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# **10 Seconds**

By

**MIRIAM GONZALES**

**Dramatic Publishing Company**

Woodstock, Illinois • Australia • New Zealand • South Africa

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*10 Seconds* was premiered by Imagination Stage, inspired by the Police and Youth Program, on Nov. 18, 2021, at the Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Library in Washington, D.C.

CAST:

RAY ..... Anthony Powell  
JIMI ..... Tre'mon Mills  
LELAND..... Carl Ackers  
KENT ..... Katie Wicklund

PRODUCTION:

Director ..... LeeAnét Noble  
Music/Sound Design..... Roc Lee  
Scenic Design..... Molly Singer  
Costume Design.....Kiana Vicenty  
Stage Management..... Jason Payton

# 10 Seconds

## CHARACTERS

RAY HENDERSON (m): 14 years old, Jimi's friend, Black.  
Also plays Student 1.

JIMI ROBERTS (m): 14 years old, Ray's friend, Black. Also  
part of the Chorus.

CRAIG LELAND (m): Police officer, Black. Also plays  
Teen Boy, Ray's Dad, Jimi's Dad, Student 2 and Chorus.

SAMANTHA KENT (w): Police officer, white. Also plays  
Drama Teacher, Teen Girl, Ray's Mom, Annie and Chorus.

TIME: Present day.

PLACE: Washington, D.C.



## 10 Seconds

*(An empty stage.)*

*The following is done in silence.*

*RAY HENDERSON enters with his script and a prop box. He creates a crooked line on the stage floor with a roll of tape. He arranges some of the set pieces. He begins to write.*

*The rest of the cast enters as RAY writes the characters into his script. Perhaps a drumming underscore begins here.*

*RAY scribbles on his script as he walks, erases, thumbs through pages, circles a section and noticeably draws a line to move a section to the top of the page.*

*The performers respond, moving as he writes.*

*The performers playing SAMANTHA KENT and CRAIG LELAND put on police hats from the box as they circle.*

*RAY stops writing. The performers stop walking.*

*Drumming quickens. RAY grows increasingly agitated as the performers move into a tableau becoming their characters. The tableau consists of JIMI ROBERTS kneeling on the ground, frightened; KENT violently grabbing JIMI's arm, holding it behind his back, kneeling on one knee behind JIMI, her other hand on her holster; LELAND reaching in, holding on to JIMI's shoulder.)*

RAY. No, no! Stop!

*(The performers freeze. Drumming stops.)*



RAY (*cont'd, distressed*). That's not supposed to happen. Stop. (*Pause. To JIMI.*) Why—why didn't you listen to me?? Why didn't you meet me, why didn't you—Jimi—

(*JIMI unfreezes from the tableau to turn his face to RAY.*)

RAY (*cont'd*). Why, huh?? *Answer me.*

(*JIMI looks away. RAY looks down at the line, which looks like a crack.*)

RAY (*cont'd*). Steppin' on a *stupid bad-luck crack, stupid girl, stupid plan, stupid—*

(*RAY erases lines on his script so furiously it tears.*

*The performers unravel from the tableau and remove costumes. Throughout the play, the CHORUS of performers remain onstage as they watch and help RAY tell his story, shifting in and out of characters as needed.*)

RAY (*cont'd*). Mrs. Martin, my drama teacher, always with the—  
DRAMA TEACHER. Write it out, write it out; it helps, it heals, it—

RAY. Really? Just write a play and boom—no more nightmares, no more feelin' like a wreckin' ball's tearin' through my chest?

DRAMA TEACHER. There's no heart without art, Ray. Express yourself, your voice, it matters, it—

RAY. Uh-huh. Yeah. (*He writes, his head inches from the paper.*) So. I write, and I write, and I write; and it stays, (*Distressed, he rubs his forehead, eyes, tearing into his skin.*) and it stays, and it stays—every second of that day—that scene— (*Looks back to where the tableau stood.*) I can't forget. I won't forget— (*To the CHORUS.*) We won't forget.

