**Act**

*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 singerslyrics/ 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.

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**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.*

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**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 actuallytried 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 lotno 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/ tarted 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.*

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**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**  olà 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 ‘suggggggggggar’ 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 bluesdoncha 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 poemmore 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 oyè négro te amo mas que te amo mas que when you play yr flute

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**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 forty poems 2 plants & 3 handmade notecards i left town so i cd send to you have been no help to me on my job you call at 3:00 in the mornin on weekdays so i cd drive 27½ miles cross the bay before i go to work charmin charmin but you are of no assistance i want you to know this waz an experiment to see how selfish i cd be if i wd really carry on to snare a possible lover if i waz capable of debasin my self for the love of another if i cd stand not being wanted when i wanted to be wanted & i cannot so with no further assistance & no guidance from you i am endin this affair this note is attached to a plant i've been waterin since the day i met you you may water it yr damn self

**LADY IN ORANGE**  i dont wanna write in english or spanish i wanna sing make you dance like the bata dance scream twitch hips wit me cuz i done forgot all abt words aint got no definitions i wanna whirl with you

*Music starts, "Che Che Cole" by Willie Colon. Everyone starts to dance.* our whole body wrapped like a ripe mango ramblin whippin thru space on the corner in the park where the rug useta be let willie colon take you out swing your head push your leg to the moon with me i'm on the lower east side in new york city and i can't i can't talk witchu no more

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**LADY IN YELLOW**  we gotta dance to keep from cryin

**LADY IN BROWN**  we gotta dance to keep from dyin

**LADY IN RED**  so come on

**LADY IN BROWN**  come on

**LADY IN PURPLE**  come on

**LADY IN ORANGE**  hold yr head like it was ruby sapphire i'm a poet who writes in english come to share the worlds witchu

**EVERYONE**  come to share our worlds witchu we come here to be dancin to be dancin to be dancin baya

*There is a sudden light change, all of the ladies react as if they had been struck in the face. The lady in green and the lady in yellow run out up left, the lady in orange runs out the left volm, the lady in brown runs out up right.*

**LADY IN BLUE**  a friend is hard to press charges against

**LADY IN RED**  if you know him you must have wanted it

**LADY IN PURPLE**  a misunderstanding

**LADY IN RED**  you know these things happen

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**LADY IN BLUE**  are you sure you didnt suggest

**LADY IN PURPLE**  had you been drinkin

**LADY IN RED**  a rapist is always to be a stranger to be legitimate someone you never saw a man wit obvious problems

**LADY IN PURPLE**  pin-ups attached to the insides of his lapels

**LADY IN BLUE**  ticket stubs from porno flicks in his pocket

**LADY IN PURPLE**  a lil dick

**LADY IN RED**  or a strong mother

**LADY IN BLUE**  or just a brutal virgin

**LADY IN RED**  but if you've been seen in public wit him danced one dance kissed him good-bye lightly

**LADY IN PURPLE**  wit closed mouth

**LADY IN BLUE**  pressin charges will be as hard as keepin yr legs closed while five fools try to run a train on you

**LADY IN RED**  these men friends of ours who smile nice stay employed and take us out to dinner

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**LADY IN PURPLE**  lock the door behind you

**LADY IN BLUE**  wit fist in face to fuck

**LADY IN RED**  who make elaborate mediterranean dinners & let the art ensemble carry all ethical burdens while they invite a coupla friends over to have you are sufferin from latent rapist bravado & we are left wit the scars

**LADY IN BLUE**  bein betrayed by men who know us

**LADY IN PURPLE**  & expect like the stranger we always thot waz comin

**LADY IN BLUE**  that we will submit

**LADY IN PURPLE**  we must have known

**LADY IN RED**  women relinquish all personal rights the presence of a man who apparently cd be considered a rapist

**LADY IN PURPLE**  specially if he has been considered a friend

**LADY IN BLUE**  he is no less worthy of bein beat witin an inch of his life bein publicly ridiculed havin two fists shoved up his ass

**LADY IN RED**  man the stranger he always thot it wd be

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**LADY IN BLUE**  who never showed up

**LADY IN RED**  az it turns out the nature of rape has changed

**LADY IN BLUE**  we can now meet them in circles we frequent for companionship

**LADY IN PURPLE**  we see them at the coffeehouse

**LADY IN BLUE**  wit someone else we know

**LADY IN RED**  we cd even have em over for dinner & get raped in our own houses by invitation a friend

*The lights change, and the ladies are all hit by an imaginary slap, the lady in red runs off up left.*

**LADY IN BLUE**  eyes

**LADY IN PURPLE**  mice

**LADY IN BLUE**  womb

**LADY IN BLUE & LADY IN PURPLE**  nobody

*The lady in purple exits up right.*

**LADY IN BLUE**  tubes tables white washed windows grime from age wiped over once legs spread anxious eyes crawling up on me eyes rollin in my thighs metal horses gnawin my womb dead mice fall from my mouth i really didnt mean to i really didnt think i cd just one day off . . . get offa me alla this blood bones shattered like soft ice-cream cones i cdnt have people lookin at me pregnant i cdnt have my friends see this dyin danglin tween my legs & i didnt say a thing not a sigh or a fast scream to get those eyes offa me get them steel rods outta me this hurts this hurts me & nobody came cuz nobody knew once i waz pregnant & shamed of myself.

