

# “Wanna Be”

## A Journey in Four Parts

wanna be your lover wanna be successful wanna be desired wanna be cool wanna be hot wanna be starting something wanna be amongst friends wanna be everything wanna be simply me wanna be where you are wanna be the best you've ever had wanna be the life of the party wanna be with me, myself and I wanna be rich wanna be unseen wanna be spectacular wanna be remembered wanna be historic wanna be married wanna be single wanna be a parent wanna be a winner wanna be adopted wanna be on a cruise wanna be on a boat wanna be on a plane wanna be in Verona wanna be in their thoughts wanna be on vacation wanna be in bed wanna be in your arms wanna be the funk in your right thigh wanna be on stage wanna be dancing til dawn wanna be the lead wanna be incognito wanna be respected wanna be free to be wanna be treasured wanna be valued wanna be the boss wanna be smaller wanna be bigger wanna be shorter wanna be a little bit taller wanna be fabulous wanna be radiant wanna be dark wanna be demure wanna be decadent wanna be memorable wanna be free wanna be me

**Zachary Marcus Cesare Harris**

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by Zachary Marcus Cesare Harris

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For all inquiries contact: Zachary M.C. Harris at [admin@ikavina.com](mailto:admin@ikavina.com)

## ***Wanna Be***

I've wanted to be so many things in life,  
succeeding in some,  
exceeding in some,  
failing in some,  
and choosing a different path in others.

I'm happy when I succeed,  
sometimes in even accomplishing some of the smallest things,  
because I've learned to do something new.  
But I'm not always sad when I fail,  
because I know that I have limits,  
and sometimes pushing too far can have drastic results.

Sometimes it's not the mastery of one thing that works,  
but the understanding of how to make different things work together.  
The ability to see more  
where others have blinders.

Until I die,  
I'll be a wanna be,  
and I hope I succeed more where it counts,  
and learn where it matters.

## Preface

It's been a long time since I wrote my last book; or shall I really say a draft, which was sometime around 2006. I have been writing some since then; some on my website [whenablackmanloves.com](http://whenablackmanloves.com) but more on the *When A Black Man Loves* Facebook page. Of course, there was the new content I added to *When a Black Man Loves*, which was like a ten years later reflection. And then there are things I wrote which I put to paper and just placed away.

Suffice it so say, there has been a lot swimming around my heart, mind and soul in all this time. And maybe I didn't realize all of the possibilities of naming my wine label as such, though I knew it would be a way for me to exercise many of my creative sides. So, this will be a combination of thoughts and feelings since I started on this wine journey as well as the four main themes of the concept of the name, each exemplified by a specific song.

Now some of the titles will be a play on words and phrases, or even song titles, as music is something that enshrouds and comforts me at times. It's hilarious when I look back and realize that some of the songs I loved in my childhood I only began to understand them the older I became; not just from their use of word play, but also that in some cases I finally started to realize the words that they were singing. "Remind Me" by Patrice Rushen is a song that gripped my heart and soul just with the opening four bars, and then the lyrics came in. It entranced me again when I heard J. Robb's "I Got Standards" version, which I heard on Azul Horizon's "Mixtape No. 41" (Youtube).

I did reach out to Patrice Rushen via her academic email to see if she potentially had any tracks she never released that she'd be willing to let me use. She helped out Robert Townsend with "Hollywood Shuffle" and I always say what do I have to lose. Hell, maybe the email went to her spam folder. But I do reach out to people whom I want to work with in music, art, film & television because you never know who might be interested. I hope Sway liked the wine I sent him.

Some songs make me want to play them again and some songs make me want to take them apart instrument by instrument and rebuild them, adding different arrangements or just freestyling some verses of poetry overtop them. And when I say play again, I mean whip out some of my own instruments and just jam along, or recreate the tunes a little bit differently. "Rockets" by Lion Babe has me so in that mood right now.

Music is that thing that has the potential to stir your soul on several levels, be it the lyrics, the singer's voice, the music, or the combination of them all. "Nothing in the Middle" by Rachel Farrell breaks me down at the core of who I am, and I know that "Still Standing" by Pharoahe Monch hits so many of us in different ways. And sometimes, it's just tied into a moment in time. I heard Lionel Richie's "You Are the Sun" the other day and it took me back to 7<sup>th</sup> grade at Labrum Middle School and the crush I had on 8<sup>th</sup> grader Tamika Anderson; I wonder whatever happened to her.

And, music can be that thing that energizes and steels your spirit. Like when West African wrestlers and their processions enter, with their musicians playing Dundunba, one of my favorite rhythms to play. And other people see this with the samba batteries of Brazilian soccer teams. There is nothing like that bass bellowing through your body!

There is also allowing the music to seize you and allowing yourself to vibe in dance, being an extension of the spirit of the meter and tempo. My friends can easily tell you about me busting out a few moments of happiness to some house music no matter where we are.

At the end of the day,  
as well as the beginning and throughout it,  
people just want to be respected,  
accepted,  
and considered

Zachary Marcus Cesare Harris

## About the Author

Aside from being the owner and operator of Ikavina Wine and Spirits, LLC, Zachary Marcus Cesare Harris is the author of *When a Black Man Loves, When a Black Man Still Loves... Even Though (Sisters, there are still some good ones left)*, and *The Men's Dump Survival Guide and Field Manual*.

While he is a native son of Philadelphia -- West Philly --and currently resides there, his love of wine has taken him numerous times over to Italy, Portugal and Spain which is where he sources his wines from.

## About the Company

Ikavina Wine and Spirits, LLC, is a small Black- and veteran-owned federally licensed wine and spirits importer. Our goal is to bring great wines to African Americans -- the most neglected and underserved demographic in the U.S. wine sector -- and others at great prices.



## Introduction

In a way, my life's journey has been all about love, whether I have actively realized it or not. The relationships I didn't have, and never will; the relationships I had which ended; the relationships I wished for, but never got. But it's more about that, and the people who know me better, if not best, know how I love, whether it is for friends, animals (my own, strays, or those of others), family, lovers or just people I come across in life. I sometimes love without words, but by being there to help people go forward, regardless of whether or not there will be an "us." And sometimes I show weakness and emotion just so that other people can realize acting hard all the time will stifle themselves.

My previous books all dealt with love, or various aspects of it, and easily dealt with my own experiences in life. Like those other books, this will also have a central theme of love, but it's going to play to a certain audience, which is women, specifically African American women. But there are also brown (Latina) women who can also see themselves in this, as well as Asian and white women too, as there are a huge number of women I have come across while traveling to and from, as well as attending, trade shows whether in the United States, Italy, Portugal and/or Spain. I've easily seen a thousand faces which have led the romantic part of my mind ponder the possibilities of what could be.

Hmmmm, I guess that I should I explain this more.

When I look at people, I normally just don't look at them. I start to dissect them based on a number of different views or angles. I might wonder about their past from an ethnic and/or cultural perspective, wonder about their thought process (how they think and react, what they hold dear), wonder about what makes them happy as well as said. And when it comes to women, I wonder what their hearts are like. From all of the information I have taken in, or consumed, in my life, a lot has come to allow me to see people in different ways, and sometimes it's just in the ways that other people wanted me [and you] to see things. As a Black man in this society, I have watched tons of works in film & video and read

an innumerable amount of books which all manifest imagery of people - - mainly white – to get you to connect with them and see something relatable and attractive in them. But when it comes to Black people in general, and Black women specifically, it usually is already slanted and usually very shallow. I am happy every time I get to see a better depiction of us in movies, television and print.

It's like anytime I watch an old episode of "A Different World" I can see a panoply of beautiful Black women, including those who just had an appearance on one episode. I think that some of the finest characters were Jaleesa (Dawn Lewis, who also got a role in "Major Crimes" still looking fine as frog's hair), Kim (Charnele Brown), and Gina (Ajai Sanders). But you also had Lettie (Mary Alice), Dean Davenport (Jenifer Lewis) and Dean Hughes (Rosalind Cash). I also can't forget Carla (Vernee Watson-Johnson). They all reminded me of the range of luxurious Black women I knew from the time I was born until when the show came out and beyond.

Anyway, when I look at people, sometimes the intensity of that focus can be unnerving, but in my head there are a ton of gears turning and churning and I am flooded with a number of thoughts and analyses.

Now, I'm going to launch into one theory that some people will immediately understand, and many have no concept of, which is that African Americans have one of the most unique and downtrodden existences of any people on the planet. This is not to say that there are no other people who have suffered [and may be still suffering human rights abuses] but I don't know of any group which has been treated the way that we have and still are going through it. Nothing was worse in the history of the world than American chattel slavery, and the remains of it still haven't been corrected and might never be. As a fifty-year-old African American man, I exist at a crossroad of realities and have traveled many roads which are years of experiences not all of the same direction and altitude. This is to say that I have compiled a vast multicolored tapestry of encounters [and entanglements] spread across a plethora of people, places and paths in this time which many people might never get to undergo or even know that exist.

I always start with my eyes, my vision, which is to say what I see. I have to be honest with myself and know that part of what attracts me is shaped by a history of television, movies, art and literature which for the most part hasn't pushed the beauty of people who have the same racial background as me, but when it has, maybe they don't have the most "authentic" aspects of who we are. I've read enough romantic passages in books to "see" the beauty in a number of women of other races, but have yet to see the same descriptive topology and topography when it comes to Black women. On a sidenote: a friend of mine keeps saying that I should write fiction; maybe it's to do the same for sisters as others have done for their women. I grew up continually seeing a slate of either white women, or white women of a certain age on the screen, with the constant corroboration that whom they are was what beauty was. Remember in "The Fifth Element" where they said that she was the most perfect specimen? They also did that in an episode of "Buck Rogers in the 25<sup>th</sup> Century."

I don't think that most men of other races see the beauty in Black women on an untarnished and unvarnished level, but with a root of fetishization. But then again, it depends on where they are in the world and how they were raised as I know some guys who don't appear to be like that. And no, I don't know Robert DiNero. I think that the beauty of a Black woman is not just her beauty as a woman, but also includes how she handles her survival as well as protection of Black men in a world where we are an endangered species. It doesn't matter whom you love, just don't throw the sisters under the bus because they will be there for you when no one else will. And the same can be said by men for women of their background as well; I was shocked and educated when a young winemaker in Portugal whom I know told me that over there, they don't date to date, but date with intention for marriage. And while that might not be true for all men in Portugal, it was a truth that in some places they focus on finding a good partner and continuing, as well as advancing, things.

But in this country, I know people don't look at us like we look at them. There is no reason to do the work to understand others if you are only focused on yourself. Black people do not have this luxury. The lack of

understanding is evident in casting for television, film and commercial advertisements, not to even include the bias in regard to stereotypes like the sassy Black woman or the Black buck. And sadly, this also extends to our own forms of self-hate. I know of one brother who thinks that the “flowers” of Black women are dirty, and only deals with white women. But if they’re dirty, then why would he consider himself clean?

