



For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide When the Rainbow Is Enuf

By Ntozake Shange

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From its inception in California in 1974 to its highly acclaimed critical success at Joseph Papp's Public Theater and on Broadway, the Obie Award-winning *for colored girls who have considered suicide/when the rainbow is enuf* has excited, inspired, and transformed audiences all over the country. Passionate and fearless, Shange's words reveal what it is to be of color and female in the twentieth century. First published in 1975 when it was praised by *The New Yorker* for "encompassing...every feeling and experience a woman has ever had," *for colored girls who have considered suicide/when the rainbow is enuf* will be read and performed for generations to come. Here is the complete text, with stage directions, of a groundbreaking dramatic prose poem written in vivid and powerful language that resonates with unusual beauty in its fierce message to the world.

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Editorial Review

Review

"Extraordinary and wonderful...Ntozake Shange writes with such exquisite care and beauty that anyone can relate to her message." -*The New York Times*

"Celebrates the capacity to master pain and betrayals with wit, sister-sharing, reckless daring, and flight and forgetfulness if necessary. She celebrates most of all women's loyalties to women." -Toni Cade Bambara, *Ms. Magazine*

"These poems and prose selections are...rich with the author's special voice: by turns bitter, funny, ironic, and savage; fiercely honest and personal." -*New York Post*

"Ntozake Shange's extraordinary "choreopoem"...is a dramatic elegy for black women with an undercurrent message for everyone. Its theme is not sorrow...but courage. Its strength is its passion and its reality....An unforgettable collage of one woman's view of the women of her race, facing everything from rape to unrequited love....Wisdom and naivete go hand in hand. Wounds and dream intermingle; strong passions melt into simple courage." -*L.I. Press/Newhouse Newspapers*

About the Author

Ntozake Shange, poet, novelist, playwright, and performer, wrote the Broadway-produced and Obie Award-winning *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide/When the Rainbow Is Enuf*. She has also written numerous works of fiction, including *Sassafras*, *Cypress and Indigo*, *Betsy Brown*, and *Liliane*.

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Chapter 1

The stage is in darkness. Harsh music is heard as dim blue lights come up. One after another, seven women run onto the stage from each of the exits. They all freeze in postures of distress. The follow spot picks up the lady in brown. She comes to life and looks around at the other ladies. All of the others are still. She walks over to the lady in red and calls to her. The lady in red makes no response.

lady in brown

dark phrases of womanhood

of never havin been a girl

half-notes scattered

without rhythm/no tune

distraught laughter fallin

over a black girl's shoulder

it's funny/it's hysterical

the melody-less-ness of her dance

don't tell nobody don't tell a soul

she's dancin on beer cans & shingles

this must be the spook house

another song with no singers

lyrics/no voices

& interrupted solos

unseen performances

are we ghouls?

children of horror?

the joke?

don't tell nobody don't tell a soul

are we animals? have we gone crazy?

i can't hear anythin

but maddening screams

& the soft strains of death

& you promised me

you promised me...

somebody/anybody

sing a black girl's song

bring her out

to know herself

to know you

but sing her rhythms

carin/struggle/hard times

sing her song of life

she's been dead so long

closed in silence so long

she doesn't know the sound

of her own voice

her infinite beauty

she's half-notes scattered

without rhythm/no tune

sing her sighs

sing the song of her possibilities

sing a righteous gospel

let her be born

let her be born

& handled warmly.

lady in brown

i'm outside chicago

lady in yellow

i'm outside detroit

lady in purple

i'm outside houston

lady in red

i'm outside baltimore

lady in green

i'm outside san francisco

lady in blue

i'm outside manhattan

lady in orange

i'm outside st. louis

lady in brown

& this is for colored girls who have considered suicide

but moved to the ends of their own rainbows.

everyone

mama's little baby likes shortnin, shortnin,

mama's little baby likes shortnin bread

mama's little baby likes shortnin, shortnin,

mama's little baby likes shortnin bread

little sally walker, sittin in a saucer

rise, sally, rise, wipe your weepin eyes

an put your hands on your hips

an let your backbone slip

o, shake it to the east

o, shake it to the west

shake it to the one

that you like the best

lady in purple

you're it

As the lady in brown tags each of the other ladies they freeze. When each one has been tagged the lady in brown freezes. Immediately "Dancing in the Streets" by Martha and the Vandellas is heard. All of the ladies start to dance. The lady in green, the lady in blue, and the lady in yellow do the pony, the big boss line, the swim, and the nose dive. The other ladies dance in place.

