

Taylor University

Pillars at Taylor University

English Student Projects

English Program

Fall 2024

Alfonzo Learns to Dance

Breck Lindahl

Follow this and additional works at: <https://pillars.taylor.edu/english-student-projects>



Part of the [Creative Writing Commons](#)

Alfonzo Learns to Dance

"The gods confound the man who first found out
How to distinguish hours! Confound him, too,
Who in this place set up a sun-dial
To cut and hack my days so wretchedly
Into small portions!

-Plautus

Alfonzo Regelsprout was one of those deep meditative specimens who always knew what went wrong. It was his firm conviction that if the guiding powers of the world would simply hand over the reins he could have the entire ball of wax running like clockwork before afternoon tea. In fact, had Eve received the great fortune of consulting with him during her tête-à-tête with the serpent, he was most positive that he could have worked out a solution satisfactory to all parties involved.

His great burden in this life, then, was the fact of his finitude. No matter how commanding a force he exerted on his hours, minutes, and seconds, he never could be in two places at once. As a result, his every effort was directed towards "redeeming the time, because the days are evil." For this reason, he had always with him a golden pocket watch, that he might always know exactly when to do such and such and exactly

how much of his time so and so had wasted; an omnipresent God may have patience to hear the many petitions of the faithful, but Alfonzo Regelsprout could not be expected to.

It was this last sentiment which now consumed him body mind and soul as he strolled along the uneven ground of the forest walkways. The forests surrounding the SchwarzRegen University of Orderly Conduct and Bureaucracy were known to be among the most beautiful of all the patches of wildlife so prevalent in the local geography; but by far, the most beautiful of them all was the Grünwald forest, known for its densely packed, scented conifers. At this time of year it was all leaves and needles everywhere you looked, coating both the ground and the trees in equal portions.

Alfonzo, however, was not impressed. In fact, he was slightly annoyed at the sappy taste in the air as it made him feel he were on the precipice of stumbling into a marsh of maple syrup; an event at which the mere thought made him shudder. To add to this already trying set of circumstances, it seemed to him that the proverbial fountains of the great deep had chosen this moment to burst open and unleash the harshest deluge of wind man was capable of imagining. Despite these thorns in his flesh, he had managed to set his mind on the things above: namely, what complete asses the schoolmasters were to have canceled all classes on such short notice merely because of a

stroke of good weather in an otherwise sopping month of cold showers.

“Confound the blasted oxen!” he thought. For Alfonzo regarded his morning routine as a kind of sacred edifice which no man, until now, would dare to soil.

He checked his pocket watch for perhaps the fifteenth time that afternoon: an old habit performed with as much reverence as morning prayers. The watch chain thumped against his stomach in the fierce wind as he made mental note of how long he had already been made to endure the chilled air. Satisfied that fifteen minutes was more than enough time to appreciate all that was wise and wonderful, he began the much anticipated return journey.

He had not gone but a few steps when his real troubles began. As he muttered his way down the path, he detected a sweet scent mingled with the sound of birds a little off the path. His first instincts were to ignore this unwelcome phenomenon and continue his way back to the worldly comforts of his favorite pub, but upon taking a second look he thought better of it; in the distance, twirling and spinning in the wind, flitted the form of a woman. As Alfonzo crept closer, he began to make out the finer details of her fluid form and drew up quite aghast when he finally understood what he was seeing. There, springing and gliding in a sort of dance with the wind itself, was a woman

made entirely of flowers. Or at least that was his first impression; she seemed to flit back and forth between a woman with shining skin and bright eyes and a living bouquet of Lillies and sunflowers wearing a sweet smelling dress of small blue and red buds. Alfonzo never could tell afterwards which description was best.

A sudden gust of the harsh wind seemed to seize Alfonzo and throw him from his hiding place amongst the tall grass and shrubs so that he landed, quite unceremoniously, in front of her. Instantly he was up and brushing himself off while she finished her dance and then stood still in the wind, watching Alfonzo as if she had known he was there the whole time.

Alfonzo, who was not in the habit of making appearances to ghosts, spirits, or even the postmaster by flying out of adjacent shrubs, turned a deep red, which quickly became an even deeper purple when he realized the soiled state of his suit. Being a sensible fellow, however, he did his best to compose himself and prepared to make light of the fact that he looked like a man who thought grooming were a thing he did not approve of in the modern age. "Awfully sorry about that. Can't imagine how it could've happened. Dreadful windy eh?"

