

Sundown Town
(a Zoom play)
By Marcus Scott

About the show: *Sundown Town* follows two newly-minted sophomore students fresh from their first year at university who have returned home in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. Under quarantine and taking shelter within their homes, just as these two sexually curious and sexually-active young men hop online to unleash their carnal desires, news of a horrific incident prompts them to not only ask questions about the worth of the black body in America, but also its endurance. Written for Zoom, play can also be staged.

Cast / Characters: 2M

DAVID - 19, an awkward, highly intelligent self-described “blerd” with some emotional issues. Snarky, whimsical and polite. The kind of guy on the verge of a major glow-up. Black, Cis-male.

OMARI - 19, a teenage dream boy next door, the kind of guy that inspires R&B love jams and who should be on the cover of your favorite urban romance novel. Cocky in a refreshing kind of way, smart in a down-to-earth way. Black, Cis-male.

Setting:

June 2020

Time:

Now

Place:

Two bedrooms; both in the suburbs.

(Omari is shirtless, his hands reaching toward his manhood, staring into the abyss of his webcam, licking his lips. David enters the chat room. He stares for a moment. Puzzled. Then, he notices.)

DAVID

Oh God! Maybe I should leave you to—maybe you can finish up and—

OMARI

You're cute when you pretend to be shy, you know that right?

DAVID

Pretending? I don't know what you mean.

OMARI

You want me to stop?

DAVID

Figured we'd talk, you know?

OMARI

(Putting it away) ...Oh.

DAVID

Before we—it's just, we haven't seen each other in a while—

OMARI

Since the last time you went down on me in the passenger seat of my car last summer?

DAVID

Look out boys, we're coming in hot!

OMARI

What can I say, I'm warm blooded. *(Beat.)* What's wrong?

DAVID

Just wanted to talk. You know, reconnect?

OMARI

What's on your mind?

DAVID

I missed you. Is that a crime?

OMARI

In some parts of this country, it's a Class A felony and it's liable to get you 25 to life. (*Beat.*) I think about you all the time. Few months back, when my pops came to pick me up from campus, he asked me what was the first thing I wanted to do when I got home and you just popped right into my head. Like a flash of lightning and I don't know if pops knew it or not, but he just smirked, you know? Like, he saw right into me and through me all at the same time. Like he knew something, like we shared a secret, just between the two of us. Panicked and said I wanted ice cream.

DAVID

Soft serve. Twist in a cone from—

DAVID + OMARI

Kurver Kreme.

OMARI

The best ice cream shoppe, full stop. You remember.

DAVID

Of course. I remember everything about you. (*Beat.*) How was school?

OMARI

This last semester sucked; I almost failed one of my prerequisites and my laptop crapped out on me, so I had to hop on the phone and make some calls; finally got it replaced, but the well-researched 15-page final paper for my Intro to Civics class didn't save so I had to rewrite the whole thing from scratch. Got an A minus.

DAVID

If there's anyone who can get themselves out of a pinch, it's you. Proud of you, black man.

OMARI

Proud of you, too. (*Beat.*) David, I'm sorry I didn't get around to—you've been on my mind. Really. With school and everything—

DAVID

You don't have to... This last semester wasn't the best for me either. They shut the dorms earlier than they said they would, so I was pretty much homeless for like a week before—had to petition the school so I could grab my things and put the things I couldn't throw in the back of our van in storage. Have you ever put anything in storage?

OMARI

Don't think I have.

DAVID

It's sketchy. The site manager looked like he came from one of those Victorian penny dreadfuls, you know, if it were a Crenshaw swap meet.

OMARI

No one told your saddity ass to move all the way the fuck out to the West Coast.

DAVID

It's Stanford. What was I supposed to do? The acceptance rate—

OMARI

Don't explain it to me. You've had your sights set on Outer Space as long as I can remember. Why not go to the school 15 astronauts went to?

DAVID

Seventeen.

OMARI

Huh?

DAVID

Seventeen. You said 15.

OMARI

...Oh, did I?

DAVID

Such a troll!

OMARI

You make it too easy. (*Beat.*) See you grew into your nose. Lookin' fine and shit.

DAVID

Sure you kept yourself busy, being so darn irresistible and everything. Who's the lucky girl?

OMARI

Boy, actually.

DAVID

Do your parents know?

OMARI

Trying to tell you, I did some growing up since last we spoke.

DAVID

Who is he?

