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**American Association of  
Community Theatre AACT  
NewPlayFest Winning Plays:  
Volume 4 (2020)**

*Shattering* by  
PAT MONTLEY

**Dramatic Publishing Company**  
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# **Shattering**

By  
PAT MONTLEY

*Shattering* received its world premier production at Tacoma Little Theatre in Tacoma, Wash., on Jan. 24, 2020.

CAST:

DEEDEE .....Robin McGee  
JONAH.....Donovan Mahannah  
SONNY ..... Joshua Hector  
LABELLE.....Cynthia Kinyanjui

PRODUCTION:

Director .....Chris Serface  
Set Design .....Blake R. York  
Light Design..... Niclas Olson  
Sound Design ..... Dylan Twiner  
Properties ..... Frank Roberts  
Costumes.....Michele Graves  
Assistant Director.....Jeremy Lynch  
Stage Manager ..... Nena Curley  
Dramaturg ..... Kathy Pingel

In addition to the information on the Important Billing and Credit Requirements page (p. 3), all producers of the play must include the following acknowledgment on the title page of all programs distributed in connection with performances of the play and on all advertising and promotional materials:

“*Shattering* was premiered in the American Association of Community Theatre’s AACT NewPlayFest by Tacoma Little Theatre in Tacoma, Wash.”

# Shattering

## CHARACTERS

JONAH: 14, African American; tough but vulnerable; bright but poorly educated; insolent but sensitive; recently released from juvenile commitment.

JACQUELINE DAWSON (DEEDEE): 59, African American; an astrophysicist and atheist; brittle and brisk; strict but caring; intent, committed; a natural educator; riddled with guilt, regret, grief and determination.

LABELLE: 14, African American, Jonah's girlfriend; lively, loyal and lovable; determined, hopeful and single-minded; pregnant; a talented singer.

SONNY: 24, African American, DeeDee's dead son, a Christian Fundamentalist; bright, well-educated and obsessed with words; committed and single-minded; insistently religious yet unforgiving.

TIME: The present.

PLACE: DeeDee's home in an urban neighborhood, USA.

## SCENES

Prologue

Scene 1: A Saturday in early April, late afternoon.

Scene 2: The next Saturday, midday.

Scene 3: Three weeks later; early May, early evening.

Scene 4: Two weeks later; mid-May, late evening.

Scene 5: Two weeks later; a Saturday afternoon in early June.

Scene 6: Thirty-six hours later.

## PREFACE

A few years ago, I heard part of a recording of a South Africa Truth and Reconciliation hearing. A white security officer admitted to torturing and killing the husband and son of an elderly black woman. The judge asked her what justice should be done. The woman replied: “My husband and son were my only family. I want ... for Mr. Van der Broek ... to become my son. I would like for him to come twice a month to the ghetto and spend a day with me so that I may pour out to him whatever love I have remaining with me.”

This astounding story dogged me. Maybe because I live in Baltimore, shooting site for *Homicide: Life on the Streets* and *The Wire* (both of which harrowed my heart). In real life, we have a juvenile detention system in crisis, one of the highest murder rates in the United States (most of them drug/gang-related) and a tragic lack of respect between the police and the community they are supposed to protect. It’s an epidemic that haunts me whenever I open the paper, turn on the news or walk the streets.

This combination was my inspiration for writing *Shattering*. How could anyone be as forgiving as the South African woman whose son was murdered? What could be the effects of such forgiveness? How might a relationship between such a woman and her “adopted son” play out?

My research for creating the world of *Shattering* involved reading, viewing and attending anti-racism workshops and events and interviewing a teacher from the Maryland State Detention Center and an administrator/social worker in the Baltimore Juvenile Detention system. While attending a Kennedy Center Playwriting Intensive, I sought input on my initial efforts from Michael Oatman, then playwright-in-residence at Karamu House, and later from former Baltimore Center Stage dramaturg James Magruder. Actor and audience feedback at a DG Footlights reading featuring teen actors from the Baltimore School for the Arts resulted in further revisions. I also shared the script with African American friends and artist-colleagues and am especially grateful for input from filmmaker Najaa Young and photographer Kay Adler.