Anyway, I am just going to let my heart, mind and soul pour through and hope that many of these pieces (poems, essays and assorted writings) makes some sisters feel good.

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## For the Sistahs

I thought that I would add this quick section just because. As I was coming back from a weekly run to mail out UPS shipments, I was thinking about the uniqueness of African Americans specifically and African American women in general. To my knowledge, I don't think that any group has went through all of that we have went through in this country/nation as a result of American slavery. It's not just the depths of the depravities against other humans, but also for how long it went on. And the women suffered the most. This is not to discount the massacres that others have received at the hands of explorers (?), colonizers and occupying forces, as in more than one case, whole cultures and civilizations have been wiped out, especially if you look at Africa and the Americas. But I think that the reality of the African American is uniquely a different historical horror.

We truly are a changed people, not just mentally, but even physically down to genetics. Unfortunately, part of that also affects our relationship dynamics. We have issues with hair, weight, body types, facial features, eye color, complexion, and even dental composition/arrangement, before we even get into who a person is.

I am the child of a woman who made sure that I was never hungry or went threadbare. Whether I can agree with, and/or accept, my mom's lack of progress in certain areas, I can look back and realize what she provided for me and my sister at the expense of not having things for herself; moms do this all the time. I can look at her mother, who tended house for white people [and got financially screwed by them and mistreated as an employee] and who was the result of her mother's tryst with a white man from a well-to-do family, and I take pride in all the times she sent us clothing and what not; I hated all those Levi's Corduroy pants, but she did it for me and for my sister, and we only got to see her for a few days once a year. My paternal grandmother was a nurse who also tended house for white folks when she got older; my first color TV came from her as did a lovely Spiegel leather jacket.



I've been surrounded by Black women my whole life who've had my back in some way or another and I try to return the favor when and where I can. I'm not perfect, or anywhere near to it, but I recognize the greatness in the sisters, especially when us men are both clueless and stupid. I often jokingly claim that I suffer from Congenital Male Stupidity.

The fact is, for many of my peers, there are a ton of Black women who have been nurturing and caring for us from the time we were born until now, and some were unfortunately sidelined into doing only that, caring for other people and not themselves. I think back on the mothers, aunts, grandmothers, cousins, nieces, babysitters [both formal and informal], accepted extended family members, neighbors and the list easily goes on and on. Then you have the folks that you came across in life, which includes school and work. Those teachers, secretaries, nurses, and lunch-ladies as well as doctors, lawyers, bus drivers, cashiers, judges, social workers, and the list goes on and on.

In my life, there are always stories with the sisters I have come across, regardless of whether it was platonic or romantic. Friends became lovers, and some lovers became friends, but respect was always there.

Sisters have been holding it down.

What I have been happy about over the past years is my ability to bring various Black women together, even if in the end I sometimes feel like the outsider. Relationships form and blossom and sisterhoods are formed. Whether I make a planned get together, or someone just wants to come through and chat, have a drink or chow down, it happens. I have just a glimpse of what sisters deal with, and I try to just provide a little oasis of respite from it all.

I've included a link to a great song that another great sister-friend turned me on to, which her eldest son turned her on to ([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VW\\_UHYs3giU&list=FLknpj6KDkeZ-XGo7ebZYUc0g&index=1](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VW_UHYs3giU&list=FLknpj6KDkeZ-XGo7ebZYUc0g&index=1)) Enny ft Jorja Smith, "Peng Black Girls Remix" which is a great work of art, and basically just tells a little bit about the struggles of Black women. So, I look at the ladies in the video, and they each move me. And it speaks to the diversity of who Black women are

and how they are perceived by different people. With that said, I am going to include some poems from my first book, which is cheating a little, but what the hell.

## *Thoughts of a Black Woman*

Sweet,

succulent as the first dew drops off of an African violet during the rainy season.

Fiery,

and feisty as a dab of cinnamon as it set upon your palate, quenching your hunger, desire and thirst.

Tangy,

as tantalizing as an infinite labyrinth carved of the souls of our ancestors.

The Black Woman.

From the south in the homeland of the Bantu,  
to those living in the metropolitan areas of America.

From those beautiful blue-black skinned goddesses roaming the  
desertside in Bedouin fashions,

to the saints in the Caribbean & Latin America pounding out Calypso  
beats.

Starting with Queen Mother rage, Isis, the goddess of fertility,  
through the lineage of queens of BlackKind like Nefertari, Cleopatra,  
Makeda and Nzinga,

along the lines of great rulers deemed Candace,  
to great warriors reminiscent of the amazons like Parks, Sanchez, Davis  
and Chesimard<sup>1</sup>.

Coming to fruition with my mothers and my sisters,  
the present day queens of the physical plane.

The producers of the Black race as well as all mankind,  
giver of life to ancient kingdoms and civilizations such as Timeria, Cush,  
Kemet and Nubia,

progenitors of kings such as Solomon, David, Chaka, Menelik II and  
Mansa Mussa,  
mother of Heru, Moses, King and Shabazz.

---

<sup>1</sup> Joanne Chesimard, alias Assata Shakur, head of the Black Liberation Army

Respect me not because I am your mother, sister, companion and  
friend,  
Respect me not because I have carried your seed and breathed life unto  
you,  
Respect me not because I am the other half of life quintessential,  
Respect me for me, and all that I encompass,  
my essence is unsurpassed by anything living or dead.  
Only I can make you whole,  
the moon to your sun.  
When you look into the deepest cavities of your heart and the confines  
of your soul,  
I am the answer and treasure which you seek.  
Black Man, you seek everything and everything is me.  
Respect me,  
Protect me,  
Treasure me,  
Honor me:  
The Black Woman.

### ***Moon ( 2nd version)***

Darkness,  
cloaking all,  
consuming all.  
Man rests, as well as the beasts of the jungle,  
Yet there is light,  
is power,  
is form.  
She,  
her luminescence enchants me,  
charms me,  
entices me.  
Casts a spell on my manhood,  
beckoning me to approach.  
But the call emanates from within myself,  
as if activated out of divine ritual;

She holds the cipher to the enigma.  
Great Khonshu and Thoth<sup>2</sup> pale to her in comparison,  
Her scepter she carries not,  
needs not;  
she rules me with her celestial presence and form.  
She has shown me that which can make the ankh whole,  
but only once a month does she fully bestow her presence upon me,  
shows me,  
allows me to see her whole self.  
I am tempted by her interludes of waxing and waning,  
coming and going,  
until she is there but is not,  
disappearing from the sight of mine eyes but not invisible either.  
Is it that I neglect to see her until I rest my aggressiveness?  
I am forced to wait,  
to endure that passage of a cycle once more.  
Maybe I can catch up with her the next time around,  
and never eclipse her again.

Rain

She has come from up above,  
The Creator has answered my most solemn prayers.  
Earthbound, He has released her soul, mind and body from His grasp.  
She cascades from the firmament with speed as quick as the fleeting cheetah,  
but quiet as if born on the wings of angels.  
She encircles me,  
drenches me,  
devours me,  
soothes and caresses me.  
Her touch chills me to the bone,  
as she warms me with the dew of heaven.  
She soaks me in her essence,  
tickling my spine.

---

<sup>2</sup> Khonshu was the Egyptian deity that was represented by the moon, Thoth represented wisdom

She is as fiery as the rays of the sun,  
yet cool as the night sky moon.  
Sometimes she visits me in torrents,  
as if her mind was filled with the rage of a typhoon,  
While other times she briefly kisses me,  
as if only a passing cloud.  
As she slowly fades away, returning back to Him,  
I remember every moment, turning every second into an hour  
and every minute into a day,  
recollecting her love, attitude, fury and grace.  
She never stays with me,  
she is just a passing fancy,  
and I, a passerby.

### *Delicacy*

If you were mine Black goddess,  
I'd treat you as if you were the delicacies of life itself.  
If you were mine,  
I'd savor you like a chocolate tootsie roll pop;  
Patiently licking through each coating of layered essence,  
As if each pass did not taste as if it were filled with the salt of your  
sweat,  
but a thick sauce made of allspice and marmalade from a Caribbean  
isle.  
Until I uncovered your condensed soul at the very center of this holy  
creation;  
A perfectly sculpted sphere the color of ebony,  
but with a plethora of tastes and experiences ranging from the most  
gentle drop of anise,  
and the sweet touch of sugarcane,  
to the spiciness of a mother's pinch of cinnamon, and the consuming  
power of clove.  
A confectionery work of art,  
with skin as toned as the bark of mahogany,  
but with the silkiness and fit of the pelt of the black leopard,

and a center molded of the power of the universe,  
much like a black pearl found in the great clam off the coast of  
Madagascar.

If you were mine,

I'd consume you as if you were a bowl of tropical fruit,  
the very gifts of life set forth on this planet by the Creator Himself.

From peeling off and devouring the layers of your soul and heart like  
the flesh of the mango,

To opening your mind as if it were surrounded by the shell of a  
coconut,

and then drowning myself in the omnipotent juices of your being.

Following this divine ritual of cleansing myself of the sins of man,

I would spread your seeds to the farthest reaches of the Earth,

So that new civilizations of African women and men would spring  
forth,

carrying on the reigns of Nikaulah, Hatshepsut and Cleopatra.

New founders of empires reminiscent of Cush, Timeria and Timbuktu,  
the Zulu Nation and the Songhai Empire;

Nourished only by your quintessence and the power of God.

Black Goddess if you were mine

I'd build a throne for you,

with support of ivory from the tusks of the rhino, elephant and walrus,  
and covered with the skins of leopards of the jungles and lions of the  
Serengeti plains,

encrusted with pearls and shells from the Ivory Coast,

and diamonds and sapphires from Namibia and Ghana.

Then I'd worship you throughout the physical, astral and mental planes  
of existence:

On this earth I'd follow you to the depths of hell to get closer to  
heaven,

which you embody in heart, soul and mind.

I'd join you in the great sun disc of Ra,

that I may bask in your ambient radiance and ethereal glow to absorb  
the rays of holiness that emanate from your  
essential being.

I would become Osiris so that I may quell your anger at the sins and wickedness of mankind, o Isis, Queen Mother Rage.

Black Goddess you are the only one that can set the evils of this world asunder,

And it is you that I seek.

Essence of all that exists and the reflection of the beauty that encompasses all.

Black Goddess you are the delicacy which can quench my hunger, thirst and desire.

If you were mine Black Goddess,

All that you ask would be granted,

And the earth would become a heaven so magnificent that all men would wage a thousand wars to wrest me from your side.

### ***Untitled***

Entranced am I,

as I walk and roam along the planes of physical existence,

askew in desire,

perpendicular to lust,

and parallel to love.

Captivated by those which nurtured me upon the birth and rebirth,

my return to the land of the lost and mortal,

my journey earthbound from the great sun disc of Amen Ra,

through the immaculate birth canal of a Black Queen I call mother.

I seek to reclaim the ability to nourish from,

to be nursed from,

to once again suckle from the true fountains of youth.