OMARI

Some Korean Chester Lockhart wannabe; we met in Chemistry. He was my lab partner. Bonded kinda quick, he's adopted too. Some white Evangelicals from Omaha took him in as a baby orphan and he's still not over it. We fooled around, but it was nothing serious. He gave me the boot after a couple of weeks. Turns out he and I had some fundamental differences.

DAVID

Like?

OMARI

He called microaggressions a *myth* and said he didn't see race, even though his last three hookups before me were all black men because he's a, quote, "size queen with unquestionably high standards" and he can't help himself especially since black guys "have the the fattest, biggest cocks."

DAVID

That limp-dick son-of-a-bitch.

OMARI

He also had a lot of internalized self-hatred. He's very light-skinned, super pale, almost white; has a thing against what he calls "jungle Asians." I couldn't even. What about you? You've been working out, I see. Filled out a bit and from the looks of it, in all the right places. What's his name?

DAVID

Astrophysics.

OMARI

Come on!

DAVID

Not all of us look like an African Joey Russo type fucked a very Black Jake from *Sixteen Candles*.

OMARI

I take issue with the fact that I have to be a Black anything.

DAVID

Now you're just nitpicking.

OMARI

All I'm saying is, you never hear Celine Dion being referred to as the white Whitney Houston or Justin Timberlake being called a white Michael Jackson. It's always the other way around. Besides, we have our own teen heartthrobs. Although, I do appreciate the compliment. A handsome devil like you; still don't believe you haven't seen any action since we—is Stanford full of uggos or something?

DAVID

One isn't motivated to find someone else to scratch the itch when their first is someone as notorious as the famous Omari Barnes.

OMARI

Not that famous.

DAVID

Turning down a full scholarship at a Division I college so you can study Law—

OMARI

Had to think about life after the NFL and seeing that everything from the Olympics to the World Cup and all sports in between are cancelled for the next year and a half, it's looking like I made the best decision at the right time.

DAVID

You are certainly great at making life decisions.

OMARI

Not always. I could have reached out more, kept in touch. You know how you can go months without seeing someone and then when you do meet, it's like you hit the pause button again and picked up where you left off? Kinda feeling that right now.

DAVID

Me too. (*Beat.*) Wait, you're wearing underwear, right?

OMARI

See anything you like?

(Omari stands up, revealing that he is indeed wearing underwear. They're nice.)

DAVID

(Taking a gulp:) Very nice *stitching*, nice color contrast—Omari, don't tease.

OMARI

It's not teasing, especially since we both know how this is going to end.

DAVID

And how is it going to end, Omari?

OMARI

With your hand between your legs, eyes crossed and seeing stars.

DAVID

Oh really?

OMARI

Really. Is your door locked?

DAVID

I think so? *(Beat.)* What about you?

(David gets up and locks the door.)

OMARI

The folks are out; running errands. Shouldn't be back for a while. That means, I got you all to myself.

(David returns, aroused and intrigued.)

DAVID

Got something to show me?

(Before he can respond, Omari gets a notification message on his phone. Then another message, then another.)

OMARI

Hold on. I got a message from one of my followers.

(Omari opens his phone and looks at it. There's a video. He plays it. The sound of a rebel yell from a revolutionary in the trenches of an uprising, the bursting of gunpowder, the crackle of machine gun fire, the snap of rubber bullets ripping through flesh, a bystander screams. He stops the video. Clicks on another.)

DAVID

What's going on?

OMARI

Please forgive me. I just gotta—

(As the video plays: The sound of a struggle, a body hits concrete, the sounds of manacles wrapping themselves around contorted arms, the sound of resistance, the sound of blood-curdling cries for help, bystanders plea with law enforcement, the cries slowly go faint as the voice cries out for their mother to no avail.)

OMARI

You need to see this.

DAVID

(Realizing:) I don't. I really don't. I've seen the videos. Too many of them in fact.

OMARI

But this one—

DAVID

(Maniac fury:) Which one is it? The one with the redneck white supremacist who bought a bow and arrow to a protest because “All Lives Matter”? The video where the sociopath in blue shot that little girl at point-blank range with pepper spray? Or, the clip where one of the little piggies went to market and called a protester a “fucking faggot”? Not that one? What about the one where that police officer slammed his vehicle into a bunch of civilians? The video where the boy gets shot in the eye with a lead pellet-filled bean bag and is carried down the street of Cleveland as he bleeds out on another protester? The video where the two cops shoved a 75-year old white dude causing him to fall and smash his head on the pavement? Or my favorite, the compilation tape of white people looting, only for people who look like you and me to take the fall and get their asses beaten within every inch of their life by law enforcement? Which one, are we talking about exactly?