I attended the second week of rehearsals at the Tacoma premiere and, after hearing a read-through and getting feedback from the actors, made many edits to the language used by the two teens and gave permission to the actors and director to make additional language changes that would, in their opinion, make the diction more realistic. After the run, I read the stage manager's production book and viewed a tape of the performance to check for changes the actors had made in diction or wording and made more edits to the script. Finally, I sent this post-production script to Steven Butler, artistic director of the Actors' Warehouse and executive director of the Florida Theatre Conference, and incorporated suggestions he made.

As a white playwright, I fully understand the need for this kind of cultural trust, for corrective input at every step of the writing journey from a wide variety of people who know well the terrain I am only briefly visiting. So I am especially grateful for and humbled by the generous support—including questions, criticisms, suggestions and encouragement—given by my African American colleagues. I hope this resulting script proves worthy of their trust.

—Pat Montley

# Shattering

## Prologue

*(An electronic hum is heard. A large empty window frame is suspended at an angle. On one side, SONNY is being beaten up. He mimes this dance of violence. We do not see his two assailants or hear any of them speak. JONAH stands anxiously by, looking back and forth between the beating and the street corner behind him. On the other side of the frame, DEEDEE witnesses this. She is wild with distress, but we do not hear her screams. SONNY is stabbed in the chest, and he puts a hand to his heart. The hum grows louder. DEEDEE bangs on the window “glass” so desperately that her hand goes through it. There is a sound of violently shattering glass as JONAH and DEEDEE lock eyes, mirroring each other’s desperation. Blackout.)*

## Scene 1

*(The present. A Saturday in early April. Late afternoon.*

*An urban neighborhood. A large park separates an economically impoverished neighborhood of project housing on one side from a gentrified neighborhood of rows of townhouses on the other side. DEEDEE lives in one of these. Her tasteful house has no walls, so the projects are always a presence. There is a large, suspended picture window in the front room, from which a person inside could see—even touch—someone on the sidewalk outside. On the same plane as the window is the entrance, and outside this is a stoop.*

*We see an orderly but welcoming living/dining area: bookshelves, a sofa, wooden rocker, steamer trunk coffee table, a TV that is not the conspicuous center of attention, a desk with a cordless landline phone and desktop computer, and a small dining table with two chairs. A doorway leads to a kitchen [not visible], and there is a small bedroom with a window—possibly on a higher level.*

*We hear the sound of loud but unintelligible rap music booming from a car going by.*

*DEEDEE and JONAH enter. He has a visible tattoo on his arm—the word “Lords” over the drawing of a knife—and wears a GPS ankle monitor. She wears a small elastic wrist support. As she crosses to the desk to deposit mail, he lights up a cigarette. She sees this, takes a glass coaster from the desk, crosses to him, and holds it out to him. He looks at it, pretending not to know what she wants. She raises it. He takes a deep drag, blows the smoke in her face, then puts out the cigarette in the coaster. She puts out her other hand. He stares at her defiantly. She stares back. He slaps the pack of cigarettes and matches down on her hand. She pockets these and puts the coaster down.)*

JONAH. Jesus fucking Christ!

DEEDEE. Please don't do that, Jonah.

JONAH. You gonna give me shit about “taking the Lord's name in vain”?

DEEDEE. I don't care about that.

JONAH. What then?

DEEDEE. It shows a lack of imagination.

JONAH. Huh?

DEEDEE. What were you feeling when you said that?

JONAH (*taunting, thinking she will resist repeating it*). Said what?

DEEDEE (*matter-of-factly*). Jesus fucking Christ?

JONAH. I don't know ... pissed, screwed?