lady in yellow

it was graduation nite & i waz the only virgin in the crowd

bobby mills martin jerome & sammy yates eddie jones & randi

all cousins

all the prettiest niggers in this factory town

carried me out wit em

in a deep black buick

smellin of thunderbird & ladies in heat

we rambled from camden to mount holly

laughin at the afternoon's speeches

& danglin our tassles from the rear view mirror

climbin different sorta project stairs

movin toward snappin beer cans &

GET IT GET IT THAT'S THE WAY TO DO IT MAMA

all mercer county graduated the same nite

cosmetology secretarial pre-college autoshop & business

all us movin from mama to what ever waz out there

that nite we raced a big ol truck from the barbeque stand

trying to tell him bout the party at jacqui's

where folks graduated last year waz waitin to hit it wid us

i got drunk & cdnt figure out

whose hand waz on my thigh/but it didn't matter

cuz these cousins martin eddie sammy jerome & bobby

waz my sweethearts alternately since the seventh grade

& everybody knew i always started cryin if somebody actually

tried to take advantage of me
at jacqui's
ulinda mason was stickin her mouth all out
while we tumbled out the buick
eddie jones waz her lickin stick
but i knew how to dance
it got soo hot
vincent ramos puked all in the punch
& harly jumped all in tico's face
cuz he was leavin for the navy in the mornin
hadda kick ass so we'd all remember how bad he waz
seems like sheila & marguerite waz fraid
to get their hair turnin back
so they laid up against the wall
lookin almost sexy
didnt wanna sweat
but me & my fellas
we waz dancin
since 1963 i'd won all kinda contests
wid the cousins at the POLICE ATHLETIC LEAGUE DANCES
all mercer county knew
any kin to martin yates cd turn somersaults
fore smokey robinson cd get a woman excited
The Dells singing "Stay" is heard
we danced

doin nasty ol tricks

The lady in yellow sings along with the Dells for a moment. The lady in orange and the lady in blue jump up and parody the lady in yellow and the Dells. The lady in yellow stares at them. They sit down.

doin nasty ol tricks i'd been thinkin since may

cuz graduation nite had to be hot

& i waz the only virgin

so i hadda make like my hips waz inta some business

that way everybody thot whoever was gettin it

was a older man cdnt run the streets wit youngsters

martin slipped his leg round my thigh

the dells bumped "stay"

up & down-up & down the new carver homes

WE WAZ GROWN

WE WAZ FINALLY GROWN

ulinda alla sudden went crazy

went over to eddie cursin & carryin on

tearin his skin wid her nails

the cousins tried to talk sense to her

tried to hold her arms

lissin bitch sammy went on

bobby whispered i shd go wit him

fore they go ta cuttin

fore the police arrived

we teetered silently thru the parkin lot

no un uhuh

we didn't know nothin bout no party

bobby started lookin at me

yeah

he started looking at me real strange

like i waz a woman or somethin/

started talkin real soft

in the backseat of that ol buick

WOW

by daybreak

i just cdnt stop grinnin.

The Dells singing "Stay" comes in and all of the ladies except the lady in blue join in and sing along.

lady in blue

you gave it up in a buick?

lady in yellow

yeh, and honey, it was wonderful.

lady in green

we used to do it all up in the dark

in the corners...

lady in blue

some niggah sweating all over you.

lady in red

it was good!

lady in blue

i never did like to grind.

lady in yellow

what other kind of dances are there?

lady in blue

mambo, bomba, merengue

when i waz sixteen i ran off to the south bronx

cuz i waz gonna meet up wit willie colon

& dance all the time

mamba bomba merengue

lady in yellow

do you speak spanish?

lady in blue

ol&\$224;

my papa thot he was puerto rican & we wda been

cept we waz just reglar niggahs wit hints of spanish

so off i made it to this 36 hour marathon dance

con salsa con ricardo

'sugggggggggar' ray on southern blvd

next door to this fotografi place

jammed wit burial weddin & communion relics

next door to la real ideal genuine spanish barber

up up up up up stairs & stairs & lotsa hallway

wit my colored new jersey self

didn't know what anybody waz saying

cept if dancin waz proof of origin

i was jibarita herself that nite

& the next day

i kept smilin & right on steppin
if he cd lead i waz ready to dance
if he cdnt lead
i caught this attitude
i'd seen rosa do
& wd not be bothered
i waz twirlin hippin givin much quik feet
& bein a mute cute colored puerto rican
til saturday afternoon when the disc-jockey say
'SORRY FOLKS WILLIE COLON AINT GONNA MAKE IT TODAY'
& alla my niggah temper came outta control
& i wdnt dance wit nobody
& i talked english loud
& i love you more than i waz mad
uh huh uh huh
more than more than
when i discovered archie shepp & subtle blues
doncha know i wore out the magic of juju
heroically resistin being possessed
oooooooooooooh the sounds
sneakin in under age to slug's
to stare ata real 'artiste'
& every word outta imamu's mouth waz gospel
& if jesus cdnt play a horn like shepp
waznt no need for colored folks to bear no cross at all

& poem is my thank-you for music

& i love you more than poem

more than aureliano buendia loved macondo

more than hector lavoe loved himself

more than the lady loved gardenias

more than celia loves cuba or graciela loves el son

more than the flamingoes shoo-do-n-doo-wah love bein pretty

oyeè neégro

te amo mas que te amo mas que

when you play

yr flute

everyone (very softly)

te amo mas que te amo mas que

lady in red

without any assistance or guidance from you

i have loved you assiduously for 8 months 2 wks & a day

i have been stood up four times

i've left 7 packages on yr doorstep

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Users Review

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