The flowery woman merely smiled and chuckled, subtly swaying with the wind.

His initial shock having subsided, Alfonzo now narrowed his eyes at the strange sight before him, equally as unable to discern what he was seeing as before. "My name is Regelsprout, Alfonzo R. Regelsprout," he said reservedly, hoping she would reciprocate with some means of identification.

Instead, she said quite simply, "Alfonzo Regelsprout. Dance with me." She held out her hand meaningfully, and Alfonzo got the impression that he was expected to take it. The wind began to pick up and swirl around them voraciously.

As Alfonzo watched this curious creature begin to weave and twirl in harmony with fresh currents of swirling air, her hand still outstretched, he was surprised to find a small part of himself wanting to accept her invitation.

"We might at least make each other's acquaintance before we engage in the old one two three four, hmm? I mean to say, I haven't the faintest idea who you are," said Alfonzo, one hand fiddling with his watch chain. It is perhaps self evident, that for Alfonzo to have proceeded thus far without a formal introduction was a miracle in and of itself; with Alfonzo there was no clearer indication of poor breeding than an overfamiliar exchange with a perfect stranger.

The woman of flowers stopped dancing momentarily, though even standing still she seemed to be a constant motion of shifting petals. "I am wisdom. And some know me as peace. I am

she whose glory surpasses even Solomon. And if you are to be saved from these winds, you must dance with me."

Alfonzo did not know quite what she meant by anything which she said, but something about her words rang true inside him, and he was not at all comfortable acknowledging it. As the wind washed over him with a renewed violence, he suddenly felt very cold. "N-Now see here!" he managed to say. "I'm sure I haven't the slightest idea what you mean by all that gas about wind and Solomon, but I really haven't the least desire to go dancing with a nymph or a whatchamacallit out in the middle of this damned forest with every tree within a generous radius prepared to give up the ghost and come crashing down on yours truly." Her whole aspect no longer possessed the same charm it had mere moments ago and her hand seemed farther away somehow.

"You will not dance?" And she sighed as she said this. "If you will not dance then you will be drowned." Sadness seemed to creep into her eyes.

The wind was now blowing with such ferocity that the petals which made up her body began to blow away.

"If you cannot dance, perhaps you can learn to laugh," she said, a note of hope entering her voice, though by now Alfonzo could barely hear anything she said in the midst of the raging gale now assaulting his body.

Slowly, the woman bent backwards and began to weave herself away from Alfonzo in a series of twists and spins. Before long, she seemed to be moving with as much energy as the storm, darting left and right, always in constant sync with the wind. As Alfonzo anchored himself to the ground, shivering against the onslaught of air, he noticed that this strange girl no longer looked at if she felt the wind at all. Her dancing was in such harmony with the currents around her, that they seemed to meld into one entity, neither one in contrast with the other.

"I will send my brother to you, Alfonzo Regelsprout. He will give you the joy you seek." Her voice seemed to come from all around Alfonzo even as her body appeared to melt away in a cyclone of pollen, petals, and stems.

Alfonzo did not like the sound of brothers finding him; still less, however, did he like the increasing winds which threatened to remove him from his footing, and so Alfonzo did not long dwell on the ominous statement.

As he walked on, the wind continued to grow ever more biting, and he soon left the path again to walk in the shelter of some large, densely packed trees. Though he did not relish the prospect of taking a longer path, this way, he found, offered a brief respite from the biting chill. He continued in this manner for some twenty minutes, continually wondering when he would finally make it out of the infernal forest and

occasionally making rash promises to burn it down should he make a timely escape.

His annoyance at wandering for so long a time shortly grew to concern, and he began even to display signs of being downright anxious; as he had been walking he made periodic stops to observe the time on his pocket watch (as we have related, an old habit of his), and he now found to his great surprise that the watch seemed to display the exact same time it had when he first left the path. "Just my luck to have the old thing go bad in my hour of need," he said to himself, feeling not unlike one who has been denied three times before the rooster has done so much as turn over in his sleep.

"Bad luck, that," said a crispy voice over Alfonzo's shoulder.

"Gaghh!" Said Alfonzo, and he meant it. "Who in all the sands of Arabia are you?! And what the blazes do you mean by popping out like a damn jack-in-the-box?!"

Alfonzo was now looking at a twisted mass of twigs, leaves, and pine needles arranged in the general outline of a man.