DEEDEE (*takes a thesaurus from the bookshelf and flips its pages at him. Teacher mode*). Were you irritated? Piqued? Nettled? Provoked? Exasperated? Wrathful? Mildly annoyed?

JONAH. What you talking about?

DEEDEE. Roget's Thesaurus. You could pick the exact word. You have choices, you know. (*Thrusts the book at him.*) Make them.

JONAH. I was just mad. I don't need this shit. (*Tosses the book.*) I made a choice to be mad.

DEEDEE. So you were angry because you don't like having someone else make the rules.

JONAH. Well, duh!

DEEDEE. Then say so.

JONAH. Say what?

DEEDEE. Say: “It makes me angry when I don't get to make the rules.”

JONAH. Then what?

DEEDEE. Then ... I hear you—I know what you’re feeling.

JONAH. So?

DEEDEE. So maybe—maybe this time is different from ... before.

Maybe—in this house at least—we *negotiate* the rules.

JONAH. I get to make ’em?

DEEDEE. You get to ... *suggest* ... *some*.

JONAH. One for every one you ... “suggest.”

DEEDEE. Fair enough. Let’s try.

JONAH. Me first! I get to have my girlfriend come over. She just lives over in the projects ... across the park.

DEEDEE. What’s her name?

JONAH. LaBelle.

DEEDEE. How old is LaBelle?

JONAH. Fourteen. Same as me.

DEEDEE. Is she a classmate?

JONAH. Yeah.

DEEDEE. Oooo ... kay ... agreed. *After* you’ve had a week to settle in, LaBelle may come to visit. Now it’s my turn to suggest a rule. LaBelle doesn’t spend the night.

JONAH. That ain’t fair!

DEEDEE. That’s “negotiating.”

JONAH. What you got against love?

DEEDEE. Nothing.

JONAH. Then why can’t she spend the night?

DEEDEE. Because people should sleep in their own beds. She should spend the night in her own home. With her own family. This is our home—yours and mine. LaBelle may spend the day here on Saturdays if she likes.

JONAH. Humph. Next time you go first.

DEEDEE. No TV until after seven.

JONAH. Except on weekends.

*(She makes a face.)*

JONAH *(cont’d)*. Football.

DEEDEE *(conceding)*. Football.

JONAH. I get to smoke one pack of cigarettes a day.

DEEDEE. One cigarette a day—

JONAH. Half a pack.

DEEDEE. The first week. Then nine cigarettes the second week.

Then eight—

JONAH. Whooooaa!

DEEDEE. Then seven, then six ... then one cigarette the tenth week.

Then none. (*Waving the pack toward the door, then putting the cigarettes on the windowsill.*) On the stoop.

JONAH. What kinda “nee-gotiatin” is that?

DEEDEE. The kind with your well-being in mind.

JONAH (*beat*). I won’t go to church.

DEEDEE. Me neither.

JONAH. Really?

DEEDEE. Really.

JONAH. Never?

DEEDEE. Does that surprise you?

JONAH. What I care?

DEEDEE. Whoever cooks doesn’t have to clean up.

JONAH. What’s that mean?

DEEDEE. When I cook dinner, you clean up. We take turns. Week at a time.

JONAH. Why I have to cook?

DEEDEE. Because it’s fair. Because it’s good training in life skills.

Everyone needs to learn how to prepare his own food. (*Pulls a cookbook from the shelf.*)

JONAH. But I don’t know nothing about cooking.

DEEDEE. Haven’t you ever boiled a potato?

JONAH. Ain’t no potatoes at the 7-Eleven.

DEEDEE. So what did you eat growing up?

JONAH. When I was little, my mama used to bring home leftovers from where she worked. Meatloaf, chicken stew. Some kinda tuna fish with noodles. Stuff like that. But I never seen her make it.

DEEDEE. And after that?

JONAH. After she ... after she don’t work no more, we get our food at McDonald’s. Sometimes KFC. I never fixed no dinner.