*The lady in blue exits stage left volm.*

*Soft deep music is heard, voices calling "Sechita" come from the wings and volms. The lady in purple enters from up right.*

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**LADY IN PURPLE**  once there were quadroon balls/ elegance in st. louis/ laced mulattoes/ gamblin down the mississippi/ to memphis/ new orleans n okra crepes near the bayou/ where the poor white trash wd sing/ moanin/ strange/ liquid tones/ thru the swamps/

*The lady in green enters from the right volm; she is Sechita and for the rest of the poem dances out Sechita's life.* sechita had heard these things/ she moved as if she'd known them/ the silver n high-toned laughin/ the violins n marble floors/ sechita pushed the clingin delta dust wit painted toes/ the patch-work tent waz poka-dotted/ stale lights snatched at the shadows/ creole carnival waz playin natchez in ten minutes/ her splendid red garters/ gin-stained n itchy on her thigh/ blk-diamond stockings darned wit yellow threads/ an ol starched taffeta can-can fell abundantly orange/ from her waist round the splinterin chair/ sechita/ egyptian/ goddess of creativity/ 2nd millennium/ threw her heavy hair in a coil over her neck/sechita/ goddess/ the recordin of history/ spread crimson oil on her cheeks/ waxed her eyebrows/ n unconsciously slugged the last hard whiskey in the glass/ the broken mirror sheused to decorate her face/ made her forehead tilt backwards/ her cheeks appear sunken/ her sassy chin only large enuf/ to keep her full lower lip/ from growin into her neck/ sechita/had learned to make allowances for the distortions/ but the heavy dust of the delta/ left a tinge of grit n darkness/ on every one of her dresses/ on her arms & her shoulders/ sechita/ waz anxious to get back to st. louis/ the dirt there didnt crawl from the earth into yr soul/ at least/ in st. louis/ the grime waz store bought second-hand/ here in natchez/ god seemed to be wipin his feet in her face/ one of the wrestlers had finally won tonite/ the mulatto/ raul/ was sposed to hold the boomin half-caste/ searin eagle/ in a bear hug/ 8 counts/ get thrown unawares/ fall out the ring/ n then do searin eagle in for good/ sechita/ cd hear redneck whoops n slappin on the back/ she gathered her sparsely sequined skirts/ tugged the waist cincher from under her greyin slips/ n made her face immobile/ she made her face like nefertiti/ approachin her own tomb/ she suddenly threw/ her leg full-force/ thru the canvas curtain/ a deceptive glass stone/ sparkled/ malignant on her ankle/ her calf waz tauntin in the brazen carnie lights/ the full moon/ sechita/ goddess/ of love/ egypt/ 2nd millennium/ performin the rites/ the conjurin of men/ conjurin the spirit/ in natchez/ the mississippi spewed a heavy fume of barely movin waters/ sechita's legs slashed furiously thru the cracker nite/ & gold pieces hittin the makeshift stage/ her thighs/ they were aimin coins tween her thighs/ sechita/ egypt/ goddess/ harmony/ kicked viciously thru the nite/ catchin stars tween her toes.

*The lady in green exits into the stage left volm, the lady in purple exits into up stage left.*