Swinging,

swaying,

pendulous in nature as well as in dance...

Reminiscent of the gourds from which the sekere are made,

and melons which are the fruits set upon us by the Creator Himself.

I wish not to pick just one pair,

but to harvest an acre.

However,



I'll have to choose one flower,  
one orchid,  
and truly savor its petals.

### ***Indulge in Woman***

First there is the hunt for treasure,  
for an onyx  
for salvation through the ankh's other half:  
the Black woman

The Black Woman;  
mother of all civilizations,  
quintessential link to earth, moon and sky,  
infinite you.

Without Her there is no harmony,  
no peace,  
no existence

All is meaningless without Her presence  
her body  
her soul  
and her spirit

The hunt,  
the searchings and stalkings  
the quest.

I spot her across a crowded room  
in a subway car  
on a city street

Her look captivates me,  
her eyes hold me,  
I am lost in the black pools of Her iris

I pounce,  
make my presence known to her,  
unveil my emotional camouflage.

## ***Self Love***

Excuse me,  
if my violins remain unstrung  
for your own problems  
affecting yours  
more than they affect mine

For my folks  
died five to one in transit  
for your economic reasons

Civilizations destroyed  
families torn  
marriages unwed  
by disaster

Pardon me  
if I  
don't cry for you Argentina  
cause it sure ain't my Brazil  
I didn't disenfranchise you;  
your own ignorance did it

Forgive me,  
if I will never  
place you above  
those that have endured  
your systems  
of abuse

Self love,  
for my sisters

*Another old piece I found while scrounging around some old files, but think that some sisters might appreciate this one.  
Penned 9/28/99 7:26 PM*

## The Bottles

I tried to write poems for most of the wines, as that was initially the plan, but some things just can't be done. Everyone wants something for [Saint] Bakhita, her story is so tragic on one level that I can't really find any joy in it. While I think I have another angle to take in another section, I will leave an unfinished and unpolished version in this section as well. In some ways she reminds me of this homeless sister I would always pass by every now and then. This lady was gorgeous and I always wished that I had a place of my own where I could take her from that. And then I got a place of my own and I started to think of all of the potential bad things that could happen, as when I got it my mother came and so did the cat (Gizmo; some folks know), and I couldn't think of endangering either of them. From the pictures of Bakhita, she reminds me of that woman so much it is haunting.

Now let me also tell you that it is hard to find folks for the artwork you really want. It's a damned shame in certain regards because I used to draw a lot, but got out of it, and never wanted to take it to the point of learning all of the different techniques and mediums to render images in. I am neither jealous of those who can do it nor truly angry at myself because there are other things which my life consists of. I'm actually finding myself going back to photos I had shot for my first book to use on labels, with the upcoming "Satori" to be the first to feature a pic of me.

As I am writing this entry into this section, I am listening to Angela Winbush's "It's the Real Thing" which was released in 1989. The song playing is *Precious* which brings back memories. Angela Winbush was that sister that brothers could all just melt over, even before she opened her mouth and showed off her pipes. That's also the feeling that I want my labels to evoke, that just looking at them makes you want to pick them up, take them home, hoping that what's in the bottle moves you just as much as the label did.

## ***Bakhita***

Sweet, sophisticated Sudanese sister  
surreptitiously spirited away,  
scion stripped of status,  
forcibly filched from family;  
apprehended from ancestry.

Daju from Darfur,  
sister to six others,  
as one of seven.

Separated from all things familiar,  
placed into bondage and servitude.

An unfortunate occurrence that happened in far too many places,  
for way to long.

No longer knowing her name,  
devastated and mentally drained,  
choosing the opposite,  
titling herself "lucky."

Enslaved at seven,  
sold five times in twelve years,  
abused and scarred,  
mistreated and maligned,  
then gifted away like some unwanted item.

From Khartoum to Suakin,  
to Genoa to Zianigo,  
then back to Suakin, Sudan.

Smart sister,  
finding sanctuary and salvation,  
Refusing to return to servitude,  
winning her freedom.

Little brown sister,  
and Black mother,  
both sobriquets of respect,

unofficial saint of Schio while living,  
who transitioned on a Saturday evening.

I could not have had her strength.

***Caprice***

I saw her walking thirty feet away,  
and then a feeling came over me.  
Did I see a twinkle in her eye,  
or was that stars in mine?  
In either case, I think I'll take the chance,  
to go and say hello.  
I might just meet the love of my life,  
or make a great friend in the process.

***Asteria,***

If it weren't for you,  
I wouldn't see...  
gaze upon the future and the possibilities  
in my dreams,  
whether they are waking,  
or at night or even the day.  
  
I wouldn't know myself,  
understanding my sun,  
my ascendant,  
my moon and planets which make up this big-hearted lion.  
And thus also understand to know others.

## ***Aether***

Shine,  
and burn away the dross  
rid me of all the impurities and imperfections,  
self-doubts and negative thoughts  
Warm my soul,  
in this cold cold world.  
You beautiful, black-skinned goddess;  
daughter of night and dark,  
sister of sleep and stillness.  
The quintessence impermeable and ever present,  
through you is the path to heaven,  
and the satiation of my unspoken needs and hungers.  
The fifth element,  
you have transmogrified yourself into a liquid form,  
ambrosia that I am thankful for,  
allowing me to look outward and inward,  
simultaneously and sequentially.  
I am at peace and evolved.

## ***Aura***

Some people sing of halos,  
but your aura is all encompassing.  
From every angle I can see your shine,  
and feel the hum and crackle of your energy.  
I warm myself in its invisible glow,  
and find a serene conjunction between the two of us.

## ***Triune***

Three as one,  
separate but intertwined.

Prototype:

grandfather and father, father and son, son and grandson;  
grandmother and mother, mother and daughter, daughter and  
granddaughter.

Alternatively and additionally:

uncle, nephew, cousin, brother;  
aunt, niece, cousin, sister.

A repeating dynamic.

Three generations,  
thoughts differing,  
but sometimes in agreement.

One looking at the present and past;  
another the future, the present and the past;  
the third looking at the present and wanting a different future.

Sometimes the fury and passion of fire,  
sometimes the stability and evenness of earth,  
and sometimes the calm as well as understated strength of water.

Changing which one is expressed  
depending on the time and place,  
the situation unfolding,  
the ramifications of actions taken and immediacy of safeguarding  
oneself and others.

I exist because your sacrifices and achievements,  
and I'll return the favor.

## ***Caesura***

Please stop me,  
pause me in my thoughts and make me reflect on everything.  
Make me approach you with respect,

and patience,  
not jumping in while you're not fully opened.

Halt me in my tracks,  
after showing me a symphony of warm joy,  
compel me to enter your depths,  
savoring and engaging in every nuance and scintilla of your empirical  
nature.

And then start me up for this next turn of your merry-go-round.

### ***Bella***

Spicy,  
and sweet.

Strong,  
and refined.

I look at you and know not to underestimate,  
you're no joke.

Some would call you a barrelhouse,  
others sassy,  
strong-willed, and even angry.

You're just the essence of how so many people push you to react.

### ***Motif***

Every time I hear those opening notes,  
my heart flutters,  
and my mind instantly recalls each time I have listened to that song.

Recalling places,  
people,  
and even the weather and time of day.

I hope this has the same effect on you.



### ***Arpeggio***

Sometimes,  
it's the separation of the things in a group,  
which are more pleasing than having it all at once.  
The slowly inclination of pleasure,  
derived from the methodical teasing from the start to the end.  
An evolving cascade,  
heightening response and stimulation the deeper into the movement  
until the climax is reached,  
and the movement finished.

And here is where we really begin,  
as the foreplay has ended.

### ***Satori***

I get it,  
but it's my own burden of knowing,  
and seeing,  
and understanding.

My own solitude,  
a lifelong scenario I don't want you to shoulder,  
knowing that you don't want this as well.

The Osayin in me deals with it,  
and I dance with Oya,  
loving the tempest of the storm,  
and wielding that power.

A whirling dervish,  
happy in my house [music]  
and never spilling a drop from my glass.

## Starting Something

Let's be honest, many – African Americans that is -- have a conflicted relationship with Michael Jackson for so many reasons; and the decision to listen to his music is an argument that is akin to that of the works of that Kelly guy (I have no albums of his – technically I have his first one with Public Announcement as well as the Gotham City Remix EP CD -- and immediately turn his music off when it comes on), but we grew up on decades of songs where he, and at times his siblings, captured our attentions and moved our hearts. MJ had more to him than many of us saw or understood, and some of his output touched upon struggles and bad treatment of people in ways we didn't even realize. The song "Wanna Be Staring Somethin'" touched upon a number of issues, with the aspect of not having a child if you can't afford a child to be one of the most serious ones. But it took folks bugging out even further because they couldn't figure out what "Ma ma se, ma ma sa, ma ma coo sa" meant, though it literally translates to "dance." Check out "Soul Makossa" by Manu Dibango.

Quintessentially, this section is about starting something, or wanting to be starting something, which is more like initiating something, which ironically the word *ignition* comes to mind. It also is about not starting something you can't handle the ramifications of! Weirdly, while I write this, I have the Official Extended Music Video of "So Beautiful" by Musiq Soulchild playing right now. I guess I will have to borrow a title from one of his songs and do a piece.

For me, I would say that the concept of starting something is the first thing that runs through my mind [when it is untethered]. Usually, it's the thoughts that run through my head when I see a beautiful woman, but it can easily be the feeling to get up and dance when some great music is playing. It could be the feeling to get into a scenario of stimulating wordplay, joking and bantering back and forth in a situation; I've had some of the best conversations that started from cracking wise about something inane or mundane, which sometimes leads to new friendships along the way.

And sometimes it's just the thought to go out and do something.

True story #1: For the past few years, I usually attend SISAB, which is the national wine trade show of Portugal. There is foodstuff there as well such as olive oil, cheeses, pastries, candies and seafood, but half of it is easily wine. So during one of my first years there, I am at an exhibitor's booth sampling the wines and talking with the person there and the president of Portugal and his entourage come through. Well, he stops in and kisses the woman manning the booth on both cheeks and says how much he likes their wine. So, as he is leaving I ask, "what about me?" He then comes over and kisses me on both cheeks and the press corps is taking it all in. The wine producer then looks at me and says that he has to work with me based on how I did what I did.

True story #2: Also at a SISAB, on the opening night there are festivities during the dinner. The entertainment is usually something that some attendees are wondering why they were chosen. During this year, there was a dance troupe doing a performance to some historical Angolan music. Well, after a day of sampling wines, I just couldn't believe that "this [or that]" was the best that they were doing.

So I proceeded to get up [as they had left the stage and were dancing through the audience] and show them some better moves for this music.

Mind you, they were being followed by the cameras and it was being beamed to the huge screen at the front of the room! It made the Portuguese producers I was sitting with smile with happiness and I still am known for that. Sometimes, starting something is starting the fun.

