



SUGAR IN OUR WOUNDS

BY
DONJA R. LOVE



DRAMATISTS
PLAY SERVICE
INC.



SUGAR IN OUR WOUNDS
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SUGAR IN OUR WOUNDS was originally produced by the Manhattan Theatre Club (Lynne Meadow, Artistic Director; Barry Grove, Executive Producer) on June 18, 2018. It was directed by Saheem Ali. The set design was by Arnulfo Maldonado, the costume design was by Dede Ayite, the lighting design was by Jason Lyons, the sound design was by Palmer Hefferan, the original music was by Michael Thurber, the production stage manager was Jereme Kyle Lewis, and the stage manager was Erin McCoy. The cast was as follows:

JAMES	Sheldon Best
HENRY	Chinaza Uche
AUNT MAMA	Stephanie Berry
MATTIE	Tiffany Rachelle Stewart
ISABEL	Fern Cozine

SUGAR IN OUR WOUNDS was developed by The Playwrights Realm (Katherine Kovner, Artistic Director; Roberta Pereira, Producing Director).

CHARACTERS

JAMES

M, late teens, Black; he's young, precocious, and innocent—according to his heart; but let the world tell you, he's a man. He has a magical relationship with a tall, tall tree.

HENRY

M, late teens/early twenties, Black; he's tall, strong, and harder than the world that made him this way; and he's dark—real dark. His skin looks like the midnight hour—like something people pray to. He has an incredible tenderness that he doesn't let anyone see, that he desperately wants someone to see.

AUNT MAMA

W, there's no age here—that's for a reason, Black; she's an old, old magic woman who's probably older than God—let her tell it. She has a gentleness to her that can be hard to see thanks to her quick tongue.

MATTIE

W, early twenties, Black; she's a girl who just wants to be loved. Despite the scars on her face, she is very pretty. She has skin so yellow it makes the sun jealous.

ISABEL

W, early twenties, White; she has a desire for things she shouldn't touch, and it's dangerous—at least for those she tries to touch. But with that, she's as well intentioned as she possibly could be—for a white girl.

TIME

Summer
1862

PLACE

Somewhere down South
By a tall, tall tree

ABOUT THE SKIN

The actor playing Henry *must* have skin as dark as a starless midnight. The actress playing Mattie *must* have skin so light it could make the sun jealous. The actors playing James and Aunt Mama should have skin tones that exist somewhere between the actors playing Henry and Mattie.

NOTE

This play is part of a trilogy that explores Queer love through Black History (*Slavery, the Civil Rights movement, the Black Lives Matter movement*).

If desired, the playwright gives permission for an intermission to happen after Scene Five.

“When the wounds right he run down get some sugar

*Prolly pour it on so it sting not as bad as salt, but it get sticky
Melt in the singing Southern sun.*

*Sweetness draw all the bugs and infection to the sores... Sweetness
harder to wash.*

It become molasses in all that heat and blood...”

*—Marcus; or The Secret of Sweet
Tarell Alvin McCraney*

SUGAR IN OUR WOUNDS

Scene 1

Dark.

We hear...

Humming.

Humming in the air.

It makes the whole air sweet.

It's wind.

But not just any kind of wind—talking wind.

It says, "James."

We see...

Stars kiss the midnight sky.

And,

A tree.

It's big.

Real.

Big.

Some say it go straight up to heaven.

Its branches spread out like wings.

It beats.

Beats.

Beats.

Like a heart.

In an open space there stands a boy.

James.

He's young, and innocent—according to his heart; but let the world tell you, he's a man.

He stares up at the tree.

He's mystified by it.

No one would be surprised if he were here, standing in this exact spot, staring at it for hours.

He begins to weep.

He wipes tears from his eyes.

Then...

An old, old woman comes up behind him. She takes her time. That's all she know to do...

Take time.

It's Aunt Mama.

She's probably older than God, let her tell it.

JAMES. Aunt Mama.

Remind me 'bout this tree uhgain.

AUNT MAMA. You always been uh learnin' boy.

JAMES. Please.

Remind me.

Why it's so big?

AUNT MAMA. It's blood at dat root.

Help it grow.

Help make it strong.

Look at dem branches—day bodies.

Da blood come from some strong menz.

JAMES. Like ma daddy?

AUNT MAMA. Yes'um.

Ya daddy was hunged on dis here tree.

And his daddy.

And his daddy 'fore dat.

And his.

All da ways up ta Jesus,

bein' hunged on da cross.

Dat's why it so tall.
It go straights up ta heaven.
If ya quiets nuff ya can hear 'em.