*The lady in brown enters from up stage right.*

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**LADY IN BROWN**  de library waz right down from de trolly tracks cross from de laundry-mat thru de big shinin floors & granite pillars ol st. louis is famous for i found toussaint but not til after months uv cajun katie/ pippi longstockin christopher robin/ eddie heyward & a pooh bear in the children's room only pioneer girls & magic rabbits & big city white boys i knew i waznt sposedta but i ran inta the ADULT READING ROOM & came across TOUSSAINT my first blk man (i never counted george washington carver cuz i didnt like peanuts) stillTOUSSAINT waz a blk man a negro like my mama say who refused to be a slave & he spoke french & didnt low no white man to tell him nothin not napolean not maximillien not robespierre TOUSSAINT L'OUVERTURE waz the beginnin uv reality for me in the summer contest for who colored child can read 15 books in three weeks i won & raved abt TOUSSAINT L'OUVERTURE at the afternoon ceremony waz disqualified cuz Toussaint belonged in the ADULT READING ROOM & i cried & carried dead Toussaint home in the bookhe waz dead & livin to me cuz TOUSSAINT & them they held the citadel gainst the french wid the spirits of ol dead africans from outta the ground TOUSSAINT led they army of zombieswalkin cannon ball shootin spirits to free Haiti & they waznt slaves no more TOUSSAINT L'OUVERTURE became my secret lover at the age of 8 i entertained him in my bedroom widda flashlight under my covers way inta the night/ we discussed strategies how to remove white girls from my hopscotch games & etc. TOUSSAINT waz layin in bed wit me next to raggedy ann the night i decided to run away from my integrated home integrated street integrated school 1955 waz not a good year for lil blk girls Toussaint said ‘lets go to haiti’ d ‘awright’ & some very important things in a brown paper bag so i wdnt haveta come back then Toussaint & i took the hodiamont streetcar to the river last stop only 15¢ cuz there waznt nobody cd see Toussaint cept me & we walked all down thru north st. louis where the french settlers usedta live in tiny brick houses all huddled together wit barely missin windows & shingles uneven wit colored kids playin & women on low porches sippin beer i cd talk to Toussaint down by the river like this waz where we waz gonna stow away on a boat for new orleans & catch a creole fishin-rig for port-au-prince then we waz just gonna read & talk all the time & eat fried bananas we waz just walkin & skippin past ol drunk men when dis ol young boy jumped out at me sayin 'HEY GIRL YA BETTAH COME OVAH HEAH N TALK TO ME' well i turned to TOUSSAINT (who waz furious) & i shouted 'ya silly ol boy ya bettah leave me alone or TOUSSAINT'S gonna get yr ass' de silly ol boy came round de corner laughin all in my face ‘yellah gal ya sure must be somebody to know my name so quick’ i waz disgusted & wanted to get on to haiti widout some tacky ol boy botherin me still he kept standin there kickin milk cartons & bits of brick tryin to get all in my business i mumbled to L'OUVERTURE ‘what shd I do’ finally i asked this silly ol boy ‘WELL WHO ARE YOU?’ he say ‘MY NAME IS TOUSSAINT JONES’ well i looked right at him those skidded out cordoroy pants a striped teashirt wid holes in both elbows a new scab over his left eye & i said ‘what’s yr name again' he say ‘i'm toussaint jones’ ‘wow i am on my way to see TOUSSAINT L'OUVERTURE in HAITI are ya any kin to him he dont take no stuff from no white folks & they gotta country all they own & there aint no slaves’ that silly ol boy squinted his face all up ‘looka heah girl i am TOUSSAINT JONES & i'm right heah lookin at ya & i dont take no stuff from no white folks ya dont see none round heah do ya?’ & he sorta pushed out his chest then he say ‘come on lets go on down to the docks & look at the boats’ i waz real puzzled goin down to the docks wit my paper bag & my books i felt TOUSSAINT L'OUVERTURE sorta leave me & i waz sad til i realizedTOUSSAINT JONES waznt too different from TOUSSAINT L'OUVERTURE cept the ol one waz in haiti & this one wid me speakin english & eatin apples yeah. toussaint jones waz awright wit me no tellin what all spirits we cd move down by the river st. louis 1955 hey wait.

*The lady in brown exits into the stage right volm.*

*The lady in red enters from the stage left volm.*

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**LADY IN RED**  orange butterflies & aqua sequins ensconsed tween slight bosoms silk roses dartin from behind her ears the passion flower of southwest los angeles meandered down hoover street past dark shuttered houses where women from louisiana shelled peas round 3:00 & sent their sons whistlin to the store for fatback & black-eyed peas she glittered in heat & seemed to be lookin for rides when she waznt & absolutely eyed every man who waznt lame white or noddin out she let her thigh slip from her skirt crossin the streetshe slowed to be examined & she never looked back to smile or acknowledge a sincere ‘hey mama’ or to meet the eyes of someone purposely findin sometin to do in her directionshe waz sullen & the rhinestones etchin the corners of her mouth suggested tears fresh kisses that had done no good she always wore her stomach out lined with small iridescent feathers the hairs round her navel seemed to dance & she didnt let on she knew from behind her waist waz aching to be held the pastel ivy drawn on her shoulders to be brushed with lips & fingers smellin of honey & jack daniels she waz hot a deliberate coquette who never did without what she wanted & she wanted to be unforgettable she wanted to be a memorya wound to every man arragant enough to want her she waz the wrath of women in windows fingerin shades/ ol lace curtains camoflagin despair & stretch marks so she glittered honestly delighted she waz desired & allowed those especially schemin/ tactful suitors to experience her body & spirit tearin/ so easily blendin with theirs/ & they were so happy & lay on her lime sheets full & wet from her tongue she kissed them reverently even ankles edges of beards . . .

*The stage goes to darkness except for a special on the lady in red, who lies motionless on the floor; as the lights slowly fade up the lady in red sits up.* at 4:30 AM she rose movin the arms & legs that trapped her she sighed affirmin the sculptured man & made herself a bath of dark musk oil egyptian crystals & florida water to remove his smell to wash away the glitter to watch the butterflies melt into suds & the rhinestones fall beneath her buttocks like smooth pebbles in a missouri creek layin in water she became herself ordinary brown braided woman with big legs & full lips reglar seriously intendin to finish her night's work she quickly walked to her guest straddled on her pillows & began ‘you'll have to go now/ i've a lot of work to do/ & i cant with a man around/ here are yr pants/ there's coffee on the stove/ its been very nice/ but i cant see you again/ you got what you came for/ didnt you’ & she smiled he wd either mumble curses bout crazy bitches or sit dumbfounded while she repeated ‘i cdnt possibly wake up/ with a strange man in my bed/ why dont you go home’ she cda been slapped upside the head or verbally challenged but she never waz & the ones who fell prey to the dazzle of hips painted with orange blossoms & magnolia scented wrists had wanted no more than to lay between her sparklin thighs & had planned on leavin before dawn & she had been so divine devastatingly bizarre the way her mouth fit round & now she stood a reglar colored girl fulla the same malice livid indifference as a sistah worn from supportin a wd be hornplayer or waitin by the window & they knew & left in a hurry she wd gather her tinsel & jewels from the tub & laugh gayly or vengeful she stored her silk roses by her bed & when she finished writin the account of her exploit in a diary embroidered with lilies & moonstones she placed the rose behind her ear & cried herself to sleep.