### ***Wind Parade***

Words whispered on bated breaths,  
combinations of carefully crafted compliments,  
my yin complementary to your yang,  
and vice versa.

Wishes,  
of what I want with you,  
packaged as seductive seasoning  
in a mix of decadent metaphors  
hoping to slowly heat up, and pique, your interest  
and melt your heart.

Phrases elicited softly  
but in a tenacious tenor  
trying to resonate and reverberate  
in your ears and your soul.

Succulent and spicy stanzas  
and remarkably romantic refrains  
ending with curiously carnal codas.

Did I move you?

### ***Morning Wine***

I plunge my tongue in,  
tasting the bouquet  
of nature's flowering gifts.  
Swirling and teasing,  
accessing different angles,  
nuances,  
and layered components of depth and flavor.

I don't have to wonder if it's five o'clock somewhere else in the world.

Do you?

### ***Remind Me***

You remind me,  
jog my memory,  
make me think of a place and time,  
of absolute ecstasy.  
Bringing me back,  
and recalling in my mind  
the smells, sounds, tastes, and touch  
of great times past  
that will never be repeated with that same person,  
whichever and whomever they were.

You make me wonder about the possibilities,  
the potential scenarios,  
but also the ramifications.

Is the risk worth the reward,  
the squeeze worth the juice?

### ***Say My Name***

Because your voice ripples through me,  
timbral titillations tingling in my spine,  
satin-laced shivers shaking my thoughts,  
enumerating through my chakras,  
stimulating them all in succession,  
then buzzing my crown and kundalini simultaneously.

### ***Paradiddles***

A tipping and a tapping,  
syncopated resonations playing some notes in the rhythm,  
alternating when you hear them versus where you know they are,  
feeling it deep in your...

Bebop from bebop,  
scatting notes, sounds, intonations,  
and reverberations.

Finding solace,  
and completion within the emptiness of sound,  
heard louder than the one and the two.

Can I get a word in edgewise?

### ***He's Not Here***

Don't worry,  
he's not here.

He doesn't treasure you,  
see in you what I see.

How could he?

Nebbish and awkward,  
his life has been bereft of what you bring to the table.

He can't sing,  
dance,  
or do anything interesting at all.

So how could he appreciate you.

Oh me?

Just call me Buddy,  
Buddy Love!

*The original "The Nutty Professor" is one of my favorite movies, and it speaks to the reality that sometimes there is a different man residing underneath all of his insecurities and lack of experience. Some of my friends never realized I was actually shy until seeing me in the right situation, which totally blew them away.*

### ***Salted Caramel***

I was told lately that I wasn't chocolate,  
or not as brown as I thought that I thought I was,  
but a salty salted caramel,  
with a difference shade in my iris;  
something I never knew.

I guess they can tell when they see my feet,  
and my legs,  
as I never wear shorts,  
but the depths of my soul are mahogany and ebony,  
rich, dark and enchanting,  
prized.

Would you like a taste?

### ***Ponc ti Ponc***

"Ponc ti Ponc"

"Ponc ti Ponc"

"Ponc ti Ponc"

next

I can start with this and go anywhere,  
knowing that I can always find my North star;  
or the one.

Comprehending where it all comes together,  
and the intersection of each meter,  
regardless of difference,  
as they all meet up together.

"Ponc ti Ponc"

"Ponc ti Ponc"

"Ponc ti Ponc"

next

I feel the possibilities of everything,  
anything,  
and all things.

The call of my ancestors,  
the drummers before me,  
and the shouters and intoners;  
the first instrument was the voice.

“Ponc ti Ponc”

“Ponc ti Ponc”

“Ponc ti Ponc”

next

I feel the music of rebellion,  
the songs of harvest,  
the unfortunate reactions to genital mutilation  
[of man’s patriarchy and oppression].

I channel the rhythms of the motherland,  
spread to the Americas, the Caribbean and Europe.

Power in reverb,  
melody and composition.

“Ponc ti Ponc”

“Ponc ti Ponc”

“Ponc ti Ponc”

next

Shall we dance?

*“Ponc ti ponc” is a crucial part of some rhythms in West Africa played on the djembe drum [or drum orchestras which feature the djembe]. It is crucial because it helps you understand timing and more. When people are learning, sometimes this is all that they are given. But sometimes playing this little part allows you to more easily understand the whole rhythm and speed up your learning of the other parts as well.*



## ***So Beautiful***

I see you often,  
looking at you go about your way as I occasionally cross your path,  
scrying multiple scenarios in which the two of us  
interact.  
Thinking about just the chance to be close enough to be eye to eye  
with you.

I wonder of the length of your gaze,  
as I know I can't hold my defenses for long against it,  
my staccato heart betraying a cool façade that I try to erect near you.

I ponder the resonant frequency of your voice,  
realizing that it's going to shatter my visage,  
revealing my awkward shyness,  
and also bringing out the coquet in me.

I guess the weight and feel of your caress,  
knowing that it will probably give me goosebumps;  
both a chill and a heat at the same time.

I think I'll get my courage up and finally say hi.

## ***Heartstrings***

Here I go again,  
strumming along,  
arranging my words as notes into chords, rhythms and melodies;  
repeating phrases in order to mesmerize you  
like I'm a romantic Rasputin.  
Orchestrating and mastering the final production like Timbaland,  
Teddy Riley,  
and Quincy Jones.

Just trying to pull on your heartstrings,  
And get you to notice me.

## ***Hungry***

I am famished,  
acutely seeking for this scenario to change,  
hoping to alleviate these pangs,  
and slake these feelings.

The time between feasting is irrelevant,  
as the desire needs to be alleviated,  
the screams and yells call out,  
the next consumed entrée which will quiet and palliate my soul.

I wait;  
the door is open once again.  
I can't wait to quench and quell,  
Sate and satiate,  
calm and placate,  
these urges for you.

## ***Proximity***

Forty feet,  
four months later.  
We have entered the arena,  
zones of conflict  
and spheres of influence  
Each superpower  
staking its own turf  
and  
establishing its own policies

Ten feet,  
one year,  
Defcon two.  
Fingers poised over triggers,  
I see all the curves

and the lines.  
The walls,  
facades,  
have come crumbling down.  
For the horns of Jericho have sounded

Ground zero,  
critical mass.  
Implosions  
and explosions imminent  
Maybe I  
should have turned the corner,  
or kept going ahead  
and passed you by

*I found this piece as I was searching for some unpublished works  
of mine. This was from 7/19/02.*

**Call Me**

(penned November 20, 1999 3:38pm)

Call me,  
dial my number  
ten digits  
and the lift of a handset  
is all that stands  
between you and I

Call me  
elate me with  
your conversation  
your voice  
needs, wishes and desires

Call me,  
let me be  
the one

if not for ever  
than for now

Call me,  
see what I have to offer  
you  
see what  
and how  
I will receive you

Call me  
and let us  
begin a journey

## Where You Are

When love starts, whether it is love, lust or infatuation, it can be all-consuming. And in that, you sometimes want to be with that person as much as possible. I remember easily driving an hour through storms, either rain and/or snow, just to spend time with someone. And I remember others doing the same for me. This concept also applies to wanting to be with someone, or where they are, even after a relationship has ended, because you want another chance.

And it can also be that weird, but common, scenario in which you think that you've met the perfect person for you, but they live in another city, state, or even another country. New England, Chicago, Texas, Canada, Austria, and even Cape Verde have been that reality, possibility, or fantasy, for me.

On a non-romantic label, it can take the form of just wanting to be somewhere that you have been before, or even haven't been. In my travels, I have a slew of locations that I joyfully recall and wish I were at again. There is nothing like being near a body of water at night, with a nice breeze, and maybe a nice glass of wine, while the lights from building and streetlamps cast glowing reflections like fireflies off the surface. Then there are the marine smells, whether freshwater or saltwater, combined with the scents of the flora.

When I was in the Navy, the song "California Dreamin'" resonated in my soul, as the guy who wrote it – who would later become part of The Mamas and the Papas – also was on that Annapolis circuit/track and was missing home. I myself wasn't missing home, but what was at home had blown up before I left and my focus wasn't where it should have been, or focused at all. I used to go out on the jetty behind my barracks, which was on the Narragansett Bay, put on my headphones and play music on my Walkman – okay, it wasn't a Sony model, just some oversized thing from Radio Shack which took four AA batteries and had no radio-- letting the sea spray soak me to the core.

For me, those places don't necessarily have to be far away, just familiar. I am just as happy at the Sea View Inn (Galloway, NJ) or Tomatoes (Margate, NJ) as I am in Antica Bottega del Vino or Marie Bistrot (Verona, Italy), or hanging anywhere my buddy Andres Sanvas is tending bar; or Israel Cinto as well! Sometimes, I have the pleasure of meeting someone for the first time [and maybe the last] and just enjoying the moments we share from the start to the finish. We won't know it has ended until one of us is not here anymore.

But I guess "Where You Are" can also deal with just being in a different mental vibe than the other person. I can look back from the time I graduated high school up to the present, and know how my seriousness and awareness of certain things just weren't a match for someone else. Hey, I was given a certain nickname in college which definitely made perfect sense. Not everyone sees the world like me, and some people don't really need to have certain weights upon them. I remember kinda having a crush on Marsha Ambrosius after seeing Floetry perform in 2002 in Atlantic City. She had me with "Say Yes" but there was no way that she was going to date a guy like me; she'd remember me as the guy who had her sign his arm when they performed with Erykah Badu in Philly later on. And there is no way I can dial back that part of me, nor would I want to. I think one of the best songs that deals with part of this disconnect is "Stop on By" by Bobby Womack. It took me some years to understand what he was really saying, and I have been both the victim and the guilty party of this.

### ***Transporter***

I'm always falling in love,  
or just looking at the possibilities  
of someone who is never here,  
but over there,  
and I just can't change my coordinates.

A town,  
a state,  
a country;

The difference doesn't matter because it's always the distance,  
and we are never close enough to one another.

### ***HalfCrazy***

Nothing is right.

The air,  
the sky,  
the food,  
and even the water.

I can't breathe,  
chest pains  
and a seizure of breathing.

I can't focus,  
mind racing and reeling,  
heart palpitating and still,  
thoughts incoherent and fluttering.

I can't wait to see you later tonight,  
but has it only been ten minutes since I left you?

### ***Continental Divide***

You always appear,  
seeming to be the match for me,  
but never will our paths cross,  
distance being the culprit,  
both of us wishing for the other,  
interrupted by time and place,  
space and intersection,  
or lack thereof.

### ***Beside/Beside***

I wish I was there,  
lying next to you,  
wrapping you up in my embrace,  
trading and building body heat,  
romantic thoughts  
and telepathic flirts.

I wish I was there,  
holding you,  
your back to my front,  
nose nuzzling your ears,  
smelling the smallest of your scents.  
Ears listening to your inhalations,  
and exhalations.  
Skin feeling the landscape of your dermis,  
picking up the palpating of your heart.  
Why are we not fully awake?