DEEDEE (*thrusts the cookbook at him*). Learn *The Joy of Cooking*.

JONAH (*tosses the book on the sofa. Looks around. Spots a silver baby cup on a shelf, examines it*). What's this for? Silver, right? Must be worth something.

DEEDEE. Sentimental value only—it's engraved. A baby cup.

JONAH. Awful fancy thing for a baby to drink out of. (*Puts it back.*)

DEEDEE. It's more for show—a gift to celebrate a birth.

JONAH (*indicating the sofa*). So. This where I sleep?

DEEDEE. No. (*Crossing to the bedroom.*) You'll have your own room. Come see it.

*(He follows her. It is clearly the bedroom of a teenage boy: football paraphernalia, a bookshelf, a large telescope on a stand by a window.)*

JONAH. Looks like somebody else sleeps here.

DEEDEE (*pointedly*). Somebody else did.

JONAH (*changing the uncomfortable subject*). Where's my TV?

DEEDEE. There's only one.

JONAH. What?!

DEEDEE. You saw it in the living room.

JONAH. *One* TV? Who has one TV?

DEEDEE. We do.

JONAH. What about a computer?

DEEDEE. A desktop. Also in the living room. You may use it for your homework.

JONAH. No laptop?

DEEDEE. At work.

JONAH (*looking around*). So what I sposed to do in here?

DEEDEE. Sleep. Read? Think? Take refuge. Cocoon. Explore the blissful, terrifying terrain of solitude.

JONAH. Lady, who you think you talking to? I don't know what them words mean.

DEEDEE. You will. You'll figure them out from the context. That's how one learns new words, develops a vocabulary. I don't believe in talking down to children.

JONAH. I ain't no "children."

DEEDEE. Or to teenagers. I will treat you like a literate adult in the hope that you will eventually become one.

JONAH. What if I don't wanna become your kinda ... whatever?

DEEDEE. That will be your choice.

JONAH. Where'd you learn to talk white?

DEEDEE. I don't talk "white." I talk educated. And so can you.

JONAH. And have everybody laugh at me for acting better than them? No way. Nobody I know talks like that.

DEEDEE. There are more people in the world than the ones you know. And you are smarter than most of them.

JONAH. I'm a ninth grader.

DEEDEE. With an IQ well above average. I've seen the test scores.

JONAH. Then why I get "D's" all the time?

DEEDEE. We're going to find out. And then we're going to do something about it.

JONAH (*dismisses this possibility with a grunt. Then, looking around*). What's this thing?

DEEDEE. A telescope.

JONAH. What's it for?

DEEDEE. You'll figure it out.

JONAH. Looks expensive.

DEEDEE. It was. That second one even more than the first.

JONAH. What happened to the first?

DEEDEE. It ... got broken.

JONAH. So what I get if I sell it on the street?

DEEDEE. A visit from your parole officer and another stint in the Juvenile Training Center.

JONAH (*opening a drawer*). Am I sposed to wear these?

DEEDEE. Up to you. If you do, afterwards— (*Lifting lid of clothes basket.*) they go in here. You do the laundry every other week.

JONAH. Aw, fuck!

*(She gives him a look.)*

JONAH (*cont'd*). I mean shit!

*(Another look.)*

JONAH (*cont'd*). What am I sposed to say?

DEEDEE. What you feel.

JONAH. I never done no laundry.

DEEDEE. So what do you feel? Inadequate? Incompetent?

JONAH. Stupid. I mean, I ain't no cleaning woman—it's stupid for me to be doing laundry.

DEEDEE. Is it stupid for you to be wearing clothes?

JONAH. Everybody wear clothes.

DEEDEE. Then everybody can do laundry. At least everybody in this house. *(Crosses to the living room.)*

JONAH *(following her)*. But how do I—?

DEEDEE. It's not astrophysics.