OMARI

David, I'm sorry. Maybe I should have kept things light? Didn't mean anything—

DAVID

No, I shouldn't have exploded like that—

OMARI

As opposed to...?

DAVID

Pervert.

OMARI

Listen, we don't have to—you know, we can just talk like old times, right? Let's do that. No pretenses, no niceties, bullshit. Talk to me like we're back in the quad in high school. *(Beat.)* I'll start, and I hate asking, but how are you feeling?

DAVID

How do you deal with all of this? Because honestly... it's like I've been holding in a scream and that scream is like a gas stove leaking in a condemned building, you know? It's circulating, it's in the air, filling up everything... every room, every doorway, just trying to air itself out... but all the windows are shut and just outside the streets are lined with candles. Lit candles. I'm afraid that any day now this scream I got inside of me is going to build into a fireball and it's gonna take me and the whole world with it.

OMARI

...How does anyone "deal" with this? I thought if I took a couple of days off from social media, maybe I could just take a deep breath and sit in darkness for a while, maybe watch a little TV... that I could find a way to just remember that life goes on, that I'm still here, that these were all isolated incidents. It gave me hope that one day, when I'm stating my cases in court as a high-powered attorney or whatever... that I could make a difference. But I'm beginning to think there's a glaring difference in this country and that difference is the lay of the land, that all these rules and regulations and Bill of Rights and amendments... they only really apply to a certain kind of people and the only way to really see the change we want in this world is to burn it to the ground, only I'm scared of what happens next. Humans are creatures of habits and old habits die hard.

DAVID

Everything is so fucked. I thought this was going to be my year. But since quarantine began, with COVID-19 and college campuses shutting down, now there's all these other factors at play: Sky-high unemployment rates, our second recession in less than a decade, an impending Great Depression, the rise of Dengue fever in Asia, a plague of locusts swarming through Central Africa, possible UFO sightings and then there's these string of murders against us, people who look like us, live like us, come from the same ghettos and the same suburbs... and yeah, it's been happening, right? But it's happening in real time and it's like fucking *Battle Royale* or *The Hunger Games* and the only weapons they have to arm themselves with are the cameras on their mobile phones and... it's beginning to feel like we're in some kind of purge, you know, like—

DAVID + OMARI

Like we're being hunted.

(A moment.)

DAVID

...It hurts, you know.

OMARI

When's the last time you got a full night of sleep? Mine was the day before yesterday. I passed out at 9pm. I woke up and it was 11am the next day. Slept 14 hours.

DAVID

I... haven't? Every time I close my eyes, I have these visions.

OMARI

Visions?

DAVID

Prophecies? Possibilities? Whatever they are, in these dreamscapes, these waking nightmares, I'm either falling to my death, or worse.

OMARI

Expand on that, please. Worse?

DAVID

These dreams are like Freddy Kruger-level, only there's no witty one-liners thrown in or a last man standing at the end of them. I had a dream where I was strapped to the back of an old pickup truck and dragged for miles down a dark asphalt road. Had another dream where I was hit by a car and dragged beneath it. Had another one where I reached for my wallet and was riddled by a rain of bullets. Had another one where I was strung up in a jail cell by a plastic garbage bag.

OMARI

Not exactly pillow talk, but okay...

DAVID

Sorry.

OMARI

Nothing to apologize for. I'm just playin'. Go on.

DAVID

Had another one, but this time I was a kid. Couldn't be more than 14. They brought me in, restrained and strapped me to an electric chair. I was so small they used the Bible I brought with me as a booster seat, put a leather strap on my mouth, covered my face in this cloth... but it was too small, it kept slipping down my face. Took them eight minutes; my teeth were smoking and one of my eyes melted out of my face... But the one that's haunted me? The one that made sleep with the lights on? I was walking down a street, it was dark and I was waiting at a rendezvous point somewhere, waiting for somebody, I don't know who and these two men showed up. They beat me, held me down, possibly raped me, stabbed me in the heart with a screwdriver, then left me to bleed out on some empty street and that was that. Laid there for hours.

OMARI

Fuck.

DAVID

Want to know the messed-up part? I did some digging. All of those deaths, every one of them are real. Every one of them happened. Every one of them actually happened to someone in real life, in real time somewhere in this country at some point in our history.