### ***Desiderio***

I wish I was a little bit taller,  
at least enough so that we could breathe the same air,



and I could exist at your altitude,  
being able to look at you eye-to-eye,  
and kiss your lips without raising mine.

*Maybe you don't recognize me down here*

I wish I were a little bit straighter,  
as that would put me on par with you,  
but I have no control over that;  
scoliosis is a bitch.

*Maybe you don't see me down here*

I wish I were a little more statuesque,  
so you'd more easily see the twinkle in my eyes when I look at you,  
and you wouldn't be self-conscious about wearing those heels you love.

Don't worry about what everyone else thinks,  
I'll make our lives together the happiest that they could be.  
And don't worry,  
you won't break me.

*While this is not my best take on this concept – dating a taller woman – I thought of it while driving and had to pen something to it. There is a female meteorologist who I think is drop dead gorgeous on a local news station, and every time I see her... And there was another reporter for that same station who also had that affect on me. I have dated a woman an inch or two taller than me, and I had no problems with it. Hell, this makes me think of a gorgeous Latina whom I think was named Luz who made my heart swoon.*

*There is nothing like coming across a beautiful woman, even if she is taller than you, and just being totally enamored of her. Just too bad that sometimes the height difference doesn't allow it to go any further.*

### ***n Adeyinka s***

I guess it's a play on a center point,  
or what is called the rose of the winds,  
even more humorous because of your beauty  
and the storms that wound thru me when it all happened.  
That point which gives a starting reference  
and knowing that I was equally pulled in two directions,  
feelings stretched to limits,  
with you at the center of it all.  
The first great look from the outside in,  
though no major unearthing of it to myself.  
Some of my best words were to you,  
probably lost forever,  
and I regret none of them.

### ***A Ride Too Far***

I want to be there,  
but I know that I won't make it.  
or it's not that I don't know,  
I just don't want to take the chance.  
And the urges in me keep saying one thing,  
reminiscing of the memories of touch, smell, sight and taste;  
the silky feel of your mahogany skin,  
the bouquet of the bends in your elbows and knees,  
the curvature of your hips and thighs,  
and the saltiness of your lotus.

But the logic in me says quite another thing.  
And right now is not the right time.

But you know,  
I'm going to still be thinking those same thoughts "fun" tomorrow.

**H**onestly, there wasn't too much I could bring out for this section right now, because most of the feelings surrounding it are all in the past, and I mean many years ago. So, it's hard for me to summon up the energy that would even put them into creative writing, so I will just talk about the concept.

At this point in my life, most of the fantastical thoughts of fantasy are over and done; hell, I'm about this [wine] business and don't have time to make rookie mistakes. If I do have certain thoughts, they last for a few minutes and my mind and heart plunge back into reality once more. I look back at my life and I sometimes wonder if I passed up on a diamond in the rough which I didn't see or if I would be closer in my goal with someone from my past. And then I immediately realize that the path I am on would have never happened had any of those other paths worked out. To be where I am meant that I needed to make the decisions which put me in those situations which led to me being here right now.

But then again, you never really know if that's true either, it's just something to say and believe in that kind of helps you to justify that you're at where you're at.

And trust me, you can easily fall in love fifty-eleven times on Facebook, Instagram and even Twitter. Don't even get me started on *Divorce Court*, as there are always some gorgeous ladies in the current season on the monitors in the back!!! Though I miss the guy who had the great smile and the craziest reactions to cases when they still had people in the court behind the parties; I think even John Oliver showed a clip of him. I remember the first time seeing the video to "Perfect" by Johnny Gill and Ralph Tresvant; the sister who is the assistant just makes me want to melt, and she looks like a darker complected [but younger] version of someone I used to date. I would've been a puddle of water on that set. Don't forget the sister who was in Usher's "Good Kisser" video either!

But in regards to "where you are" I have had a number of situations in my life where there was someone I liked, or was attracted to, and we just lived states away. I remember once seeing this very gorgeous sister while hanging out for Greek Weekend festivities, and just having the guts to walk up and tell her how beautiful I thought that she was. She was hanging with her friends, which I understood, and I simply gave her my

card. If I recall, her name was Michelle and she actually called me a week later from home, which was Massachusetts. She told me that the reason she called was because of my sincerity; yes, I meant what I said to her. We talked on the phone for a minute but lost touch. I can still remember where I wrote down her number and that her father drove for either Greyhound or Trailways.

And that actually dealt with another thing, which was not having the money to just go and be; this can also be a blessing in disguise as well. I don't like going anywhere and not having money, especially not enough money [as well as the ability] to extricate myself out of a situation gone wrong. There are several times where it just couldn't happen because of that, but in retrospect you sometimes got to see more about the person and were glad it didn't happen at all.

But a funny tale in another direction. When I used to attend the Annual Leadership Conference of the Congressional Black Caucus, I would normally stay at the Grand Hyatt located at 10<sup>th</sup> & H Streets. At some point, I would always wind up with the same woman in housekeeping for my room, year after year. There was an unspoken attraction between us, but you know, the protocol is for them to never date guests, and I was hesitant in making a move because of that. It was funny because every year, she knew when it was me by my cologne [and possibly a guest list]. It could've also been my snoring; hey, it runs in the men in my father's side of the family!

## Your Lover

I was on my way back from DC dropping off UPS shipments when a song I love came on, and it's a song that I love the wordplay in it, so I had to work with the title of it. One thing that I definitely love is wordplay, and I can be quite ribald with some of my lines, which is fun to me. It's been a long time since I wrote *When a Black Man Loves* and even the ten year update was maybe nine or ten years ago; I don't think that I have written much since then, mainly because I am in a different place than when I started writing the pieces in that book. Most of the works in that book were written prior to the movie *Love Jones*, but that aspect of composing something on the spot is me. Sometimes, I hear something and just want to work with it, whether throwing some great words over it and/or breaking down the music and building it back up into something new.

I can easily reach back into my past and remember all of the times of instant attraction and infatuation when I looked at someone, falling in love with the potential of the "us" and in my mind going through various permutations of possibilities of what paths we could take, both short and long term. I can easily look back and remember most, if not all, of the crushes I have had in my life. I can even remember those women whom I met and maybe we chatted on the phone but never got the chance to connect further and see what could be.

As I was leaving the gym the other day, I was thinking that each woman is a collection of poetry, both written and unwritten, spoken and unsaid. It's just the appropriate man/men to understand and recognize the content and composition. The concept of wanting to be someone's lover is also a fantasy, or at least the start of a possible adventure.

Some of these poems are about the first-time meeting someone, and some are about trying to bring something back together.

## ***Again***

I remember you,  
me with you,  
us together.

The fire, the binary reaction,  
the fission and the fusion.

The combination of smells,  
flavors and tastes,  
emotions and thoughts.

The feeling of you in my arms,  
and your arms around my back.

The feeling of me in you,  
and your embrace of me,  
the encircling  
and consumption.

The complementing  
and the addition,  
to being a sculpture.

It's been years,  
but I want that... again.

## ***Quiche***

As you glided heavenly across a room,  
I screamed,  
and spied you.

Immediately rapt with your angelic motion and decadent eyes,  
choosing to say something and call you over,  
if not forth.

Smooth and unblemished chocolate skin,  
dazzling eyes,  
radiant smile;

And I know you think that I got that backwards, but I didn't.

Lips that form the most perfect heart,  
Akoma.

Voice sending shivers through my soul,  
hitting the resonant column of my attraction,  
transcendental vibrations.

Two pieces on a chessboard,  
moving different, but actually on the same side.  
Where have you been my whole life?

And time unfolded,  
good times and great embraces.  
Meals and drinks shared and experienced,  
plus some anxiety we can laugh about.

I'm happy to have shared the time,  
and wish you the best in your relationship.  
Just happy to know a woman as beautiful as you.

### ***Swallow Me***

Swallow me,  
ingest me,  
engulf me.

Surround me in your flesh and spirit;  
warm in your cheeks,  
your lips a lock made of petals securing me nestled inside.  
Not bitten or nicked,  
just a transit from outside to inside,  
warmed by your love.

Don't release me,  
this feels like home.

## *Changes*

I think back and think of my times of being awkward,  
of not knowing how to talk to women,  
and missing signs thrown my way,  
which landed on deaf ears and blind eyes.

Remembering crushes experienced,  
but with confidence lacking I never approached,  
which makes me think of what could have been,  
but also thankful for what didn't become...

I still remember my cousin's beautiful friend who liked me, and who got  
pregnant that summer;  
I was not the father!

Recalling when it was the woman who made the first move,  
on a Saturday night at Club H2O,  
or when I was selling my first book at "Sisters" in 2002,  
or after a night of house [dancing],  
or online.

Still friends with some,  
but not all.

But isn't that's what to be expected?

And then I started to evolve,  
astute and assured.

Able to hide my shyness,  
in my jokes and my self-deprecation.

Never focusing on the things that they were attracted to,  
but talking about what in them I was attracted to.

The ugly duckling became the black swan.



## **Honeywood**

You had me at nothing,  
just looking at the shine in your eyes,  
the gleam in your soul,  
and the luminescence of your ebony skin floored me.

And then you spoke,  
tickling and titillating my heart,  
tantalizing and teasing my soul.

Why couldn't I write those words for you?

*Years ago, I wrote a piece for a beautiful sister to do a dramatic recitation for the Miss Black Penn State contest. It was titled "Thoughts of a Black Woman." The funny thing is that my buddies in the [Notorious] Nu chapter of Omega Psi Phi [who ran the contest] never said anything to me about it, but dropped the bomb during the competition. Being "Black Zach" most people thought it would be some really radical stuff, but were shocked when they heard it. This piece "Thoughts of a Black Woman," is in a previous section.*

## **Shall Be**

Shall be,  
that's what it sounded like.  
A destiny for something to happen,  
a dropped ball on in my court.

Honey-toned,  
dimpled,  
voluptuous goddess.

I'm still enthralled.

## ***The Last First***

Is this the last first,  
the last time I have that first kiss,  
hug,  
or more that seals the deal?

## ***Lenny Williams, Because I***

So,  
here I am;  
it's winter, cold as fuck outside and I am driving on East River Drive with  
the windows down (they renamed it Kelly Drive because of Grace Kelly).  
And I am talking to a friend of mine,  
playing a custom CD called "Man Love"  
that another friend made for me.  
I am missing you,  
hurt,  
distracted,  
heart torn asunder.  
I am crooning while navigating the twist of the turns of the road,  
but deftly like I'm a Formula 1 driver.  
Eyes ablaze like the Ghost Rider,  
the weather having no effect on my unjacketed torso;  
the windows are down and folks probably think that I am crazy,  
as I'm a Black man and it's freezing outside;  
winter has never really been my enemy.  
  
I can say what I feel,  
not denying how much you mean to me,  
because not giving in to the truth of it is just a fallacy  
perpetuated by ego.  
  