*All the lights fade except for a special on the lady in red; the lady in red exits into the stage left volm.*

*The lady in blue enters from up right.*

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**LADY IN BLUE**  i usedta live in the world then i moved to HARLEM & my universe is now six blocks when i walked in the pacific i imagined waters ancient from accra/ tunis cleansin me/ feedin me now my ankles are coated in grey filth from the puddle neath the hydrant my oceans were life what waters i have here sit stagnant circlin ol men's bodies shit & broken lil whiskey bottles left to make me bleed i usedta live in the world now i live in harlem & my universe is six blocks a tunnel with a train i can ride anywhere remaining a stranger NO MAN YA CANT GO WIT ME/ I DONT EVEN KNOW YOU/ NO/ I DONT WANNA KISS YOU/ YOU AINT BUT 12 YRS OLD/ NO MAN/ PLEASE PLEASE PLEASE LEAVE ME ALONE/ TOMORROW/ YEAH/ NO/ PLEASE/ I CANT USE IT i cd stay alone a woman in the world then i moved to HARLEM i come in at dusk stay close to the curb

*The lady in yellow enters, she's waiting for a bus.* round midnite praying wont no young man think i'm pretty in a dark mornin

*The lady in purple enters, she's waiting for a bus.* wdnt be good not good at all to meet a tall short black brown young man fulla his power in the dark in my universe of six blocksstraight up brick walls women hangin outta windows like ol silk stockings cats cryin/ children gigglin/ a tavern wit red curtains bad smells/ kissin ladies smilin & dirt sidewalks spittin/ men cursing/ playin

*The lady in orange enters, she is being followed by a man, the lady in blue becomes that man.* ‘I SPENT MORE MONEY YESTERDAY THAN THE DAY BEFORE & ALL THAT'S MORE N YOU NIGGAH EVER GOTTA HOLD TO COME OVER HERE BITCH CANT YA SEE THIS IS $5’ never mind sister dont pay him no mind go go go go go go sister do yr thing never mind i usedta live in the world really be in the world free & sweet talkin good mornin & thank-you & nice day uh huh i cant now i cant be nice to nobody nice is such a rip-off reglar beauty & a smile in the street is just a set-up i usedta be in the world a woman in the world i hadda right to the world then i moved to harlem for the set-up a universe six blocks of cruelty piled up on itself a tunnel closin

*The four ladies on stage freeze, count 4, then the ladies in blue, purple, yellow and orange move to their places for the next poem.*

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**LADY IN PURPLE**  three of us like a pyramid three friends one laugh one music one flowered shawl knotted on each neck we all saw him at the same time & he saw us i felt a quick thump in each one of us didnt know what to do we all wanted what waz comin our way so we split but he found one & she loved him the other two were tickled & spurned his advanceswhen the one who loved him waz somewhere else he wd come to her saying yr friends love you very much i have tried & they keep askin where are you she smiled wonderin how long her friends wd hold out he waz what they were lookin for he bided his time he waited til romance waned the three of us made up stories bout usedta & cda been nice the season waz dry no men no quickies not one dance or eyes unrelentin one day after another cept for the one who loved him he appeared irregularly expectin graciousness no matter what she cut fresh strawberries her friends callt less frequently went on hunts for passin fancies she cdnt figure out what waz happenin then the rose she left by his pillow she found on her friends desk & there waz nothing to say she said i wanna tell you he's been after me all the time says he's free & can explain what's happenin wit you is nothin to me & i dont wanna hurt youbut you know i need someone now & you know how wonderful he is her friend cdnt speak or cry they hugged & went to where he waz wit another woman he said good-bye to one tol the other he wd call he smiled a lot she held her head on her lap the lap of her sisters soakin up tears each understandin how much love stood between them how much love between them love between them love like sisters

*Sharp music is heard, each lady dances as if catching a disease from the lady next to her, suddenly they all freeze.*