JONAH. Astro what?

DEEDEE. Machines are in the basement. Directions on the lids. Only thing you need to remember: dark clothes together—in cold water, light clothes in warm. Don't put my blouses in with your jeans.

JONAH. What? I gotta do *your* dirty clothes too?

DEEDEE. Only if you want me to do yours when it's my turn.

*(He's between a rock and a hard place.)*

DEEDEE *(cont'd)*. Or ... I could do my own laundry and you could do yours. *(Pointedly.)* Every week.

JONAH. Yeah.

DEEDEE. Yeah, what?

JONAH. Yeah, I do my own.

*(She gives him a look.)*

JONAH *(cont'd)*. When I get to it.

DEEDEE. Who did your laundry ... before?

JONAH. Before what?

DEEDEE. In your last ... where you lived last.

JONAH. Foster mother.

DEEDEE. Did you ... did you like her?

JONAH. Yeah. *(Pointedly.)* She didn't make lotsa rules.

DEEDEE. So. I'll leave you to ... look around.

*(Beat.)*

DEEDEE (*cont'd*). It's ... it's good you came on a Saturday. That gives us the weekend to ... get ... settled.

JONAH (*sarcastic*). Yeah. Right.

DEEDEE. The bus comes at eight on school days. You catch it on the corner of Eastern and Park. Brings you back around four. Plenty of time to do your homework.

JONAH (*sarcastic*). Sure.

DEEDEE (*puts a hand in her pocket*). Oh. Here's a key.

*(She extends it to him.)*

JONAH. What's this to?

DEEDEE. The house.

JONAH (*taken back by the trust this implies*). This house?

DEEDEE. How else you going to get in? I get home around five-thirty or six, most days. Work is close by.

JONAH (*taking the key*). So that's why you live here?

DEEDEE. What do you mean?

JONAH. You got enough ... you could live anyplace. I mean this is a nice street and all, with its fixed-up, expensive houses, but ...

DEEDEE. But the larger neighborhood ... this part of the city ... has its problems. Yes. I guess I wanted to be part of the solution.

JONAH (*turning away*). Yeah. We seen how that worked out.

DEEDEE. If you ever need to call me at the lab, the number's on speed dial on the phone in the living room. Number four. (*Takes a slip of paper from her pocket, holds it out to him.*) This is the number. In case you ever need to call me there from school.

JONAH. Can I get a iPhone?

*(He turns back to her. She shakes her head. He grunts, disgusted.)*

DEEDEE. Not my rule. But a good one.

*(He ignores the slip of paper she's holding out. She puts it down.)*

DEEDEE (*cont'd*). I'll be calling the school twice a day—at ten and two. Just to make sure you're ... doing OK.

JONAH. You mean just checking up on me.

DEEDEE. Just while you're on probation.

JONAH (*awkward pause*). Why ... why you doing this?

DEEDEE. I ... think ... maybe I ... (*Shakes her head.*) I don't really know.

JONAH. You some kinda ... wacko?

DEEDEE. I guess we'll find out, won't we? (*Looks at her watch.*) Supper's in the Crockpot. Be ready in five minutes. This week I'm cooking.

*(DEEDEE exits. JONAH pockets the key, crosses back to the bedroom. He looks around, takes a shirt from a drawer and holds it up to him. It is ten years out of style. He tosses it back and goes to the telescope. He begins to examine how it swivels and pumps, looks into the wrong end. He gets up, runs his hand along books on a shelf, pulls out a small spiral notebook, looks inside at the handwriting then tosses it on the bed. He takes out the key and plays with it for a moment, then pockets it again. He picks up the notebook again, flips it open and reads for a moment. SONNY enters through the wall.)*

SONNY. This is my room.

JONAH. Not for a long time. Them shirts ain't fit you for ten years. Where you been, Sonny boy?

SONNY. It's a long story.

JONAH. People down at the mission say you good at telling stories.

