

Jump

We

Broom

By

Mildred Inez Lewis

WHY I LIKE IT: *Drama Editor JANET EHRLICH COLSON writes...Playwright Mildred Inez Lewis' heartbreaking We Jump Broom bravely defies the form of a short play, veritably bending time and giving us an epic experience in only ten pages. We Jump Broom delves into the horrors of slavery, but more than that it's a timeless love story between Winny and Nell, two women who must hide their passion and identities in order to survive while finding a way to remain true to each other and to themselves. The poetic use of language, the effortless dialects, the resilience of the characters, and the internal rhythms of the piece are masterfully woven together in We Jump Broom to create an intimate spellbinding piece of theatre that shines a light on the humanity of those who have struggled before us and how they fought back - leaving us with a glimmer of hope for what is to come. These women matter. This story matters.*

NELL reaches for WINNY. WINNY eludes her.

WINNY

They'll be missing us in quarters.

NELL

They might already know we gone.

WINNY

They do know. But they ain't gon *say* nothin', less we make it so they have to. We need to be back before first light. Even mister abide by that.

NELL

Mister don't abide by nothin'.

The ferocity of Nell's words contrasts with her trembling.

WINNY

You won't have to suffer him again. I fixed that. I'll always fix it.

Five stars

(Spacing is playwright's own.) JEC

WE JUMP BROOM

SCENE 1

IN DARKNESS. NELL and WINNY laugh and gasp with lovemaking pleasure, then roll away from each other.

LIGHTS RISE. NELL is loose and relaxed. Draped in a scratchy horse blanket, she leans back and watches WINNY intently. WINNY buttons her blouse with her back to NELL and the audience. She looks oddly prim.

NELL

Turn round.

WINNY

(teasing)

I done give you a lot of pleasure. Set with it and leave me 'lone.

NELL

Meet me again tonight.

WINNY

We can't meet up two nights in a row. You know that.

NELL embraces WINNY. WINNY protects the place of a scar.

WINNY

Gimme my breath back.

NELL

Naw. Everything about you belongs to me. All of me's yours.

WINNY wiggles away, then peeks over her shoulder.

WINNY

What 'cha lookin' at?

NELL

I like to watch.

WINNY

You as bad as a man.

NELL

Bet I do some things a man wouldn't.

WINNY, now fully clothed, turns.

WINNY

I could feel your eyes on me all day long. From ten rows away. You burning holes into my back past all that cotton.

NELL

Wishing them skirts off.

WINNY

Made me sweat so bad, I looked round to see if anybody else could feel your heat. I was scared John Henry 'spect something, but he scared of his own shadow since mister branded him.

NELL

You took yours without a whimper.

WINNY

It was so much pain, I wasn't sure I was still alive.

NELL

My poor chile.

WINNY

I crawl into your pallet that night in front of everybody. Didn't care what nobody was gon' say.

They could 'splain it cause we from the same village or whatever all else. Had to be with you.

NELL

I got to hold you all night. The sun kissed me awake with you in my arms.

WINNY

You, me and all that pain.

NELL

You didn't cry one tear. I was proud of you.

WINNY

Why?

NELL

I --

WINNY

Why we got to be so strong? Who made it like that?

NELL

A time like that shows what someone's made of. You showed out. Got up and walked to them fields the next morning like nothing happened. John Henry was watching to see if you would break. You never give him that happiness. That means a lot.

WINNY

I wish I could be weak sometimes.

NELL

I'm not claiming weakness. (teasing) You want to flounce round, pretendin' like Missus do?

WINNY

Pretendin's right. She hurt you, then go cryin' to Mister so he can --

NELL

-- turn round and get John Henry to beat you some more.

They laugh. It's a little bitter.

WINNY

Don't pay Missus no mind. She don't know no better than what she's been taught. The things they beat outta us, they beat into her. I'm talking about something else. I guess I don't mean weak, but I wish we could be soft with each other.

WINNY grows wistful.

NELL

Hey.

NELL draws WINNY into a clapping game.

WINNY

Thank you.

WINNY starts to cry.

NELL

Don't ...

WINNY forces her tears back.