-- 16 --

**LADY IN ORANGE**  ever since i realized there waz someone callt a colored girl an evil woman a bitch or a nag i been tryin not to be that & leave bitterness in somebody else's cup/ come to somebody to love me without deep & nasty smellin scald from lye or bein left screamin in a street fulla lunatics/ whisperin slut bitch bitch niggah/ get outta here wit alla that/ i didnt have any of that for you/ i brought you what joy i found & i found joy/ honest fingers round my face/ with dead musicians on 78's from cuba/ or live musicians on five dollar lp's from chicago/ where i have never been/ & i love willie colon & arsenio rodriquez/ especially cuz i can make the music loud enuf/ so there is no me but dance/ & when i can dance like that/ there's nothin cd hurt me/ but i get tired & i haveta come offa the floor & then there's that woman who hurt you/ who you left/ three or four times/ & just went back/ after you put my heart in the bottom of yr shoe/ you just walked back to where you hurt/ & i didnt have nothin/ so i went to where somebody had somethin for me/ but he waznt you/ & i waz on the way back from her house in the bottom of yr shoe/ so this is not a love poem/ cuz there are only memorial albums available/ & even charlie mingus wanted desperately to be a pimp/ & i wont be able to see eddie palmieri for months/ so this is a requium for myself/ cuz i have died in a real way/ not wid aqua coffins & du-wop cadillacs/ i used to joke abt when i waz messin round/ but a real dead lovin is here for you now/ cuz i dont know anymore/ how to avoid my own face wet wit my tears/ cuz i had convinced myself colored girls had no right to sorrow/ & i lived & loved that way & kept sorrow on the curb/ allegedly for you/ but i know i did it for myself/ i cdnt stand it i cdnt stand bein sorry & colored at the same time it's so redundant in the modern world

-- 17 --

**LADY IN PURPLE**  i lived wit myths & music waz my ol man & i cd dance a dance outta time/ a dance wit no partners/ take my pills & keep right on steppin/ linger in non-englishspeakin arms so there waz no possibility of understandin & you YOU came sayin i am the niggah/ i am the baddest muthafuckah out there/ i said yes/ this is who i am waitin for & to come wit you/ i hadta bring everythin the dance & the terror the dead musicians & the hope & those scars i had hidden wit smiles & good fuckin lay open & i dont know i dont know any more tricks i am really colored & really sad sometimes & you hurt me more than i ever danced outta/ into oblivion isnt far enuf to get outta this/ i am ready to die like a lily in the desert/ & i cdnt let you in on it cuz i didnt know/ here is what i have/ poems/ big thighs/ lil tits/ & so much love/ will you take it from me this one time/ please this is for you/ arsenio's tres cleared the way & makes me pure again/ please please/ this is for you i want you to love me/ let me love you/ i dont wanna dance wit ghosts/ snuggle lovers i made up in my drunkenness/lemme love you just like i am/ a colored girl/ i'm finally bein real/ no longer symmetrical & impervious to pain

-- 18 --

**LADY IN BLUE**  we deal wit emotion too much so why dont we go on ahead & be white then/ & make everythin dry & abstract wit no rhythm & no reelin for sheer sensual pleasure/ yes let's go on & be white/ we're right in the middle of it/ no use holdin out/ holdin onto ourselves/ lets think our way outta feelin/ lets abstract ourselves some families & maybe maybe tonite/ i'll find a way to make myself come without you/ no fingers or other objects just thot which isnt spiritual evolution cuz its empty & godliness is plenty is ripe & fertile/ thinkin wont do me a bit of good tonite/ i need to be loved/ & havent the audacity to say where are you/ & dont know who to say it to

**LADY IN YELLOW**  i've lost it touch wit reality/ i dont know who's doin it i thot i waz but i waz so stupid i waz able to be hurt & that's not real/ not anymore/ i shd be immune/ if i'm still alive & that's what i waz discussin/ how i am still alive & my dependency on other livin beins for love i survive on intimacy & tomorrow/ that's all i've got goin & the music waz like smack & you knew abt that & still refused my dance waz not enuf/ & it waz all i had but bein alive & bein a woman & bein colored is a metaphysical dilemma/ i havent conquered yet/ do you see the point my spirit is too ancient to understand the separation of soul & gender/ my love is too delicate to have thrown back on my face

*The ladies in red, green, and brown enter quietly; in the background all of the ladies except the lady in yellow are frozen; the lady in yellow looks at them, walks by them, touches them; they do not move.*

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**LADY IN YELLOW**  my love is too delicate to have thrown back on my face

*The lady in yellow starts to exit into the stage right volm. Just as she gets to the volm, the lady in brown comes to life.*

**LADY IN BROWN**  my love is too beautiful to have thrown back on my face

**LADY IN PURPLE**  my love is too sanctified to have thrown back on my face

**LADY IN BLUE**  my love is too magic to have thrown back on my face

**LADY IN ORANGE**  my love is too saturday nite to have thrown back on my face

**LADY IN RED**  my love is too complicated to have thrown back on my face

**LADY IN GREEN**  my love is too music to have thrown back on my face

**EVERYONE**  music music

*The lady in green then breaks into a dance, the other ladies follow her lead and soon they are all dancing and chanting together.*

**LADY IN GREEN**  yank dankka dank dank

**EVERYONE**  music

**LADY IN GREEN**  yank dankka dank dank

**EVERYONE**  music

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**LADY IN GREEN**  yank dankka dank dank