And I love you,  
but I guess that this is the end,  
and so I am happy for her,  
as you laid me low,

she lifted me high.  
And I'm walking into sunshine.

I don't drive that Aurora anymore.

*So if you don't know by now, Lenny Williams' "Cause I Love You" is one of the greatest love songs ever, and when friends come over, we sometimes wind up going through the classics and playing this one. I've even got my neighbors, a young white couple, loving it. This poem was written over a true episode of my life, and it played out just like the lines.*

### **Your Lover**

Sounds good,  
like the greatest job on earth,  
and I swear that I am perfectly suited for it.

Well, maybe not perfectly,  
as I am going to make some mistakes,  
but I know that I am going to try my best,  
and hope one day to get promoted;  
some might even say a tenured position.

I can't say that I have been training for years for this,  
but am hoping that I have the right credentials and you're willing,  
willing to take a chance on me.

I can tell you that I'm sometimes nervous during the interview,  
but once put in the mix, I'll usually impress.

I'm not going to tell you about my performance,  
because you have to judge that when you see me doing the work,  
realizing that I will put in the extra effort and won't stop  
until the task is completed.

And if I am right,  
this position will never become open ever again.

## ***Missed Connections***

I remember seeing you  
Taking you in  
From head to toe  
In the blink of an eye  
Using the gaze of a sniper  
And the glance of a spy

I was with someone  
But still considered giving you my card  
As what I had just experienced sent shudders  
And doubts in my mind as to what would really become of the scenario  
I was in

The dilemma was that you would know someone  
That she knows  
Because my name is unique and  
The dots would have easily connected  
But I looked at you  
And potentially saw the universe  
Café au lait in a nice light blue dress  
Feet clad in wedges  
And waiting for the valet to bring you your chariot

And as this seems to have run it's course  
This relationship that has shown me the worst in someone  
Whom I wanted to share the best of me  
I wonder who you are

## ***Ode to Esmerelda***

It's not what you think,  
or what you even can envision,  
or imagine,  
of fantasize,

it's something else entirely different that I don't know if you've experienced before.

It's like being a sun,  
radiating energy and heat,  
a celestial controlled fusion reaction  
that exists, warms and lights the way,  
and collapses at one point in time,  
exuding a force of pull one thousand times more than emitted by push

It's like being the dance,  
rhythms pulsating and undulating,  
your spirit wanting to resonate the feelings,  
and your soul ready to go from foot tapping to full on syncopated gyrations.

It is the quintessence of your soul,  
or really just a sliver of it  
that which you allow me to see and the fraction that you're limited to releasing at one time  
translated into your sultry voice,  
and the French curves and angles of your beaming smile  
And the sepia depths of your eyes,  
which show just a little bit of the warmth of your soul.

I dare not talk about your walk,  
or the way you move,  
or the way you make love.

It is powerful,  
it is consuming,  
it is majestic.

I am not afraid and want more

***Love 7:31***

From that first time,  
seeing you,

analyzing you,  
taking you all in.

Looking at the possibilities,  
of you,  
of us,  
in the present and in our future(s).

I think of you,  
when I am listening to some music  
or as I walk down the streets of Verona  
or catch the breeze of the Adige River.

I taste you,  
in each glass of wine that I have,  
thinking about your complexity,  
depths,  
and the feel of your juices against my tongue.

I wonder  
the perfect words,  
the perfect meal,  
the perfect bottle to share with you

My memory  
brings forth your voice to my soul  
and paints the inside of my eyes with the look of you  
reminding my heart about how it palpitates when you are around

When can we continue?

### ***I'll Never Stop Loving You***

I'll never stop loving you  
stop thinking about the  
wonderful times that we spent together  
the little deaths (le petit morte)

and the unleashing of the panther,  
the tiger,

the dragon and the phoenix.

Dying inside you,

And reconstituting myself in the miasma of your love,

Our sweat,

The intermingled scents of our pheromones

I'll never stop loving you,

remembering driving down through a blizzard,

or a tempestuous rain storm

just to see you,

be with you,

consume you and be consumed by you

That shower in Ocean City,

that time in the downstairs bathroom,

that room with the Roman tub,

that time in the Bahamas,

that dinner in Atlanta

I'll continue to have you bound across my mind

both in my dreams and my subconscious

my mind replaying the times, whether good or bad

and thinking about what could have been

as Morpheus [and sometimes Bacchus] take control and let my

emotions take over when I am resting.

I continue to imagine and visualize you,

from head to toe,

all your features in full detail to me, easily remembered and the

beauty of each accentuated

and attenuated to my feelings.

I'll never really regret

the time and money spent

thankful for the memories,

though upset at the brevity of them

I'll never stop loving you  
but will eagerly await your return  
or for someone else to fill the void and best you in my heart

***So Close and Yet So Far***

I wish that I would have seen you,  
even though you would probably jump to the wrong conclusions,  
thinking that I was there for the chance to see you,  
while I was on some other business.

I wish that you would have been there,  
though I would be upset because it's my spot,  
but hoping that I'd win out over who else you were with,  
like that time in December.

Sometimes,  
while I might be less than one mile away from you,  
or even one thousand feet,  
I am still a million miles from your heart,

And I don't know if I even want to really close the distance.

***Starlight, Sunlight, Moonlight  
Lady, Fox, Wolf***

Starlight, sunlight, moonlight,  
but most people don't realize that they are almost all one in the same,  
The divine light of a star,  
nuclear fusion reactions throwing off excited atoms,  
bombarding our world and our bodies.

Radiance,  
we absorb it and love it,  
and it shows us the way.

We try to replicate it, but are lesser imposters.  
One side is hot and bright,



and the other side luminous and captivating,  
just like...

The lady,  
who is both fox and wolf.

Vulpine plaything during the day with a colorful pelt,  
bright and friendly eyes,  
and sharp intelligence.

Lupine lover during the night,  
armed with a smile that seizes the moonlight and shines forth like a  
goddess.

You are Artemis, Phoebe, Selene and Hecate as one,  
enchantress,  
whose beauty and mind beguiles and bewitches me.

Your talk with your eyes,  
which is the companion to your voice,  
lovely pipes resonating my heartstrings with each syllable they utter.

You burn bright,  
and sear coolly,  
a living dichotomy which is really just the two sides of the same coin.

I want the starlight,  
as it is the penultimate energy source,  
and the divine cosmic seed for a Leo like me.

I want the sunlight,  
as it gives me warmth and assuages my emotions as it bathes and  
browns my hide.

I want the moonlight,  
as it makes the nighttime at the beach become a spiritual focal point.

The gravity of your pull moving me to and fro,  
playing with the seas, the oceans and the creatures within,  
a celestial Ororo.

I want the lady,  
that beauty who can make you quake and quiver with the tilt of her  
head or the caress of her touch.

I want the fox,  
to frolic and explore the world with.

I want the wolf,  
to nuzzle with at night and howl at how good life can be.

Starling, sunlight, moonlight,  
the lady, the fox and the wolf,

Who will you capture next?

### ***No Honor Among Thieves***

Stolen hearts;  
loot which can't be fenced easily,  
or honestly.

The victim left in a puddle, bereft of emotions,  
mentally wandering aimlessly,  
senses not working right,  
because nothing tastes, smells or looks right without the perpetrator.  
And there ain't no cops that can be called.

The funny thing is that you can't ever recoup the loss,  
because you can never be made whole;  
indebted on deeper level to the brigand who swooped in,  
and pushed you over.

I hate what you did to me,  
but I'd really never want it any other way.

You play a wicked game huntress.

### ***The Deep End***

I don't know why we just didn't dive in,  
not really blind but the waters weren't all the way clear either,  
though our thoughts were crystal.  
The moment was there,  
and the minutes between when we met and now all counted down.  
Anticipation of that first embrace,  
as well as what could ensure down the line.  
Dreams and visions thinking of the good,  
pondering and wondering about the decadent bad.

We should've jumped in,  
because those waters may never be the same again.

### ***Mombajee ai-o***

Stop,  
I think it's a wrap right now.  
Don't move another muscle,  
utter another word,  
or think another thought.  
I can hear your mind,  
feel your heart,  
and read your feelings.  
I'm really not ready, or that's what I am saying to myself;  
but I know when I am defeated,  
and winning at the same time.  
The hunt has ended,  
though I'll still sometimes act different,  
like a petulant toddler,  
who really ain't gonna run away.

I look at you,  
you look at me;  
neither of us is looking any further.

**I**n retrospect, the concept of wanting to be someone's lover has many facets to it. Actually, all of the concepts are connected in some way or another. Whether I said it or not, I am a romantic deep inside, whether or not it is expressed on the surface. But life teaches you and love sometimes isn't meant to exist but for so long. You can easily fall in love, but staying there is totally another entity altogether.

My best pieces were written when I was either wanting someone, either a certain someone or just someone that fit the bill. Sometimes it was before I met someone or voiced my interest and at other times it was after I was with someone and things didn't work out. What has changed is time; time to endure and experience many things and to realize that you and others change as time goes on.

I think that many of us are more concerned with how others think and feel rather than what we feel ourselves, and we miss out on a lot, whether just a few adventures or a lifetime of them. Not too long ago I was helping my best friend out, and we were there talking with his brother, or should I say "my brother" as we are forever talking in switched family relationships; my aunt and uncle has become his "aunt and uncle," and so on and so forth. Well, he was talking about how I can see the beauty in a range of women, but that he is pretty much the same person.

Since I was twenty-four, I generally dated women older than me, easily from nine years to seventeen years older. I never wanted children [and don't have any] and was just in a different mindset than my contemporaries. I never got the chance to meet Phyllis Hyman [who just never found someone for her] or Vesta Williams; two songstresses whom she moved me to heaven and beyond.

What I don't think is that many folks think, or realize, about men – some, many, but definitely not most or all of us -- being a little bit deeper in their fantasies and dreams, just equating us as mostly having carnal and sexual machinations.

But in the end, life isn't fair and neither is love.

## Free

Since 1619 in this country, Black people have desired one all-encompassing thing, which is to be free (history actually shows that there were some Blacks brought over as slaves before this year). Free from bondage, free from discrimination, free from pain, free to just be whomever we choose to be. Free from prejudice, free from stereotypes, free from certain expectations and free from certain limitations. One of the best songs that encapsulated this ideal was “I Want to Be Free” by the legendary Ohio Players. Of course, they aren’t the only artistic entity that voiced this, as there are a number who did it before and a number who did it after, but their effort spans several generations and will be one of those songs that will always resonate within the spirits of Black people.

And for many of us, we are still trapped into trying to not only survive in this society, but to prosper. Ever since the abolishing of slavery, we still have the battles within ourselves as well as with others in order to just fit in and be accepted, and honestly there is just so much damage done that is irreparable.

But freedom is sometimes wanting to no longer be trapped in the past, whether letting a past love go or being able to forgive and leave that emotional weight in your wake. Freedom is also the ability to keep going, not caring what some folks think; being the lone wolf versus amongst a herd of boring sheep (Phonte rapped that one).

