suck them down).

So when Birk calls out 54321, all the
 guys do it -- Birk's enthusiastic about
 it; Wood's more casual -- he's still at
 the computer, trying to get the damn
 thing to load. Tony's almost reluctant,
 but he does participate.

Jimmy, however, does not. He watches
 them for a bit, then picks up his
 cherry coke, which has a red vine
 sticking out of it as a straw.

Birk finishes first, slams down his
 can.

BIRK
 (to Tony)
 Last to finish -- you're a bitch.

Then he hears the sound of Jimmy
 slurping up the last of his Cherry Coke
 with his Red Vine straw.

He turns to Jimmy, rises.

He takes a step toward him.

BIRK

(gently)

Who you think's gonna win?

No response.

BIRK

Who you think?

JIMMY

I dunno.

BIRK

Pick one.

JIMMY

I dunno.

BIRK

Pick one.

JIMMY

Why?

(Quick Beat)

BIRK

Cuz if you're wrong and the other guy wins... I'm gonna beat your face in.

(beat; no response)

All right, but if you don't pick one I'm just gonna do it any --

JIMMY

The black guy.

BIRK

You would.

JIMMY

Sorry Tony.

(quick beat; to Tony)

Should I be sorry?

The bell rings (*I gotta check and make sure there was a bell in UFC 1) and the two fighters approach each other.

[*A quick note: The early UFC fights were significantly different than the current format. For one, there really were no rules. No kind of fighting was out of bounds. For another, not everyone performed Mixed Martial Arts. In fact, the fights were set up with one fighter from a specific style (sumo, boxing, kickboxing, Sumo, jiu-jitsu), in an effort to see which style is superior. So it would be most accurate if the two fighters were representative of a distinctly different style of fighting. But we can let casting determine this.]

The fight begins -- there's a bit of dancing about -- maybe one of the fighters dives at the other's feet. The noise from the boys grows as the fight gets more intense.

After just a bit of dancing, the fighters connect, get interlocked in an embrace. A big, tightly wound, sweaty embrace.

JIMMY

Yeah, cuz this is definitely less gay.

Birk shoots him a look.

The African-American fighter makes a great move, gains the upper hand -- the other boys shout -- and Birk's attention shoots back to the fight.

And then it happens.

The African-American fighter punches the other fighter squarely in the nuts.

The boys groan (exclaim "jesus, "oh shit," etc.)

He punches him in the nuts again.
Groan.

Again. Groan.

Again. Groan.

Punch. Groan.

Punch. Groan.

Punch. Groan.

The velocity of the punches picks up and the volume of the boys groans gets louder, like a steadying beat --

Until they're suddenly replaced by a woman's moan.

A porn moan.

WOOD

It's working!

Birk races to the computer.

The porn moan continues, growing louder.

BIRK

Holy shit dude can they even put this on the web?!

WOOD

Fuck yeah mean.

(then, mocking Birk)

I'm telling you, dude, this shit's gonna be even bigger than other web sites --

BIRK

Shut up --

WOOD

Holy shit --

Moan.

BIRK

He is fucking railing her.

Moan.

BIRK

Hey freshman, get over here --

Punch/moan.

BIRK

You can see what pubes look like.

WOOD
 (off what's happening on the
 computer)
 Jesus Christ.

BIRK
 She fucking loves it.
 (to computer)
 Do it.
 (to computer)
 Do it.

Moan picks up -- faster and louder

(Note from the first punch to now --
 the speed and volume should have grown -
 - no rest and no reprieve -- almost out
 of control)

And then everything stops.

BIRK
 Dude what the fuck?!

Wood starts punching keys.

BIRK
 Fix it!

WOOD
 I'm trying!

BIRK
 FIX IT!

Jimmy and Tony share a look.

Jimmy starts to move toward the stereo.

Tony shakes his head, like, "Don't do
 it." But Jimmy keeps moving toward.

BIRK
 C'mon man --

WOOD
 What the fuck --

BIRK
 Goddamnit dude he was just about to --

Jimmy plays that slow-ass Pearl Jam
 song.

BIRK
 (hollering over music)
 -- no -- no --
 (charging toward Jimmy)
 Turn that shit off --

JIMMY
 No!

BIRK
 (hollering over music)
 Turn it off!

JIMMY
 No --

BIRK
 (grabbing the remote and
 shoving it in Jimmy's face)
 Turn it off!

JIMMY
 No! --

BIRK
 Turn it off you fucking faggot --

JIMMY
 Dude you're the one who's staring at someone's dick!

Birk drives the remote into Jimmy's
 gut.

Jimmy doubles over, falls to the floor.

TONY
 Birk.

Birk ignoring him, flips the song on
 the stereo, to Pearl Jam's "Animal"

BIRK
 You hear that?! That's a fucking song!

Jimmy starts to crawl away.

BIRK
 (shoving him down with his
 foot)
 Where you going?

TONY
 Birk --

BIRK
Wood get your ass over here.

WOOD
Dude I'm trying to fucking fix --

BIRK
I don't give a shit what you're doing -- get over here --
(to Jimmy)
Stop fuckin' squirmin'.

JIMMY
Birk c'mon man --

BIRK
Shut the fuck up -- you're only gonna make it worse.

JIMMY
(to Wood; who's come over)
Wood c'mon man --

WOOD
You should've kept your mouth shut, man.

Jimmy's squirming around.

BIRK
Stop moving your fucking legs --

JIMMY
(shouting)
The black guy won, okay?! He won!!

BIRK
Tony a little help here --

JIMMY
C'mon man, you said if he won --

BIRK
Stop moving your legs --

JIMMY
You said if he won --

BIRK
Jesus Christ -- TONY ARE YOU JUST GONNA FUCKING STAND THERE
OR ARE YOU GONNA DO SOMETHING?!

Tony turns away, turning his back to
the action.

He locks eyes with Arthur, who is now wearing a white polo and short shorts. He holds a wooden racket.

Everything goes quiet when Tony and Arthur lock eyes. Everything stops. The boys are frozen -- not in some lame, dramatic position. They're just still.

(Beat)

Arthur, staring at Tony, Tony staring at Arthur.

Arthur swings weakly with his racket.

ARTHUR
(with disdain)

Tha - bum.

Tony watches him.

ARTHUR
(a weak swing)

Tha - bum.

Tony stares at him.

ARTHUR
(a weak swing)

Tha-bum.

(Beat)

Arthur winds up for a huge swing.

He follows through and Tony looks back at the boys.

(Beat)

Tony and Arthur grin at the exact same moment.

And then Arthur charges forward as Tony charges toward the boys.

Blackout.

End of play.