**EVERYONE**

*(but started by the lady in yellow)* delicate delicate delicate

**EVERYONE**

*(but started by the lady in brown)* and beautiful and beautiful and beautiful

**EVERYONE**

*(but started by the lady in purple)* oh sanctified oh sanctified oh sanctified

**EVERYONE**

*(but started by the lady in blue)* magic magic magic

**EVERYONE**

*(but started by the lady in orange)* and saturday nite and saturday nite and saturday nite

**EVERYONE**

*(but started by the lady in red)* and complicated and complicated and complicated and complicated and complicated and complicated and complicated and complicated

*The dance reaches a climax and all of the ladies fall out tired, but full of life and togetherness.*

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**LADY IN GREEN**  somebody almost walked off wid alla my stuff not my poems or a dance i gave up in the street but somebody almost walked off wid alla my stuff like a kleptomaniac workin hard & forgettin while stealin this is mine/ this aint yr stuff/ now why dont you put me back & let me hang out in my own self somebody almost walked off wid alla my stuff & didnt care enuf to send a note home sayin i waz late for my solo conversation or two sizes too small for my own tacky skirts what can anybody do wit somethin of no value on a open market/ did you getta dime for my things/ hey man/ where are you goin wid alla my stuff/ this is a woman's trip & i need my stuff/ to ohh & ahh abt/ daddy/ i gotta mainline number from my own shit/ now wontchu put me back/ & let me play this duet/ wit this silver ring in my nose/ honest to god/ somebody almost run off wit alla my stuff/ & i didnt bring anythin but the kick & sway of it the perfect ass for my man & none of it is theirs this is mine/ ntozake ‘her own things’/ that's my name/ now give me my stuff/ i see ya hidin my laugh/ & how i sit wif my legs open sometimes/ to give my crotch some sunlight/ & there goes my love my toes my chewed up finger nails/ niggah/ wif the curls in yr hair/ Mr. louisiana hot link/ i want my stuff back/ my rhythms & my voice/ open my mouth/ & let me talk ya outta/ throwin my shit in the sewar/ this is some delicate leg &whimsical kiss/ i gotta have to give to my choice/ without you runnin off wit alla my shit/ now you cant have me less i give me away/ & i waz doin all that/ til ya run off on a good thing/ who is this you left me wit/ some simple bitch widda bad attitude/ i wants my things/ i want my arm wit the hot iron scar/ & my leg wit the flea bite/ i want my calloused feet & quik language back in my mouth/ fried plantains/ pineapple pear juice/ sun-ra & joseph & jules/ i want my own things/ how i lived them/ & give me my memories/ how i waz when i waz there/ you cant have them or do nothin wit them/ stealin my shit from me/ dont make it yrs/ makes it stolen/ somebody almost run off wit alla my stuff/ & i waz standin there/ lookin at myself/ the whole time & it waznt a spirit took my stuff/ waz a man whose ego walked round like Rodan's shadow/ waz a man faster n my innocence/ waz a lover/ i made too much room for/ almost run off wit alla my stuff/ & i didnt know i'd give it up so quick/ & the one running wit it/ dont know he got it/ & i'm shoutin this is mine/ & he dont know he got it/ my stuff is the anonymous ripped off treasure of the year/ did you know somebody almost got away with me/ me in a plastic bag under their arm/ me danglin on a string of personal carelessness/ i'm spattered wit mud & city rain/ & no i didnt get a chance to take a douche/ hey man/ this is not your perogative/ i gotta have me in my pocket/ to get round like a good woman shd/ & make the poem in the pot or the chicken in the dance/ what i got to do/ i gotta have my stuff to do it to/ why dont ya find yr own things/ & leave this package of me for my destiny/ what ya got to get from me/ i'll give it to ya/ yeh/ i'll give it to ya/ round 5:00 in the winter/ when the sky is blue-red/ & Dew City is gettin pressed/ if it's really my stuff/ ya gotta give it to me/ if ya really want it/ i'm the only one/ can handle it

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**LADY IN BLUE**  that niggah will be back tomorrow, sayin ‘i'm sorry’

**LADY IN YELLOW**  get this, last week my ol man came in sayin, ‘i don't know how she got yr number baby, i'm sorry‘

**LADY IN BROWN**  no this one is it, ‘o baby, ya know i waz high, i'm sorry’

**LADY IN PURPLE**  ‘i'm only human, and inadequacy is what makes us human, & if we was perfect we wdnt have nothin to strive for, so you might as well go on and forgive me pretty baby, cause i'm sorry’

**LADY IN GREEN**  ‘shut up bitch, i told you i waz sorry’

**LADY IN ORANGE**  no this one is it, ‘i do ya like i do ya cause i thot ya could take it, now i'm sorry’

**LADY IN RED**  ‘now i know that ya know i love ya, but i aint ever gonna love ya like ya want me to love ya, i'm sorry’

