

With No Immediate Cause

by Ntozake Shange

every 3 minutes a woman is beaten
every five minutes a
woman is raped/every ten minutes
a little girl is molested
yet I rode the subway today
I sat next to an old man who
may have beaten his old wife
3 minutes ago or 3 days/30 years ago
he might have sodomized his
daughter but I sat there
cuz the men on the train
might beat some young women
later in the day or tomorrow
I might not shut my door fast
enough push hard enough
every 3 minutes it happens
some woman's innocence
rushes to her cheeks/pours from her mouth
like the betsy wetsy dolls have been torn
apart/their mouths
menses red split/every
three minutes a shoulder
is jammed through plaster and the oven door/
chairs push thru the rib cage/hot water or
boiling sperm decorate her body
I rode the subway today
and bought a paper from an
east Indian man who might
have held his old lady onto
a hot pressing iron/I didn't know
maybe he catches little girls in the
parks and rips open their behinds
with steel rods/I can not decide
what he might have done I only
know every 3 minutes
every 5 minutes every 10 minutes
I bought the paper
looking for the announcement
there has to be an announcement
of the women's bodies found
yesterday the missing little girl
I sat in a restaurant with my
paper looking for the announcement

a young man served me coffee
I wondered did he pour the boiling
coffee on the woman because she was stupid
did he put the infant girl in
the coffee pot because she cried too much
what exactly did he do with coffee
I looked for the announcement
the discovery of the dismembered
woman's body
victims have not all been
identified today they are
naked and dead/some refuse to
testify one girl out of 10's not
coherent/ I took the coffee
and spit it up I found an
announcement/not the woman's
bloated body in the river floating
not the child bleeding in the
59th street corridor/not the baby
broken on the floor

"there is some concern
that alleged battered women
might start to murder their
husbands and lovers with no
immediate cause"

I spit up I vomit I am screaming
we all have immediate cause
every 3 minutes
every 5 minutes
every 10 minutes
every day
women's bodies are found
in alleys and bedrooms/at the top of the stairs
before I ride the subway/buy a paper or drink
coffee from your hands I must know
have you hurt a woman today
did you beat a woman today
throw a child across a room are the little girl's pants in your pocket
did you hurt a woman today
I have to ask these obscene questions
I must know you see
the authorities require us to
establish
immediate cause

every three minutes
every five minutes
every ten minutes
every day.

Ntozake Shange, *Nappy Edges*. St. Martin's Press, 1972.