True story: While selling my first book, I met a woman. And she rocked my world. And then there were two breakups, but I could never cry over losing her, no matter how bad it felt. And then one day, I finally played an album I had by Adrianna Evans which I hadn’t listened to yet. And the song “All For Love” opened me up and I had some tears. And so I played that song repeatedly to let it flow. And I thought I was good.

And later that day, that woman sent me friend request on Facebook!!!

## *A Million Cries*

Free

From being judged by the color of my skin,  
and my eyes

To have to don a mask and a guise of an admired woodland animal in  
the company of some  
in order to be accepted,  
considered, and respected

And assume a different guise of a predator in the company of others  
in order to be accepted,  
considered, and respected,

And in both cases to be both embraced and left the fuck alone.  
Loved and unchallenged.

From virus, disease, parasite, bacteria,  
all of which dampen the possibilities of unbridled experiences.

From affliction and the remnants of injuries,  
both physical and mental,  
emotional and romantic.

From stasis,  
those seeing me only in the past,  
and likewise me looking at people at a certain time or moment,  
holding them forever in a concrete Leo's judgement  
maybe not the best day or moment for either one of us,  
consuming weightiness,  
slowing us both down.

From reminiscence of past paramours,  
remembering and thinking of what could have been,  
thinking about the pleasure and passion of intimate moments,  
quickly followed by the recalling of past bad moments  
and knowing why it was never going to work anyway.

From not clearing the path for those better for me,  
understanding that in our uniqueness you just might not find another

you,  
but instead understand complementary and supplementary dynamics.

From solitude of individuality,  
the reality of nothing in the middle.

As well as the awkward internal feelings,  
felt amidst a coterie of compatriots.

From worrying about losing it all,  
small decisions which lead to big defeats.

Being able to take foolhardy risks,  
knowing that the penalty is just a slight disappointment,  
but the reward a lifelong happy memory.

From having to defend my choices,  
my likes,  
and my dislikes,  
as well as my quintessential existence.

### ***Chasing the Dragon***

He's always been there,  
or should I say it's always been there.

Hiding in his lair,

dozing,

napping,

crashed,

and dreaming.

Thinking of those times where he could spread his wings,

and soar to the heavens,

pirouetting down like a diving Peregrine,

and leveling off before hitting the ocean;

causing a wake in his flight,

and genuflecting in the spray of the waves.

It's definitely inside,

pent up power and strength ready that magnificent,

marvelous,  
and sumptuous encounter.  
Not a clashing of opposites,  
but an intimate interplay of two forces who entered the same arena;  
an everchanging and shifting lattice of two lovers,  
both in mind and body.

But there is no conscious controlling of him,  
no incantations or actions that can make him appear and reveal  
himself.  
It's not actively up to me,  
and there is no conversation between us where an agreement can be  
reached.

It's been a while since I've seen you my friend..

### ***Chains***

I used to be tied down,  
to the thoughts of you and me,  
of memories that made me think of the good times,  
which overshadowed the bad ones.

I used to be immobile,  
trapped in the memories of your voice, touch, smell and feel.  
Hoping for a second chance that would justify my angst,  
as if thinking that everything I did to make it work would make it right.

I used to be tied down,  
but I know that the world is a bigger ocean,  
and while I might not find the next you immediately,  
if I keep moving, something better might come across my path.



### ***In the Sunshine***

I love letting the rays of the sun permeate me,  
warming me,  
eliminating shadows, and  
imbuing me with power.  
The best Superman would actually be Black.

A comingling of peoples,  
from different places,  
all loving the lyrics,  
the rhythm  
and the melody.

Not searching,  
but happy.

You've drawn us all together,  
in the altogether.

Sunlight warming our hearts,  
and our souls,  
cutting across barriers  
and allowing us to enjoy commonalities.

Does this have to just be moment?

### ***Starship***

You,  
always take me away from this,  
this world of craziness, drama and strife.

Lifting me high and above,  
allowing me to look down as it all fades away,  
and enabling me to see for miles and miles,  
those vistas that I was shut out from standing on the ground.

Stratospheric sybaritic synchopations,  
easing my overburdened consciousness;

elicited endorphins easing my anxieties,  
as I am blasted into orbit.

### ***Inflection Point***

You honestly don't impress me anymore;  
your story is no longer inspiring.  
Your tale holds no more weight,  
or importance.

It was never hard for you at all,  
they continually gave you the benefit of the doubt,  
making excuses for your lack,  
of experience,  
of knowledge,  
and of everything that they would bang me for not having.

We were never at the same level,  
they just did everything to push you ahead of me.  
Good luck with that head start.

### ***It Could Have Been Us***

Staccato,  
Arpeggio,  
Crescendo,  
Coda.

Two-two,  
four-four,  
three-four  
six-eight.

The songs and palpitations that my heart  
used to feel  
Every time I laid eyes on you,

heard your voice,  
inhaled your scent.

I used to imagine what could be,  
fictionalize,  
visualize,  
romanticize,  
on us.

Hypothetical possibilities of you and me,  
betrothed,  
wedded,  
the long walk.

But that was not in the cards,  
as our time was our time,  
and our destinies intolerant of our positions.

And a part of me will be on an infinite loop,  
thinking,  
wondering,  
weathering the questions,  
of what could have been,  
and feathering the fantasies of what would have been perfect.

### ***Hidden Notes***

Some people never understand the reality of the hidden notes,  
moments left untouched and unused,  
just waiting for the right talent to utilize  
and capitalize on them.

The points of intersection,  
overlap,  
and juxtaposition,  
merely waiting for the proper conductor or conduit.

The scream in silence,  
begging to be heard  
and danced to.

Everyone wants their chance to shine.

### ***Odometer***

Sometimes when I drive,  
I think of the trips that I have made this way.  
The endeavors and journeys,  
expeditions and voyages,  
either with someone by my side,  
or at the end of my destination.  
Rarely in silence,  
because if the music wasn't playing, and there was no conversation,  
there was still the sound of the world as I passed through it.  
Driving away from where I live,  
while driving home at the same time,  
even if the physical destination wasn't the same.

### ***Unshackled***

Sadly I wait for that day,  
however I can break from your grasp.  
Aiming to no longer  
remember those good and great times  
or just letting the bad ones bury them  
no longer fixated and addicted.

Knowing what was the past will probably never happen again  
and that sometimes the time is past.  
Running thoughts of past adventures;  
experiences,  
no longer to happen between us.

### ***After the Storm***

Measure twice,  
and cut once,  
understanding if you want to ride out that experience again.

Don't forget the cries and howls of the wind,  
the outpouring of the clouds,  
the drop in temperature,  
and the rising of pressures.

The debris has to be cleared,  
and all the other damages repaired.

And you just have to decide if you really want to live in this place  
anymore.

### ***Cimarrón***

I dance in my head,  
I dance in my mind,  
And I dance in the physical plane...  
*sometimes never spilling a drop from my glass*

My words are the dance,  
and parts of the rhythm,  
but always they are the meaning.  
I am wild,  
unbridled,  
and reject your saddling.  
*You will not break me.*

I exude Osayin through my pores,  
partner with Oya in my moves,  
spit Chango in my voice,  
hobnob with Aganyu and my heart,

and rile Ogun as a war god.

*I play sekere for Yemaja and Olukun so they leave me be*

I am imbued with Chiwara,  
sup with the Obasun,  
interplay with the Orisha,  
and give fealty to the egun.

*I think Anansi sits on my shoulder and Tigere is what I'm meant to be*

I will not bow to you,  
nor make you think that you've won,  
or are in control.

My existence proves my strength,  
and your excuses and cheats show my truth.

And no matter what you do,  
you can kill my soul.

*I'll let you delve into the references of the spiritualities of Africa on your own, but I've had some pretty interesting experiences in my life between the practitioners of Akan, Yoruba, Santeria, Candomble, Vodun and some other stuff, as well as folks from different cultures throughout Western Africa. And as a drummer, I learned that each dance has a meaning behind it, and that in the Caribbean islands, there are dances which tell of not only the Middle Passage, but also the rebellions.*

*The Maroons of Jamaica were one group of people who basically said "fuck this slavery shit" and up and left, waging battle against those that tried to "bring them back into the fold." What is empowering is discovering that there a number of ancestral groups who did the same thing, whether in the Caribbean, South America or what is now the United States. Even more empowering is when you find out that not only were women also some of the fiercest warriors in these struggles, but sometimes the leaders of the rebellions.*

## ***Molt***

Pray for me;

I need to shed this skin,  
break thru this old carapace,  
so that the new me can finally emerge.

I need to let it go,

because growth needs to finally happen,  
and there are bigger and better things for me in life.

I need to leave those things in the past,

like shaving all my hair off,  
and burning it out of existence.

A grand ebo.

Pray for me,

because as I want to move forward,

I still remember all the great moments in the past,  
and that's like an albatross laden upon my neck.

But I look inside,

and know which things I don't have to carry anymore;

Things I am no longer obligated to.

I realize you are your own clown,

And this is not my circus.

But until my new armor forms,

I am still vulnerable.

## ***Ringside***

I now sit askew,

asunder,

and aside from the spectacle that my eyes witness.

A scenario that I was once a part of,

and now that I am apart from.

*This lion has left that building.*

I join the throngs of onlookers,  
and perceived friends;  
there just to watch the madness unfold.

I marvel at the clowns,  
there to amuse the crowds  
but also acting as jesters in your personal court.

I see the elephants in the room,  
and the lions and tigers jumping through flaming hoops,  
just waiting for the chance to gain the upper hand.

I gaze upon the aerialists and acrobats,  
showcasing the death-defying routines with no safety nets.

And I observe the fire eaters,  
the sword swallows,  
and the jugglers,  
not forgetting the person getting shot out of a cannon.

*I think sometimes that was me.*

All a menagerie,  
With you at the center;  
the ringleader of this cornucopia of cacophonous spirits.  
No longer participating in this Rube Goldberg contraption,  
I see it for what madness it is,  
And have some modicum of happiness.  
This ain't my circus,  
and keeping the show going on is no longer my concern.

### ***Prismatic***

We are everything,  
the full spectrum;  
all the colors in the rainbow,  
and all shapes and sizes.  
Skins in every hue,  
and eyes running the full gamut possible.



But not always by our choice and volition.

Our experiences are diverse,  
but our collective fears, threats and traumas unite us,  
as do our rhythms  
and our songs.

I am you,  
and you are me.  
He is she,  
and they, us.

The murals and tapestries of us paint the world.

***Skin, Sole, Sky, Soul***

Skin,  
sole,  
sky,  
soul.

*Skin*

I play the music;  
rhythms and melodies emanating from my mind,  
translated into vibrations on instruments using the stretched hides  
of cows and goats.

The slap a communal sacrifice of loss and pain,  
with the right crew this exists for hours  
and there is no fatigue at all.

Skin,  
sole,  
sky,  
soul.