**LADY IN BLUE**  one thing i dont need is any more apologies i got sorry greetin me at my front door you can keep yrs i dont know what to do wit em they dont open doors or bring the sun back they dont make me happy or get a mornin paper didnt nobody stop usin my tears to wash cars cuz a sorry i am simply tired of collectin i didnt know i was so important toyou'i'm gonna haveta throw some away i cant get to the clothes in my closet for alla the sorries i'm gonna tack a sign to my door leave a message by the phone ‘if you called to say yr sorrycall somebody else i dont use em anymore’ i let sorry/ didnt meanta/ & how cd i know abt that take a walk down a dark & musty street in brooklyn i'm gonna do exactly what i want to & i wont be sorry for none of it letta sorry soothe yr soul/ i'm gonna soothe mine you were always inconsistent doin somethin & then bein sorry beatin my heart to death talkin bout you sorry well i will not call i'm not goin to be nice i will raise my voice & scream & holler & break things & race the engine & tell all yr secrets bout yrself to yr face & i will list in detail everyone of my wonderful lovers & their ways i will play oliver lake loud & i wont be sorry for none of it i loved you on purpose i was open on purpose i still crave vulnerability & close talk& i'm not even sorry bout you bein sorry you can carry all the guilt & grime ya wanna just dont give it to me i cant use another sorry next time you should admit you're mean/ low-down/ triflin/ & no count straight out steada bein sorry alla the time enjoy bein yrself

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**LADY IN RED**  there waz no air/ the sheets made ripples under his body like crumpled paper napkins in a summer park/ & lil specks of somethin from tween his toes or the biscuitsfrom the day before ran in the sweat that tucked the sheet into his limbs like he waz an ol frozen bundle of chicken/ & he'd get up to make coffee, drink wine, drink water/ he wished one of his friends who knew where he waz wd come by with some blow or some shit/ anythin/ there waz no air/ he'd see the spotlights in the alleyways downstairs movin in the air/ cross his wall over his face/ & get under the covers & wait for an all clear or til he cd hear traffic again/ there waznt nothin wrong with him/ there waznt nothin wrong with him/ he kept tellin crystal/ any niggah wanna kill vietnamese children more n stay home & raise his own is sicker than a rabid dog/ that's how their thing had been goin since he got back/ crystal just got inta sayin whatta fool niggah beau waz & always had been/ didnt he go all over uptown sayin the child waznt his/ waz some no counts bastard/ & any ol city police cd come & get him if they wanted/ cuz as soon as the blood type & shit waz together/ everybody wd know that crystal waz a no good lyin whore/ and this after she'd been his girl since she waz thirteen/ when he caught her on the stairway/ he came home crazy as hell/ he tried to get veterans benefits to go to school & they kept right on puttin him in remedial classes/ he cdnt read wortha damn/ so beau cused the teachers of holdin him back & got himself a gypsy cab to drive/ but his cab kept breakin down/ & the cops was always messin wit him/ plus not gettin much bread/ & crystal went & got pregnant again/ beau most beat her to death when she tol him/ she still gotta scar under her right tit where he cut her up/ still crystal went right on & had the baby/ so now beau willie had two children/ a little girl/ naomi kenya & a boy/ kwame beau willie brown/ & there waz no air/ how in the hell did he get in this mess anyway/ somebodywent & tol crystal that beau waz spendin alla his money on the bartendin bitch down at the merry-go-round cafe/ beau sat straight up in the bed/ wrapped up in the sheets lookin like john the baptist or a huge baby wit stubble & nuts/ now he hadta get alla that shit outta crystal's mind/ so she wd let him come home/ crystal had gone & got a court order saying beau willie brown had no access to his children/ if he showed his face he waz subject to arrest/ shit/ she'd been in his ass to marry her since she waz 14 years old & here when she 22/ she wanna throw him out cuz he say he'll marry her/ she burst out laughin/ hollerin whatchu wanna marry me for now/ so i can support yr ass/ or come sit wit ya when they lock yr behindup/ cause they gonna come for ya/ ya goddamn lunatic/ they gonna come/ & i'm not gonna have a thing to do wit it/ o no i wdnt marry yr pitiful black ass for nothin & she went on to bed/the next day beau willie came in blasted & got ta swingin chairs at crystal/ who cdnt figure out what the hell he waz doin/ til he got ta shoutin bout how she waz gonna marry him/ & get some more veterans benefits/ & he cd stop drivin them crazy spics round/ while they tryin to kill him for $15/ beau waz sweatin terrible/ beatin on crystal/ & he cdnt do no more with the table n chairs/ so he went to get the high chair/ & lil kwame waz in it/ & beau waz beatin crystal with the high chair & her son/ & some notion got inta him to stop/ and he run out/ crystal most died/ that's why the police wdnt low beau near where she lived/ & she'd been tellin the kids their daddy tried to kill her & kwame/ & he just wanted to marry her/ that's what/ he wanted to marry her/ & have a family/ but the bitch waz crazy/ beau willie waz sittin in this hotel in his drawers drinkin coffee & wine in the heat of the day spillin shit all over hisself/ laughin/ bout how he waz gonna get crystal to take him back/ & let him be a man in the house/ & she wdnt even have to go to work no more/ he got dressed all up in his ivory shirt & checkered pants to go see crystal & get this mess all cleared up/ he knocked on the door to crystal's rooms/ & she didnt answer/ he beat on the door & crystal & naomi started cryin/ beau gotta shoutin again how he wanted to marry her/ & waz she always gonna be a whore/ or did she wanna husband/ & crystal just kept on screamin for him to leave us alone/ just leave us alone/ so beau broke the door down/ crystal held the children in fronta her/ she picked kwame off the floor/ in her arms/ & she held naomi by her shoulders/ & kept on sayin/ beau willie brown/ get outta here/ the police is gonna come for ya/ ya fool/ get outta here/ do you want the children to see you act the fool again/ you want kwame to brain damage from you throwin him round/ niggah/ get outta here/ get out & dont show yr ass again or i'll kill ya/ i swear i'll kill ya/ he reached for naomi/ crystal grabbed the lil girl & stared at beau willie like he waz a leper or somethin/ dont you touch my children/ muthafucker/ or i'll kill you/ beau willie jumped back all humble & apologetic/ i'm sorry/ i dont wanna hurt em/ i just wanna hold em & get on my way/ i dont wanna cuz you no more trouble/ i wanted to marry you & give ya things what you gonna give/ a broken jaw/ niggah get outta here/ he ignored crystal's outburst & sat down motionin for naomi to come to him/ she smiled back at her daddy/ crystal felt naomi givin in & held her tighter/ naomi/ pushed away & ran to her daddy/ cryin/ daddy, daddy come back daddy/ come back/ but be nice to mommy/ cause mommy loves you/ and ya gotta be nice/ he sat her on his knee/ & played with her ribbons & they counted fingers & toes/ every so often he looked over to crystal holdin kwame/ like a statue/ & he'd say/ see crystal/ i can be a good father/ now let me see my son/ & she didnt move/ & he coaxed her & he coaxed her/ tol her she waz still a hot lil ol thing & pretty & strong/ didnt she get right up after that lil ol fight they had & go back to work/ beau willie oozed kindness &crystal who had known so lil/ let beau hold kwame/ as soon as crystal let the baby outta her arms/ beau jumped up a laughin & a gigglin/ a hootin & a hollerin/ awright bitch/ awright bitch/ you gonna marry me/ you gonna marry me . . . i aint gonna marry ya/ i aint ever gonna marry ya/ for nothin/ you gonna be in the jail/ you gonna be under the jail for this/ now gimme my kids/ ya give me back my kids/ he kicked the screen outta the window/ & held the kids offa the sill/ you gonna marry me/ yeh, i'll marry ya/ anything/ but bring the children back in the house/ he looked from where the kids were hangin from the fifth story/ at alla the people screamin at him/ & he started sweatin again/ say to alla the neighbors/ you gonna marry me/ i stood by beau in the window/ with naomi reachin for me/ & kwame screamin mommy mommy from the fifth story/ but i cd only whisper/ & he dropped em