*(RAY writes. He speaks what he is writing, and the CHORUS acts out his lines, grabbing props to become the characters.)*

RAY *(cont'd)*. I mean some other people might be like—

TEEN BOY. Whatever—this crap happens all the time in our 'hood, who cares—

TEEN GIRL. Nobody cares.

TEEN BOY. It is what it is.

TEEN GIRL. But when it happens to you, or—

*(CHORUS returns to the tableau with JIMI.)*

RAY. You see it happenin' to someone else—

KENT. Right in front of your face—

LELAND. It sticks.

KENT *(tightens hold on JIMI's arm)*. Tight—

JIMI. Like a knot.

*(RAY looks up from his writing. He stares at JIMI and the haunting tableau. He tenses up and shuts his eyes tightly. The CHORUS retreats. RAY takes a breath, opens his eyes.)*

RAY *(into the audience)*. So. I write. About that day *(Writes. Points to CHORUS.)* and all the characters in that day— *(Turns to JIMI.)* But it begins with ... us. With you.

*(JIMI steps up.)*

RAY *(cont'd)*. And—The Plan. *(Reads from his script.)*  
“SCENE ONE.” Action. *(Reading as he introduces JIMI.)*  
“Jimi. Jimi William Roberts.”

*(CHORUS sits.)*

RAY (*reads one line, then goes off script*). “My best friend.”

Well, you’re more like a brother, really.

JIMI. Yeah, we’re so close *we’re psychic*.

RAY. It’s true! We can read each other’s minds.

JIMI. We’ll be on the Metro, right—

RAY. And we’ll both be like starvin’, an’ I’ll say, “Jimi.” An’ you’ll say—

JIMI. “Ray.”

RAY. An’ we’ll say, *at the same time*—

RAY & JIMI. “Man, I need me some Taki Fuego NOW.”

*(They crack up, eat Takis.)*

RAY. Freaky, righ’?

JIMI. We both like weird socks, too ...

*(Show each other their socks.)*

RAY. And go-go.

*(Both dance to go-go for a couple of seconds.)*

RAY (*cont’d*). I’m a math nerd—love school—we *both love* school, we—

JIMI. Uh, excuse me.

RAY. Well, you *used* to love it. Until we turned thirteen. Unlucky thirteen.

*(RAY picks up script, writes.)*

RAY (*cont’d*). You started skippin’ school, *runnin’ away from school*—like actually standin’ up and sprintin’ like a fool right outta class. Hangin’ out with “new friends,” runnin’

away from home. My grandma, she'd say:

*(As Grandma [or a CHORUS member as Grandma], calls out.)* “You be careful with that Jimi. Just a matter a time before he gets in trouble, deep trouble.”

*(Normal.)* And my dad, always tellin' me:

*(As Dad [or a CHORUS member as Dad], calls out.)* “Jimi's got anger issues. Watch out, you can't say no to him, ever, or he explodes.”

*(Normal.)* No. *(To CHORUS.)* Y'all don't know him like I do.

JIMI. We're still brothers—forever?

RAY. You know it. I always got your back, especially when things get tough. *(Writes/talks.)* And they did. We turned fourteen—our first year of high school—and for you, stuff at home started gettin' even harder.

JIMI. I'm sick of 'em. Splittin' up, comin' back together, splittin' up, screamin', fightin', splittin' up—they're nothin' like your parents, man.

RAY *(to CHORUS)*. All you have to do is look Jimi in the eye and listen.

JIMI. She doesn't even say goodbye, just flies out the door, man—who does that, *who does that??*

RAY *(looks him in the eye)*. I'm here for you. Always. *(To CHORUS.)* I meant it, too ... I did. *(Pause.)* I really did.

*(RAY sits and writes with gusto.)*

RAY *(cont'd)*. I knew what to do. *(To JIMI.)* We need a change.

JIMI. A change?

RAY. Yeah. A plan. *THE* plan. The-Greatest-Plan-EVA! *(As in “plan-ever.”)* We're gonna bust out.

JIMI. Of school?

RAY. Nah, man, we're gonna bust outta our "*image*"—boom—bust outta how everybody sees us. Show 'em a different side of us.