WINNY

If I let one go, we'll drown. I've got an ocean of tears locked up inside me.

NELL

Might be enough water to carry us over the sea back home.

WINNY

Don't go dreamin' like that. It's dangerous.

NELL

More danger being dead inside.

WINNY

Some things got to stay buried deep. I'll go back first. You wait a spell.

WINNY unconsciously touches the scar from the chest brand.

NELL

Don't do that.

WINNY

Do what? Stop trying to stretch the time out. I done already told you. We gots to go.

NELL

You stubborn as a mule, gal. Why the goddess give me somebody as hard headed as you?

WINNY

(half sings to the heavens)

Yemanja, Yemanja. Goddess of waters. You give us tears and the water to wash them away. Answer my beloved. Tell her why you made me like me and she like herself.

WINNY retrieves small bones from her pocket, rattles them, opens her eyes and reads them like tea leaves.

NELL

(a little awed)

What she say?

WINNY

If we don't get back, we gon' be in trouble.

They laugh. WINNY covers her scar again.

NELL

Stop hiding that scar from me. I ain't afraid of it. You got it cause of me.

WINNY

It's ugly.

NELL

You've never let me see it. I want to kiss it.

NELL reaches for WINNY. WINNY eludes her.

WINNY

They'll be missing us in quarters.

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NELL

Mister don't abide by nothin'.

The ferocity of Nell's words contrasts with her trembling.

WINNY

You won't have to suffer him again. I fixed that. I'll always fix it.

NELL

He was like a stone crushing the life from my chest. The worst was after ...

WINNY shakes her head. "Please stop."

NELL

It eats me up keeping it locked up inside. I let you have your truth. Let me have mine.

WINNY

Tell Hetty or Topsy --

NELL

I don't tell them wide hipped gals nothin'.

WINNY

We can trust them. They know bout us. Least they suspect, but they haven't said anything. Hetty got a way of listening. I talk to her sometimes.

NELL

They got they own troubles. We 'posed to be for each other. I don't want to tell nobody else.

WINNY

When something pains you, it hurts me a long time. When you put words to a thing, I can't stop seeing it in my mind. Sometimes it bears down so hard, I can't hardly move.

NELL

Please, Winny.

WINNY

Be quick about it. I can't let it sink into my spirit. And we got to get back.

NELL

After he done his business, he sat me on his lap. My insides were torn up.

WINNY

(quietly)

Is that why you don't bleed right?

NELL

(nods)

He was laughing, like it was funny. He shake me until he make me laugh with him. I laugh hard to make everything stop. But my laughs started turning into screams 'til they got so loud, his missus had to hear. I think he like that, cause that's when he let me go.

WINNY

I fixed him with these.

WINNY shakes the bones hard.

WINNY

The old ways can still work. He ain't ever gon' look your way again.

NELL points to the scar.

NELL

But ...

WINNY

It was my turn to pay. In the end, we all gots to pay. You're done paying him.

She touches her chest.

WINNY

This pays it in full.

NELL

I'm afraid for our girl young'uns. Especially the ones don't have anybody looking out for 'em. We got to do something for 'em.

WINNY

Can't. We can't hardly do for ourselves.

NELL

We not gon' even try?

WINNY

My body can't take another brand.

NELL

I don't believe goddess give you that magic just for us two.

WINNY

You want me to get caught? There's danger all around us.

NELL shakes her head in frustration.

NELL

You just scared.

WINNY

Course I'm scared. You should be, too. There's a thing you got to understand. But you can't tell no one. We don't know who we can trust.

NELL nods.

WINNY

Promise me!

NELL

Yes'm.

WINNY

Mister's talking about selling. Auntie whispered it to me at supper awhile back. You tell it and they find out, he's not gon sell her. He'll kill her. She don't deserve that.

NELL

You didn't tell me.

WINNY

This time's the only snatch of sweetness we get. I ain't throwing it away for somethin' we already know. He do what he want. Auntie think he's planning on selling 15 or 20 of us.

NELL

Bucks or us?

WINNY

Both. I don't want you worrying on it.

NELL

How you expect me not to?

WINNY

You better find a way.

NELL

I know one thing.