*Sole*

I dance to the music;  
mind freed of the pains  
and heart basking in the calls from my ancestry.  
My feet clad in leather shoes,  
With leather soles;  
Skin sheathed in skins  
as a natural matrushka doll.  
Steps and spins executing practiced routines,  
and freestyle expression.

Skin,  
sole,  
sky,  
soul.

*Sky*

The music and the dance take me higher,  
I am emotionally weightless  
soaring above the dance floor as I tap dance on the tops of rainbows.  
I feel the joy of birds  
riding thermals  
as it all moves thru me,  
touching my...

*Soul*

As I am lifted,  
I am enlightened and lightened.  
Crushing weights of racism and other biases  
disappearing for this brief moment.  
Tears of unhappiness  
transmogrify into those of happiness,  
like seeing the smile of a happy baby  
and understanding the empirical euphoria in it.  
  
Four stages of evolution.  
Rinse and repeat.

**L**aughing at yourself is a wonderful thing, and it should be done more often. As I consider the concept of being free, I am thinking of all of things which keep you shackled down that you'll never be able to let go. As I am writing today, I am going through a bunch of songs that I have saved on Youtube and I just went from *Love Galore (Eyes on U)* by Debra Debs, to *Donna de Mim* by Iza (haunting and glorious), to *The List* by Moonchild (one of my favorite groups, and a song that is deep on multiple levels), to *Light* by Big Sean (the video moves me and makes me want to cry) and winding up with *Enough of No Love* by Keisha Cole. I'll end with *Sing a Song for You* by Wendell Brown, a slept-on crooner.

But I am floored by Keisha Cole, even though we would never be a match, she's the sister that just represents on so many levels, and my first crush from elementary school and her could easily be the same person. And in the mix, saved in my favorites, are some songs by Vesta [Williams]; I was so in love with her! When one relationship ended and I was truly hurt, my best friend said why not write her. And every year, when her birthday comes around I am basically fucked up as I know I need to hear her music and just go through the emotions of losing a love I never had. I also wish that I had met the late, great Phyllis Hyman as well.

New loves can make you forget old ones, but some old loves always have a part of your heart, and you have no control over that. It doesn't matter how intense it was, or for how long it lasted, that's just the dynamics of it.

Maybe being free is just accepting how some of the things that you'll never be able to let go of, whether voluntarily or involuntarily.

## Outro

So, I wanted to stop the book where it is, because it's not for me to churn out another one-hundred-and-sixty-page work. But right now, even in the pandemic, I am already diagramming out the next steps for not only the wine label, but the company as well, which also involves some projects in film & video. Just emailing someone else the other day made me think of something that I need to get on and get done. I was actually going to embed some recordings I have done over the years in this, but at the last minute decided against it. Hell, I can easily do an audio companion to the label.

By now you kind of get more of an understanding of why I named the wine label as I did, as you get to understand some of the different aspects of the name, and what it ties into. My overall approach to wine and this business endeavor is also different from that of others, if not very different, and it's due to how I got [seriously] into wine. But even into my journey into wine, I also took the attitudes and behaviors of what and who I am, which comprises my heart, mind and personality. I think of all of the people whom I have met, and how we connected and/or bonded based on the vibe of our interaction(s). Whether jokingly messing with someone or giving deference and following through on your word, or even just knowing something that others don't, it builds a bridge.

Some folks know [and respect] me for my passion in regards to wine, life and being Black. Some know my playful nature, my flirting side or my party side; the latter is when the "dance" in me comes out. And some know my respect and my solemnity. There is also my amity and hospitality as well.

In regards to living in, and being of, the United States, I know that for a number of reasons, there are many wines which don't get their proper respect and chances, and that people would love them if they were introduced to them. I think that like so many other things, your life in wine is a matter of time, place, exposure and opportunity. My passion and interest at one moment in time opened up a door to something else.

By being at another place and coming across another person, another door was opened. And that kept [and keeps] happening on and on, with many branches of interactions unfolding like a tree.

Wine can be fun, serious, or anywhere and anything in between. And it can also be bad, or crappy. Wine has been something that has made me friends and acquaintances, as well as foes and enemies. Not everyone is happy with a Black guy knowing so much about it, nor being their competition or just someone who can shut down their pretentiousness. My love of wine has put me in hundreds of trade shows both here and abroad. It's taken me to Italy, Spain, Portugal and the Azores as well as just sitting in the back of restaurant talking about life until way past closing. I've got a ton of stories along the way, which just add more to the stories of my life.

As far as my goal, I want to offer you not only what others have been denying you, but also at a fair and reasonable price. And while I am focused primarily on African Americans, this is not to say that others shouldn't try the wines, BECAUSE THEY'RE GOOD!!!! I'm so happy that a white woman in the Oregon loves my wines, and she knows what she is talking about!

And as I just flipped back to Facebook, there was a memory, or really a post that I wrote this day two years ago. I think that it really shows who I am and how I deal with wine. I think that this should end the book.

### Reflections on VinItaly and WinePleasures:

Well, this was my 6th VinItaly and in this trip, my travels took me back to Catalan and back to Verona. I met new people [and new wines] and reconnected with people I already knew.

Spain was great and it was a pleasure to hang with so many wine producers and other importers. The laughs were great, the weather perfect, the hosts sublime and Phillip "cried" when I had to leave; I have to get to Toronto!

Italy was great [as some of you know that I consider Verona a second home, especially because of Bottega del Vino] and I got to make new friends and acquaintances as I always do.

I can tell you that the trip was spiritually elevating and humbling at the same time. There were so many people I came across who commended me on my "Zachness" (personality, demeanor, fashion, amity, etc.) and extended graciousness to me for how we related when we first met, or how I treated them and how our interactions took root and flourished. Between people letting me know that they want to work with me -- or how come I haven't worked with them yet; Oreste De Santis 😊 -- to people telling me specifically that when I get married, they have to attend (one winery already offered their facility for my wedding, when and if I ever get married), to one new friend telling me that one thing I said to him shook him to the core, and was one of the three times in his life that has happened (it was in a good way). this trip was transcendental.

To have tales reminisced of me doing something that changed the mood of a room in a good way, to how I made great impressions with people I just met -- bringing the last glass of a great bottle of wine to Jorgealberto Averhoff Torres in his shop, and dancing in the bar that Marie Claire DaCosta worked at -- was humbling.

As a maverick in life in general [with a big heart of gold] and a maverick in the wine world specifically, being usually one of the only Black people in the room, to being the most passionate person in regard to Italian wines, it was truly refreshing.

I can't tell you how many times I ran into producers I met in the past, or how people would walk up to me, tell me when they met me and had me come and sit with them. I also can't tell you how many times I spoke about producers I know to other importers, and as Al Paris would say, acted as a connector.

Many people don't get Verona, Veneto, Italy or wine producers wherever when it comes down to it. They are farmers (wine producers), and thus the salt of the earth. If you have no pretensions, you can make

some great relationships. There is nothing better than sitting down with families and enjoying their warmth along with their wines and their food. And don't treat them as stupid, because you'd be surprised at the intelligence you might be dealing with behind them.

I am happy to know so many good people whose work was rewarded and awarded, and to have good people know that I have always been interested in opening doors for them, even if I don't seek to make a dime from it (practically unheard of and makes their heads swivel).

This trip was very special for me and will be one of the most memorable times in my life.

Muchas Gracias, Obrigado, Grazie Mille and Xie Xie

P.S. I don't know how to say thanks in Croatian... yet!

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To explain this better, by this time in 2019 I had already been in Catalan; specifically, Alt Emporda, via another connection of mine in regards to Spanish wines. That trip had me in that area, then visiting the producer of the Bella in the Azores, and then back to Lisbon for SISAB. This latter event was buttressed by the day [and night] where I stayed in the Alto Bairro part of Lisbon and then the lunch I had on the last day of SISAB with my contact at Soul Wines. The former event expanded my knowledge of Spanish wines and was wonderful.

This was a Wine Pleasures trip back to the area followed by a trip back to Verona for VinItaly. At the first part, I made friends with a Croatian producer as well as a “Black Swede” – mom is Swedish, dad is African American – with whom I established a great friendship. What some trade shows do is to have folks in import also eat with the producers, which gets fun and very interesting the longer that the day goes on. Lunches and dinners [and even breakfasts] are usually filled with wine, food, and laughs.

On the last day of the trip, we were at one producer's house and estate – the guy had a mini zoo!!!!!! – and I was quiet at dinner. It shocked

everyone and people asked if I was okay, when I was just merely in thought, happy for the trip, the new connections and just the whole great experience. Most notable was that when we were flying into Barcelona, not only had I spotted two fighter jets seemingly pursuing another plane – this was like at five in the morning and probably the only other folks who noticed it were the pilots – but that I saw this magnificent “rock” which turned out to be Montserrat which was breathtaking. Everywhere we went, we were literally in view of this mountain, which was also awesome.

Back to VinItaly and Verona where my flights got screwed up – we literally sat on the tarmac for over two hours on my first leg and I missed the check-in for my second flight by just twenty minutes; use Kiwi.com for travel, as their policy on refunds and what not saved me -- and I wound up flying into Venice [instead of Verona] and paying the car service I use to drive me into Verona, missing dinner with all of my “brother’s” children that night.

Anytime I am in Verona, I reconnect up with Jorge and Marie, and Jorge was talking about how the owner of a restaurant where Marie used to work was talking about how I turned a boring night around, dancing to some great music which came on. Jorge is Cuban and owns an antique shop where he also does top-notch restorations. I met him during my second VinItaly where I had an AirBnb over his shop. I just went in to see what was what, and we became friends. Maire is part Senegalese and I believe Malian and owns Marie Bistro, which is two doors from my favorite spot, Antica Bottega del Vino!

Verona is like a homecoming for me, falling back into routines of mirth and drink, seeing the folks I miss when I am not there and walking the familiar streets and paths which bring back memories of times past, like reminiscing about an old flame. Knowing that you’re going to see a number of producers that you know and drink a bunch of fabulous wines is the greatest anticipation. And folks knowing that everything doesn’t happen as soon as you want it, but that it could easily take years but that they want to work with you is also a heartfelt feeling.

It’s not about the immediate sales, but the long term-relationship(s).



I have been blessed to be real and genuine, and to have done a lot of things which expand what I bring to the table, though I am still waiting on the blessing of [enough] capital. Sometimes, it's not the money that you bring to the table, but everything else. That last trip to SISAB/Lisbon had me/us hanging at a restaurant (pizzeria) at Campo Pequeno, a bullfighting ring, while waiting to be able to check in to the hotel. Now, I am not into bullfighting, but they have some great restaurants there. Anyway, I had my Bluetooth speaker [which I enjoyed while in the Azores]. There was a couple at the table next to us, and at some point, I scrolled through to my Roy Ayers albums, playing "Everybody Loves the Sunshine." Well, the guy at the next table started singing the song, and our eyes met, we all smiled in the intersection of things, and everything was chill.

I also found out about Iza at another local restaurant!