SONNY. It's not that kind of story. Anyway, this is still my room.

JONAH. Looks like it's mine now.

SONNY. Isn't that ironic?

JONAH. I what?

SONNY. Irony. My favorite word. You'll be coming across it all the time. It's probably on the page you're open to now. "A development in a narrative opposite to and in mockery of the expected result." The opposite of "poetic justice." Unpoetic justice? Poetic injustice?

JONAH. You sound like the kinda guy don't need that T-saurus.

SONNY. Ah, well. Mr. Roget and I are long-time comrades. It was ... an "arranged friendship."

JONAH. Bet I know who done the arranging.

SONNY (*imitating DEEDEE*). “You have choices, you know!”

Only you better make the ones she wants.

JONAH. Did you?

SONNY (*referring to the journal*). Read it and find out.

DEEDEE (*offstage, calling*). Jonah! Dinner’s ready.

(*JONAH and SONNY study each other. Lights.*)

## Scene 2

(*A week later. Saturday midday. Living room. LABELLE, 14, wearing only underwear and a T-shirt but covered by a light-weight throw is asleep on the sofa. Her jeans and shoes are strewn on the floor, as are JONAH’s shirt and shoes. He sits at the table in his jeans, reading a cookbook. She wakes up.*)

LABELLE. Ummmm ... I had me a nice little nap ... and the best dream ever.

(*He looks up.*)

LABELLE (*cont’d*). I dreamed it was the end of the longest four months of my life and you was out of juvey and you was inside me, coming and coming and coming home. And all the while, Patti LaBelle was singing.

JONAH. What she singing?

(*Perhaps LABELLE sings just the first line of the chorus of “Joy to Have Your Love,” imitating the style of her namesake.*)

LABELLE. Ain’t that the sweetest dream ever?

JONAH. Yeah, that dream almost as sweet as you, LaBelle.

LABELLE (*putting on her jeans*). Songs about falling in love are my favorite. When did you do it?

JONAH. Do what?

LABELLE. Fall in love?

JONAH. With who?

LABELLE (*crossing to him*). You think I wanna hear about you falling in love with somebody else?

JONAH. I ain’t thought about it.

LABELLE. Well think about it now.

JONAH. Let's see ... was it when you knocked your tray into my lap in the cafeteria? Or maybe when you dropped your book on my foot in math class?

LABELLE. I can't help it you was always in the wrong place. Come on—you just stalling.

JONAH. A'ight, a'ight. It was at the park—the basketball court. You was sitting on the bench drinking a Coke and wearing them red sunglasses that's way too big—cover up your whole face. You was sitting next to Tonya and she musta said something funny 'cause you laughing and falling over silly, not paying no attention to the game. Then I come up for a foul shot. And things get quiet. And I'm bouncing the ball, looking at the hoop, but I'm seeing you out the edge of my eye. And then you call out—

LABELLE (*calling out*). Hey, bro—stop thinking about how fine you look in them fancy Jordans and bury the damn ball!

JONAH. I know right then I got to get behind them sunglasses.

LABELLE. And that's when you fell in love with me?

JONAH (*pulls her onto his lap*). No, that happened after. Tonya eat so much junk during the game that she got sick afterwards—threw up all over the bench. But you stayed right there—held onto her the whole time she puked. Reggie come along and made fun of her and you rapped him upside the head with your Coke bottle so hard he near fell over. I know then I want somebody who would ... somebody that loyal ... and that fierce ... to be there for me.

LABELLE. I am here for you, Jonah. I always will be.

*(They kiss.)*

LABELLE (*cont'd*). What you reading?

JONAH. Cookbook.

LABELLE. Well, ain't that something? You gonna make me a Patti LaBelle Sweet Potato Pie?

JONAH. Did you know meatloaf ain't nothing but smashed up hamburgers?

LABELLE. What's the matter with hamburgers? Why you want to go and smash 'em up?