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**LADY IN RED**  i waz missin somethin

**LADY IN PURPLE**  somethin so important

**LADY IN ORANGE**  somethin promised

**LADY IN BLUE**  a layin on of hands

**LADY IN GREEN**  fingers near my forehead

**LADY IN YELLOW**  strong

**LADY IN GREEN**  cool

**LADY IN ORANGE**  movin

**LADY IN PURPLE**  makin me whole

**LADY IN ORANGE**  sense

**LADY IN GREEN**  pure

**LADY IN BLUE**  all the gods comin into me layin me open to myself

**LADY IN RED**  i waz missin somethin

**LADY IN GREEN**  somethin promised

**LADY IN ORANGE**  somethin free

**LADY IN PURPLE**  a layin on of hands

**LADY IN BLUE**  i know bout/ layin on bodies/ layin outta man bringin him alla my fleshy self & some of my pleasure bein taken full eager wet like i get sometimes i waz missin somethin

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**LADY IN PURPLE**  a layin on of hands

**LADY IN BLUE**  not a man

**LADY IN YELLOW**  layin on

**LADY IN PURPLE**  not my mama/ holdin me tight/ sayin i'm always gonna be her girl not a layin on of bosom & womb a layin on of hands the holiness of myself released

**LADY IN RED**  i sat up one nite walkin a boardin house screamin/ cryin/ the ghost of another woman who waz missin what i waz missin i wanted to jump up outta my bones & be done wit myself leave me alone & go on in the wind it waz too much i fell into a numbness til the only tree i cd see took me up in her branches held me in the breeze made me dawn dew that chill at daybreak the sun wrapped me up swingin rose light everywhere the sky laid over me like a million men i waz cold/ i waz burnin up/ a child & endlessly weavin garments for the moon wit my tears i found god in myself & i loved her/ i loved her fiercely

*All of the ladies repeat to themselves softly the lines ‘i found god in myself & i loved her.’ It soon becomes a song of joy, started by* *the lady in blue. The ladies sing first to each other, then gradually to the audience. After the song peaks the ladies enter into a closed tight circle.*

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**LADY IN BROWN**  & this is for colored girls who have considered suicide/ but are movin to the ends of their own rainbows

(THE END.)