WINNY

Gal, I done told you and told you --

NELL

I don't mean run away. Too many catchers out on them roads. I know that much.

WINNY

At least you still got some sense.

NELL

Marry me.

NELL takes out a small whisk broom. Beat.

WINNY

Don't you let nobody see you with that. What's wrong with you? It's against their law.

NELL

Their law, not ours. We're Dahomey. Our way says anybody that loves can marry.

WINNY

We're not Dahomey any more. Forget.

NELL

I don't care what they say. I belong to myself. I want us to belong to each other. In our way, the Dahomey way. Jump with me.

WINNY

You planned this.

NELL

Yes'm. Took me weeks. Hiding it every few days so wouldn't nobody find it.

WINNY

Nobody means me?

NELL 3

Sure do. Remember how the old women swept the dirt before weddings? Making patterns for a couple to grow into.

WINNY

We don't have witnesses.

NELL

The stars be our witness.

WINNY

What if mister sells me? He done threatened it. Me still walking and working is a 'buke to him.

NELL gently sweeps the ground.

NELL

I'd walk to the end of earth to find you.

WINNY

How you gon' do that?

NELL

We come from warriors.

NELL points to Winny's scar.

NELL

You found yo' strength when we most needed it. I'd find mine.

WINNY

When you love hard, you don't need that.

WINNY points to the broom.

NELL

I do. When we become ancestors, I need our descendants to have a legacy. That matters to me.

WINNY

(tries to joke)

Who you planning for me to lay with to gather these descendants?

NELL

I don't care. He wouldn't be with you. I would. You think too much. This time, let's just do.

WINNY

Don't be stupid. We gots to think all the time. Got to plot out every move, then five, six steps past that if we want to live.

NELL

We dying anyway. He killed my womb. When he marked you, he broke somethin' in you. We got to do this to keep the half life we do have goin'.

The dawn begins breaking. WINNY looks up at it. NELL positions the broom.

NELL

Jump now and we'll be back 'fore it's too late.

WINNY

I'm scared.

NELL

Throw the bones.

WINNY throws the bones. She looks at NELL and nods. The bones said 'yes.'

WINNY

One more again? To be sure.

NELL

Throw.

WINNY throws. Another 'yes.'

NELL

See? Broom, broom, who gon' jump the broom?

WINNY AND NELL

Broom, broom, who gon' jump the broom?

WINNY

I, Winny...

NELL

No. Say your true name.

WINNY

Marnar. I, Marnar, a Dahomey woman ...

NELL

I, Fugra. Dahomey woman. Goddess Yemanja! Before you, we take each other.

The women hold their arms out to each other.

WINNY AND NELL

Broom, broom. Who gon' jump the broom? We gon' jump the broom!

The women jump over the broom, look behind them, kiss passionately, then exit running.

END SCENE

END PLAY

THE PLAYWRIGHT SPEAKS: Mildred here. I wrote *We Jump Broom* for PlayGround-LA, a ten-minute play incubator. They gave us a prompt: "Lore: Retelling the Myths & Legends of Our People." I immediately realized how fractured my connection is to myth. I quickly honed in on two slaves creating their own mythology by formalizing their love in the face of a pending sale.

AUTHOR BIO: Mildred Inez Lewis writes and directs for stage, screen and the digital space. Recent commissions include GHOSTS OF BLACKNESS for the Lucille Lortel Foundation/Harlem9/National Black Theatre. Most recently her short comedy THE BRIDGE, AGAIN? appeared at PlayGround LA. Upcoming productions include JUKED, an adaptation of ELECTRA, at A Noise Within with the Towne Street Theatre. In the fall, her comedy THE MUSEUM ANNEX will premiere at Central Works in Berkeley, CA. Mildred teaches in the English department of Chapman University.

Publishing Credits

Plays:

The Gift and /kom'plisit/
Eclosion (as part of Alice in Quarantine)
CowGirls

Broadway Play Publishing
NextStage Press
Breathe Fire literary Magazine

Poetry:

Ella, Stamped
Jazz
(TL;DR Press)

Ella @ 100 collection
The Women's Anthology: Carrying Fire