JIMI. I dunno, Ray, how we gonna—

RAY. OK, look, so there's me, everybody thinks—

JIMI & CHORUS. "Ray's just a math nerd."

RAY. True, true. Can't help it. But, what everybody *doesn't* know is that I love writing *and* acting, too.

RAY'S DAD. You got both cylinders runnin' in your brain, son—math *and* art.

RAY'S MOM. That means my boy has life choices.

JIMI. It means your head's way too big, dude.

RAY. Very funny. (*Finishes writing.*) There. (*Reads it.*) "THE PLAN: I hereby declare that I, Ray Alfred Henderson, am gonna bust outta my nerdy self and turn into a cool celebrity, a star."

*(JIMI laughs and gently teases RAY, ad-libbing.)*

RAY (*cont'd*). I'm serious, man. My drama teacher's doin' auditions for a class play next week. All I have to do is memorize ten seconds of a monologue.

JIMI. What's that?

RAY. A monologue's like when a character talks a lot, for like a real long time in a play, they keep talkin' and talkin' and—

JIMI. Ah, yeah, you'll be real good at that.

RAY. I'm goin' for the superhero part.

JIMI. A'right.

RAY. I'm gonna say my thing an' then— (*Mic drop.*) I'm gonna blow up all y'all's labels 'bout me. OK. Your turn. What're you gonna do?

*(ANNIE stands up from the CHORUS.)*

JIMI *(dreamy as he gazes at ANNIE)*. You really gotta ask?

RAY. Oh no.

*(RAY stops. JIMI freezes. RAY tries to erase ANNIE from the script.)*

RAY *(cont'd)*. No, no, no. No Annie. Nope.

*(ANNIE retreats. DRAMA TEACHER stands up from the CHORUS.)*

RAY *(cont'd, to DRAMA TEACHER)*. I don't wanna hear it, Ms. Martin.

DRAMA TEACHER. Ray, Annie's a character in this day.

RAY. But—

DRAMA TEACHER. She's a part of Jimi's plan, his dreams.

RAY. But, but—if she wasn't, if she hadn't—

DRAMA TEACHER. Life is like a play. Each character has their own needs, problems, hopes. People interact, affect one another. If your goal, Ray, is to share the story of this day, you simply can't avoid her— *(Gestures to CHORUS.)* or any of the characters, you simply can't—

*(RAY shushes DRAMA TEACHER; she sits.)*

RAY *(to JIMMI)*. You really crushin' on Annie? You really like this gurl?

JIMI. I do.

RAY. Fine. *(Writes her name back into the script.)*

JIMI. Everybody thinks I'm bad, Ray. That I look mean, act mean, always in trouble, they're all scared of me.

RAY. Uh-uh, not true.

JIMI. But Annie's different. I'm gonna make her see the *real* me. I'm writin' her a poem. And I'm gonna read it to her LIVE, *in person*.

RAY. *Whaaat?* stop playin'—

JIMI. And then she's gonna see that I'm not what everybody thinks they see. There. That's my plan.

*(JIMI exits. RAY writes.)*

RAY *(writes and talks to the audience)*. So. The Greatest Plan Ever was in motion. We decided to kick it off together on the same day—my audition day. And nothin' and no one was gonna stop us—because it's OUR day, and we decide how to end our days— *(Turns to DRAMA TEACHER.)* That's what you said—

DRAMA TEACHER. “Life is like a play. Just as—”

RAY *(he's memorized her mantra)*. I know, I know—“Just as the playwright decides how to end their plays, in life we decide how to end our days, no matter the characters that get in our way. It's up to us.” *(A beat. To the audience.)* Right? *(Pause. He writes and reads from his script.)* “**SCENE TWO.** Audition day. And the first character in our day—” *(To the audience.)* Jimi's dad. ACTION.

*(JIMI looks in a mirror as he gets dressed for school. He puts on a hoodie backwards, pats his hair, wears baggy jeans and is eating Takis. JIMI hears a text notification and picks up his cellphone from the prop box.)*

RAY *(cont'd, texting)*. Meet you at the metro in fifteen. You ready? This is our day, man, #greatestplaneva. Let's do this!