The twig man laughed and then patted Alfonzo on the back, seeming not to notice the way Alfonzo immediately withdrew from the physical contact. "Some call me the twig man, and some call me by my Christian name. You, I shouldn't wonder, would prefer to call me Mr. Holz."

Alfonzo was rather taken aback by the audacity of this man claiming to know what he should and shouldn't want, but seeing as this twiggish man was correct, and not wanting to be overly offensive, Alfonzo did his best to receive the suggestion warmly. "Holz, Eh? How, erm, do you do Mr. Holz. You may of course address me as-

"Alfonzo R. Regelsprout," said Mr. Holz absently, looking far less interested in introductions and far more interested in golden pocket watches whose chains blow in the wind.

Alfonzo, who hated being interrupted by strangers, inhaled deeply and thought he had better retry the opening pleasantries as swapping names did not seem to be going his way. "Are you, erm, just passing through?" he questioned, not being at all sure of what spirits do in their spare time between hauntings and seances.

"Oh, I'm merely on the lookout for a man being held captive by a golden dragon with two hands and a long scaly tail," mused Mr. Holz still fixated on Alfonzo's watch and not showing the slightest sign of embarrassment at his previous sentence.

Alfonzo now began to suspect that this particular spirit had escaped from whatever passed for a sanitarium in the spiritual domain and hadn't the faintest notion what he was saying; he began to cast an eye about, scanning for quick exits. In any case, he thought, if there really was some half witted

egg who had managed to be captured by a kind of overgrown iguana from Brazil, Alfonzo was most certain this Mr. Holz and the aforementioned half-wit deserved each other. It was, he thought, time to make a hasty retreat.

"My dear sister informed me of this poor fellow. She assures me he wandered somewhere in this general direction, carrying his golden captor in his pocket," explained Mr. Holz, finally tearing his eyes away from the watch.

Alfonzo, who had just begun to take a step towards freedom, now began to have dark suspicions enter his mind: first of mysterious brothers, and then of ominous warnings. He lifted his watch again and observed that it was now turning backwards, a thing heretofore unheard of in the watch industry. "You're the brother of that flimsy dancing woman who traipsed away like a trapeze artist aren't you," stated Alfonzo, who by now was feeling alarm in addition to his suspicion.

"You've got the right idea," said Mr. Holz.

"What's all this nonsense about dragons and scales have to do with my watch? For that matter, what have you to do with me?!" Demanded Alfonzo, who now did very little to keep the menacing tone from entering his voice.

"I've come to free you Alfonzo R. Regelsprout." And when he said this, Mr. Holz's entire body seemed to become a more

animated tumble of wood and needles. "I will free you or you will not leave this forest."

Alfonzo had had just about his daily allotment of helpful advice and spirits for the day. To experience both in the form of this Mr. Holz telling him where he was and was not going to go was too much for any Christian man to bear.

"My good faire, sprite, or whatever you are," and at this Alfonzo drew himself up into his most impressive stance, "I have no intentions whatever of letting you, your sister, or any other distant relations tell me which woods I can and cannot exit and which pocket watches I may and may not be captive to!"

Alfonzo felt that at some point in his remarks he had not quite represented himself as intended, but as he was working himself up into one of those really fine rages that only comes once or twice a year, he did not stop to correct himself. "I am at this very moment preparing to leave this forest with more exhilaration than the children of promise leaving Egypt, and I can assure you that discussions pertaining to dragons and scales will get you nowhere in deterring me!" And with these parting greetings, Alfonzo began to move as quickly as he was possible towards the now setting sun.

It was an hour later that Alfonzo began to allow thoughts of panic to be entertained in his mind. He had been walking in every direction known to man and yet he always ended up circling

round the same hill. It was the hill situated directly in the center of the Grünwald forest, and this was the first fact that distressed him. At no point that morning had he ventured near the center of the forest. He was sure of it. To have found his way there now carried a dread implication; he was lost.

The second distressing fact was that no matter how many times he attempted to leave the blasted hill, he always ended up circling round it again until he was in the same spot. Columbus himself could not have been more confused when he landed in the new world expecting to see all the old sights and smells.

The third and crowning fact was his pocket watch. It seemed now to have developed quite a mind of its own. First it went forward, now back. At times it skipped ahead hours in the space of a few minutes. An hour of this torment and Alfonzo was beginning to lose his nerve.

"All right you confounded little imp. Step out like a man and lets us talk. Man to Spirit."

Alfonzo waited. He checked his watch again. Suddenly he smelled the aroma of cherries and walnuts. Next thing he knew, the spirited apparition had again materialized.

