



## Lazarus

By Rashid Darden  
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When I first read the novel “The Known World” by Edward P. Jones, I was absolutely shocked learning the inner-workings of a plantation and the society that surrounded its boundaries. The novel was based on a slave earning the freedom of his son who, years after being freed became a slave owner. I was amazed at how slaves were “kept in their place” not necessarily because the ‘massas’ wanted it that way, but because if a slave witnessed another slave acting with any authority, the wrong idea about slaves’ rights would spread like wildfire, bringing havoc to a society based on racial inferiority. I never thought I’d read another book that moved me in the same way—at least, not so soon. Rashid Darden has equaled Edward P. Jones, in his modern, societal tale entitled “Lazarus”.

Adrian Collins is a motivated, intelligent, 19 year-old black male at Potomac University which is set in our nation’s capital. Adrian has all possible leadership characteristics. He is an active member and vice president of the campus’ NAACP Chapter and has become a small “big man on campus” by his sophomore year at Potomac. With his father disappearing from his life at an early age, Adrian has become his own man. In obtaining that achievement, however, he is left dealing with terrible demons within his soul. Adrian has a deep-dark secret he dares not share with the world.

Deep under the “I got it together”, “I’m motivated and ready to change the world” exterior, Adrian is plagued with confusion about who he really is. His authoritative mask of conquering the world hides the secret that he’s not sure what he wants to do or where or whether he truly fits in. Obviously, these are not the type of leadership characteristics he desires to show and if exposed, it could truly ruin his image, thus ruining his future.

By the way, did I mention Adrian was gay?

Yes, Adrian is a gay, black male and he is secure in how he feels—that doesn’t mean he has to broadcast it to the whole world does it? Adrian IS NOT in the closet, he just chooses not to be the spokesperson in the middle of the spotlight. He is content with this role until he and his best girl, Nina, encounters the poetic legend of Potomac University, Savion Cortez. Savion, who has traveled the world and missed Adrian’s freshman year, returns to find true love. Both Adrian and Savion are sure that they do not want to continue life without each other. Adrian, suddenly, seems to have the opportunity to “have it all”...or does he?

Savion, no doubt, completes Adrian’s heart but does not necessarily complete his mind. In a twist of fate, Adrian pledges to the fraternity, Beta Chi Phi, which turns out to be an organization his long, lost father was a pioneering, charter members. Can the completed heart survive with the attempted

completion of the mind? Will his dedication to his frat diminish the relationship with his lover? Adrian struggles to maintain the grip on both aspects of his life, walking a tightrope between love and honor.

“Lazarus” is full of colorful, but most important, realistic characters making the story so complete. There is Nina, Adrian’s closest friend, who makes an art of remaining single; Micah, leader of the NAACP chapter, whose only goal in life is to be “A Beta-man” and will do ANYTHING to be one; Calen, the macho football player, who admires Adrian completely; Steven, Adrian’s strict, authoritative Dean and personal Beta prophete (if you don’t know what it means, read the book) and the list goes on and on. If you’ve never experienced pledging for a fraternity or sorority, you will have a front row seat—and will not miss a single detail. If you have pledged, you’ll know how EXACT Darden’s descriptions are as he describes the perspectives of a pledge’s rite of passage.

When this book was turned over to me, I was told it was a “quick read”. This is true, not because it is a short book, but because when you pick it up—you can’t bear to put it down! By the time you finish it, you will realize how much we are all ‘slaves’ to society. You will also recognize just how much masquerading we do in everyday life just to “fit in”. Rashid Darden paints an exquisite portrait of college life, urban youth and the secrets we all hold from the world to maintain the image we wish to portray.

This book is about a young, gay, black male dealing with his sexuality and his right to privacy about his sexuality. It’s about his dedication to his community and wanting to make a difference. It’s about how much he desires to be “A Beta-man” and carry on their humanitarian traditions. It’s about what he deals with in balancing the love of his partner and his determination to be a part of his father’s fraternity. It’s about the eggs that are broken when he can’t continue to juggle them all. Tell the world, lose his frat; stay silent, lose his lover. Being in the closet has nothing to do with it.

Just as Jones, in “The Known World” constructed a collage of how the South’s racist society depended upon slaves “knowing their place”, Darden, in “Lazarus” shows you how destructive ignorance can be and make you question just how far our society has evolved. The most unfortunate thing about “Lazarus” is that even though it rivals and in my opinion exceeds Jones’ novel, at this time, quantities are limited because it is self-published. “Lazarus” belongs on every bookstore shelf in America.



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