OMARI

I thought I recognized one of them. The one with the wallet... Amadou Diallo?

DAVID

Right. And James Byrd, Jr.; Brandon McClelland; Sandra Bland; George Stinney and Carol Marie Davis Jenkins.

OMARI

Martyrs.

DAVID

What good are martyrs if everyone is basically on the other end of a first-person shooter game simulation?

OMARI

Damn, man. Shit's dark. How many hours of rest would you say you've been able to get since this all started?

DAVID

Don't know. Can't sleep during the night so I try to sleep during the day. Nothing helps. I feel like I'm losing my mind. I keep checking my phone, I keep checking the news, keep refreshing all of my social media pages...

OMARI

That's your problem right there, my dude. Take some time off. *Socially distance* yourself from the internet.

DAVID

Can you honestly say it'll help when the whole world feels like it's caving in on you? And don't we have a responsibility to stay informed, to know what's going on?

OMARI

Yeah, but we have a responsibility to ourselves, too. Self-preservation. If all the Karens and Konnors of the world can take a few days off from watching the news or logging on social media because they "need a break" from it all, why can't we? Being plugged in everyday, watching this shit unfold all day, everyday... especially in quarantine? It's not healthy. It can't be healthy.

DAVID

You know what they say, we can't be tired. It's forbidden; in order to get things done, in order to get real change—

OMARI

That dream you had, where you died in the middle of the street... what were you doing before?

DAVID

Don't know, but the woman, the one this happened to... she was selling encyclopedias door-to-door. She was being followed by two white men and she took shelter with a young white couple, The Neals. They called the cops, the cops found the men who chased after her, interrogated them and went about their merry way. The wife of that couple walked her for a few blocks and even offered to let her stay, but she didn't want to be a bother. They parted ways, she traveled towards the predetermined rendezvous point where she was supposed to meet her co-workers and within the span of a half hour, she was murdered in cold blood. You see, she was in Martinsville, Indiana... a sundown town... 1968. She was 20 at the time; one year older than the both of us. She thought she'd be safe and it was her first day at her new job and all she wanted was to make a good first impression. That was almost 52 years ago to the day and this shit is still happening. Both her murderers walked; they lived long, died of old age or cancer...

OMARI

Not even a half-assed formal apology on their deathbeds?!

DAVID

It's the fact that they keep walking. You know? The jury rests, makes their decisions and those bastards walk right on out and over our graves. It is a mass grave and they keep adding on to the pile, no questions asked. George Zimmerman, walked and hasn't stopped boasting about how he murdered Trayvon Martin. Whoever killed those two white girls and blamed George Stinney, a 14 year old boy, and let him fry?! They walked and danced right on his grave. Usually it's an all-white jury and we're shocked, just *shocked*, when another Emmett Till is left butchered—laid out like some depraved science experiment to ferment in a swamp—, and their killers are found not guilty of the kidnapping and murder of yet another 14 year old boy. They are moral monsters and we're expected to live amongst them, instead of doing what they do in any storybook fairytale they write. Aren't monsters slain by the end of the fairytales? When the sun rises, aren't vampires supposed to burn and like all ashes do, shatter to the winds?

OMARI

Because, handsome... America is one giant Sundown Town. You being a future astronaut and all, don't you know time is relative? And monsters... the story changes depending on the author.

DAVID

(After a moment:) When you reached out, I thought I could use the distraction but here I am, talking about—

OMARI

Never you mind... Shit is crazy out here, there's no leadership. But with the quarantine and time to peruse the Internet... it's like, over night niggas just decided to be all about solidarity and Black Lives Matter.

DAVID

Black lives only matter when you're granted access to the whole of your humanity; not just three-fifths of it. Times like this make you feel like maybe your life don't mean shit, you know?! (*Beat.*) You're right. This is totally not sexy.

OMARI

Not even a little bit. (*Beat.*) No one looks at me, the way you look at me, you know that. You were the first person outside of my folks to tell me about myself; made me feel beautiful, special, seen. I see you Black man.

DAVID

Yeah? How do I look now?

OMARI

Endless, uncharted, a fucking galaxy far away from all of this... full of light from stars that can never die, that are so warm, so bright, full of force, with enough power to make another Big Bang. That's how you lookin'. For real. (*After a moment:*) It's still light out. Kurver is still open. My treat. I'm down if you are.

DAVID

Bet. (*Beat.*) Endless, huh?

OMARI

(*Leaning into the camera:*) Endless.

(End of play.)