"It seems to me," said Mr. Holz, "that the dragon has wrapped his claws even tighter round your neck." He smiled as one who knew exactly how to unwrap dragon's claws and also knew that it was going to hurt.

"I'm tired of wandering up and down this confounded forest! I've seen every leaf, beetle, and dung hill it has to offer. Twice!" He hesitated for a moment, as if weighing a very delicate matter in his mind. "It's already getting towards late evening and my schedule is shot. Truth be told all I want now is a little whiskey and a clean bed so that I can forget this nonsense ever happened."

Mr. Holz chuckled and seemed to turn into a small tornado of dried forest matter, swirling around Alfonzo with fervor. "Slay the dragon!" he shouted, "Slay the dragon and wrench his claws free or you're doomed to wander forever!"

"If you mean this wretched golden watch then you can have it!" With this, Alfonzo threw the golden watch as far from him as he could.

The swirl of leaves shifted to where the watch lay and hovered over it. Slowly the watch floated up from the ground. It hovered in the air for a moment, then it began to drip. Slowly, the watch melted in mid-air, and as it melted Alfonzo could have sworn he actually did see the form of a dragon's face in the metal as it pooled on the ground.

Mr. Holz was again standing beside Alfonzo. "Come," he said. And the two of them ascended the hill, Alfonzo still with reservations in his mind. As they crested the top, Alfonzo gazed out and saw his much longed for school nestled among the

surrounding forests, glowing with the last rays of the last beautiful day of November. Alfonzo cast his gaze upon the scene in a manner not unlike Moses taking his final look at the promised acreage.

"There's no point in letting you leave this forest the way you came in," Mr. Holz stated. "Your grasping and clutching at the perfect day, the perfect hour, the perfect minute, will strangle you and everyone around you eventually."

Alfonzo, though not entirely ignorant of the philosophical or the religious, was still rather mystified by everything Mr. Holz said to him. "Now see here," he reasoned, "as I see it, I've as much right as the next man to go out there and live out my bally life any ruddy way I please."

Mr. Holz peered at him with hard eyes. "You aren't willing to do what must be done. You aren't able."

Alfonzo did his best not to lose his temper again. "Now see here you conniving little— erm—that is to say, all this nonsense about dancing and... and..." This didn't seem to him, upon reflection, to be the right kind of start, and so he tried again. "What I mean to say is... try me."

Mr. Holz continued to pierce him with his eyes, only now he had the distinct feeling Mr. Holz was looking at something Alfonzo would not be able to see had he a mirror handy. "Fine. We'll compromise," Mr. Holz said. He pulled out a small

medallion made of a dark wood. It seemed to Alfonzo now that the smell of cherries and walnut which he had taken such note of earlier was emanating from this medallion. It featured two bronze bells and a crimson ribbon on it. "You will be free to walk your world again, but you must always keep this medallion with you. Any day on which you hear it ring you must return here, to this hill."

"You mean I—"

"And you must bring another pocket watch with you whenever you come. You will plant it on the top of this hill and read whatever is written in the wood."

"Written in the—"

"Do we have an understanding?" Mr. Holz seemed to Alfonzo suddenly to grow larger.

"The thing about it is—"

"And if you ever fail to do any of these things you will never leave these woods again."

Alfonzo looked as if he was about to respond again, but he paused, then thought better of it. Perhaps, he thought, this was a time for saying nothing.



A year later saw Alfonzo R. Regelsprout climbing up a smallish hill just outside the SchwarzRegen University of Orderly Conduct and Bureaucracy. He reached the top and wove his

way through a grove of densely packed trees, looking for a place to deposit the latest seed. Having found a suitable place, he whispered a small prayer over the watch and watched as it melted into a pool of silver and filled the hole. Satisfied, he turned and walked around in the midst of the grove. He touched each tree as passed alongside it, feeling the same words carved in each trunk over and over again. As he found himself back on the outskirts of the grove, he turned and mouthed the words, reading them off the nearest tree.

"Prettier than Solomon," he whispered to himself when he was done.

He sniffed the air, enjoying the scent of walnut and cherry.

The wind began to pick up again. A wild, chaotic, wet wind that swept all around him and chilled him to his bones. He didn't care. Slowly, he took a few faltering steps; he was still new to this. Then, he began to dance. He stepped, bowed, and twisted along with the wind, occasionally missing a beat, but generally in perfect sync. Halfway down the hill he was no longer dancing alone...

The End