JIMI *(texts)*. One hundred percent. C U.

*(JIMI'S DAD enters.)*

JIMI'S DAD. Who you talking to?

JIMI. Nobody.

JIMI'S DAD. That's your breakfast? Tacky's? Wash them crumbs off your ugly face—

JIMI. It's Takis, Dad. *(Mumbles as he scrolls on phone.)* And anyway, what else is there to eat around here? Nothin'.

DAD. *Whatdju say?!* You look at me when I'm talkin' to you! I don't have time to mess with you—

JIMI. Mom's been gone three months already! *Again!* Why don't you fix your mess with her?

JIMI'S DAD *(enraged, lunges for JIMI)*. I toldju watch your mouth, you hear me?! Get outta this house, go on! And gimme that, 'fore I—

*(JIMI'S DAD snatches JIMI's phone right out of JIMI's hand and puts it in his back pocket.)*

JIMI. That's mine!—That's mine!

JIMI'S DAD. Nuthin's yours, boy! Nuthin'. *(A beat.)* Now pull your damn pants up, *(Pulling at his hoodie.)* turn this smelly thing around and ... wash all these clothes when you get home, you hear me?!

*(JIMI'S DAD turns to leave, and JIMI sneaks his phone out of his dad's back pocket.)*

JIMI. Yessir.

*(JIMI'S DAD exits.)*

JIMI *(cont'd, punches the air hard)*. I hate you.



*(RAY steps in. JIMI freezes.)*

RAY. Your dad. Your mom. Your temper, man, all of it. I mean that's why Leland came into your world in the first place. *(Pause, to the audience.)* Twelve, man. Yeah, the other character in our day. *(Writes and reads.)* “**SCENE THREE.** The Metro.”

*(RAY paces back and forth, JIMI follows him.)*

JIMI. Aw, c'mon, Ray, you said you'd help me—

RAY *(paces)*. I can't—only 16,200 seconds until we do our thing—

JIMI. Exactly—

RAY. And the train's gonna be here any minute, *and* I'm freakin', dude—I'm forgettin' all my lines, *I gotta practice*—

JIMI. I do, too! You said you'd help me with “my delivery”—*you're the actor*—

RAY. Shhh. *(Practices on his own.)*

JIMI *(scrolls his phone, searching for poem)*. Lemme read it once to you, real fast, OK—?

*(RAY ignores him and continues to practice.)*

JIMI *(cont'd)*. Where are you, poem? Here you are. Thank God I stole my phone—

RAY. What?

JIMI. My dad got all mad at me this mornin' an' took it from me. But I stole it back.

*(JIMI gestures slyly picking RAY's pocket and taking his phone.)*

JIMI (*cont'd*). I got the touch.

RAY (*grabs phone back*). Just focus already.

JIMI. Ah, forget you, where's Officer Leland? I'll practice with him. (*Walks off.*)

RAY. Fine, OK, stop—c'mon! I'm here for you, I am.

(*JIMI freezes.*)

RAY (*cont'd, to himself, looking out into the audience*). Officer Leland.

(*LELAND stands from the CHORUS.*)

RAY (*cont'd, to JIMI*). I couldn't believe it. You makin' friends with a cop?! It'd been three months since your mom had left—

(*RAY puts consoling hand on JIMI's shoulder. JIMI unfreezes.*)

RAY (*cont'd*). And I couldn't get you to go to school with me for days, no matter what I said.

(*JIMI sits down, shoulders slumped.*)

RAY (*cont'd*). And then one day, when I left for school, I looked back, an' (*Worried.*) Twelve, man—Officer Leland—

(*LELAND enters the scene in a flashback.*)

RAY (*cont'd*). Was there—walkin' *straight to you*.

(*RAY watches with the CHORUS.*)

LELAND. I feel you, man, one of those days, huh?

(*JIMI, nervous, tries to stand up; LELAND motions for him to stay.*)