*He/we hear(s)...
"Jaaaaaames."*

JAMES. I hear 'em.
They callin' ma name.

AUNT MAMA. Really?

JAMES. Yes.

Beat.

AUNT MAMA. It's gonna end wit chu.
You got somefin' betta den strong.
You got smarts.

You gots uh sweetness ta ya dat make ya special.

*The stars continue to kiss the sky's dark skin, as it wraps itself
around the heavenbound tree.*

They stare.

And listen to the wind.

Hum.

Scene 2

Early night.

We're in a shack. It's small, old, and dirty.

*There are three objects that one can only gather are beds?
Maybe? A table. A big wooden block, for sitting. Two metal
buckets, one for drinking; the other for...the bathroom.*

And a chair.

A very nice chair.

It actually looks like it doesn't belong here.

James sits in THAT chair.

*He's reading a newspaper—very quickly. He turns a page
before the previously read page touches the old page.*

He reads.

And reads.

And reads.

At this exact moment, he's good.

Then...

He stops.

He listens. Intently.

He gets up and looks out the window. He runs back over to the chair. He grabs the newspaper and hides it.

ANYWHERE.

Don't think too hard on it.

Just hide it.

He goes back over to the chair and dusts it off.

Then...

He sits on the wooden block. The shack's door opens.

In walks Isabel, a white woman, 20ish; she's strikingly beautiful—and knows it. At her core, she's as well intentioned as she possibly could be—for a white woman.

ISABEL. James.

James stands.

JAMES. Hello, Miss Isabel.

ISABEL. You ready?

JAMES. Yes, Miss Isabel.

Isabel walks in and goes straight to the chair.

She sits.

She's comfortable. Clearly this is her chair.

ISABEL. What's that smell?

James runs over to the metal bucket. He takes it outside and dumps it out. He comes back in—metal bucket in hand.

Leave that thing outside.

I don't know why y'all keep it in here.

Don't make a lick of sense.

JAMES. Sorry ma'am.

*James takes the bucket back outside.
He reenters.*

ISABEL. Now, come on, sit on down here.

James sits. Next to Isabel.

I bet you've been waiting for this all day. Haven't you?

James nods.

I know.

*Isabel pulls something from out her bag.
It's a book: the Bible.
She hands it to James.*

Now, I can't stay too long.

It's funky up in here.

And this Summer sun don't help it none.

*She fans herself.
The heat combined with the stench has her a bit annoyed.*

Let's pick up where we left off yesterday.

Go on.

Read.

*James begins to read.
He's really good.*

JAMES. "...The king arose very early in the morning, and went in haste unto the den of lions. And when he came to the den, he cried with a la-men-ta-ble? Lamentable."

ISABEL. Yes. Lamentable.

JAMES. What does lamentable mean, ma'am?

ISABEL. Lamentable means: to be mournful, to grieve.

JAMES. Oh. "...He cried with a lamentable voice unto Daniel: and the king spake and said to Daniel, 'O Daniel, servant of the living God, is thy God, whom thou servest continually, able to deliver thee from the lions?' Then said Daniel unto the king, 'O king, live forever. My God hath sent His angel, and hath shut the lions' mouths, that they have not hurt me: forasmuch as before him, in... no...in...no...in—"

SUGAR IN OUR WOUNDS

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2 men, 3 women

On a plantation somewhere down south, a mystical tree reaches up toward heaven. Generations of slaves have been hanged on this tree. But James is going to be different, as long as he keeps his head down and practices his reading. Moreover, as the Civil War rages on, the possibility of freedom looms closer than ever. When a stranger arrives on the plantation, a striking romance emerges, inviting the couple and those around them into uncharted territory.

"...throat-lumpening, nose-reddening, fantastically moving... SUGAR IN OUR WOUNDS [is] written in lush, poetic dialect... its message is unimpeachable—that when we fail to treat one another as fully human, we invite tragedy..."

—**The New York Times**

"...Love's desire to celebrate these characters and their stories...is accomplished. SUGAR IN OUR WOUNDS is simple, timeless, magical storytelling at its finest..."

—**BroadwayBlog.com**

"[An] ambitious drama... evocative... this is a play to celebrate what was beautiful in an ugly world, rather than dwell on tragedy or otherness."

—**BroadwayWorld.com**

"SUGAR IN OUR WOUNDS implausibly manages to find love in the most terrible of circumstances. It searches for a queer history that passed without record, while simultaneously pointing toward a future in which our rigid taxonomy of sexual identities is no longer necessary to achieve political equality."

—**TheaterMania.com**

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