

Love in Grief

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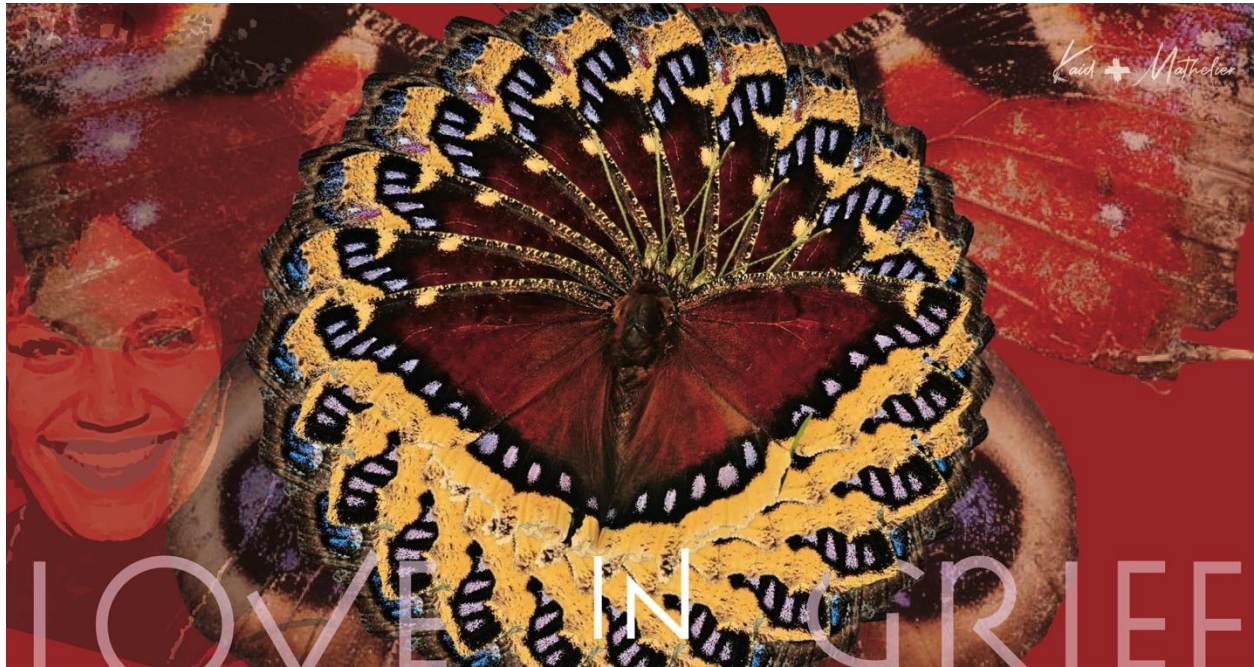


Figure 1. Lynnette Kaid of "Kaid-N-Kolor" created the graphic art accompanying *Love in Grief*.

PART ONE: THE SONG

I didn't hear the trumpet sound. I heard Lovett on the radio.

*This has got to be the saddest day of my life.
I called you here today for a bit of bad news.
I won't be able to see you anymore.¹*

"Wait, wait, wait. What time is it?" I call out to no one in particular.

8:36 AM.

¹ "Kiss and Say Goodbye," featuring Winfred Lovett and Gerald Alston, and produced by Bobby Martin, vinyl, track 10 on The Manhattans' *The Manhattans*, Columbia Records, 1976.

I can't remember if I saw that on the driver's phone beneath the navigation system directing us to the airport or if I pulled out my own phone. The incantation had already taken hold. I was both inside and outside my body. Concurrent motion and stillness in a current of energetic frequencies of transit and transport. Being and remembering between Moten's breaks. Mouth agape. Lips drying from my breath. Arrested by the coded message transcending the airwaves.

*And since this is our last day together
I wanna hold you just one more time.²*

"Fucking hell. No.
No, no, no, no, no, no.
Not yet. What the fuck!"

I remember tears welling and burning my cornea until the fire water broke and took passage. No tears. Not now. For that would mean it's true. The back of my hand hurriedly blotted that lie. No. This cannot be.

*I had to meet you here today.
There's just so many things to say.
Please don't stop me till I'm through.
This is somethin' I hate to do.³*

"Then don't do this," I say to myself, or maybe out loud, I do not know. But even as I say, think, say, think this, I know that she is not doing this; the doing is being done to her. The doing is the final stretch of her body that hit its threshold without warning. There was no alarm. There was no trumpet. If she were in control of the doing, the doing would have been a bountiful brunch filled with the ripest, most organic, and most delicious provisions from the farmers market at Grand Army Plaza. And if the offerings at Grand Army were scant, she would have crossed the bridge to the Chelsea Market, less encumbered by the winter blues labored by local, small, and independent vendors. She would have walked in the cold to get that bounty, pulled out her cookbooks to decide what to prepare for us—a gathering of friends turned family over the decades. It would have been something, or more aptly, some *things* (because there was never just one thing) for our tongues to marvel about expectantly, privileged by the high bar she had set in the art of gathering. We would have been fed food, love, and laughter, surrounded by tulips and the perfect mixed bouquet. We would have been given tasks and understood the assignments despite our objections. We would have hugged, lingered, and stayed with each other until.

² The Manhattans, Track 10.

³ The Manhattans, Track 10.

But yet, I could feel my friend—my sister—beckoning me, sojourning to Charleston to say goodbye before joining the ancestors. I was racing to get back to her in New York, but she knew time wasn't in my favor, so she came to me. Stilled time. 8:36 AM. An act of love before the loss.

PART TWO: THE CALL

“Lisa, it’s time.”

10:05 AM

“No, no, no, no.”

“Do you want to say goodbye?”

“I never want to say goodbye. Never. Never. Never want to say goodbye. Oh, god. Oh no.”

I was on the plane. In my seat. Swollen face. Sunken eyes. Trying my best to muffle the anguish that was convulsing through my body so the person next to me would not have to earphones-mute my sorrow. Shielded by the scarf that I'd draped over my head, I stared out the window, listening to the sobs of my friend, our friend, who was gifting me goodbye. She didn't know that I had already been summoned to say goodbye. It was on repeat in my head like a looping signifier of transcendent love.

*I'm gonna miss you; I can't lie . . .
Take my handkerchief an' wipe your eyes⁴*

And here was another friend pushing past her own grief to make sure I was there. Activating the technologies we had at hand. The technical encoding of our ancestry that runs through our veins--love--and the nascent technologies of modernity--the mobile.

‘I’m putting you on speaker so she can hear you.’

That’s that ancestral love. A love encoded in how we care for each other and make space for each other even in the most space-less moments. I won’t go into what I said, for I was no longer with myself, in myself, for myself. My recollection can’t be trusted; my tongue was in grief. But the gist had already been sung.

⁴ The Manhattans, Track 10.

*I'm gonna miss you; I can't lie
Let's just kiss and say goodbye.⁵*

PART THREE: THE EMBRACE

A river ran through us.

Rapid, ferocious, dark water stretching back, forward, through, and to the Nile like Sankofa. Our bodies reverberated the corporeal tremor of heartbreak. We carried a rhythm that couldn't be derived somatically. Muscular agency became subservient to deep, ancestral spirit. This must be what they called the "holy ghost" when I was growing up in my Southern Baptist church. But nothing about this felt holy. It felt raw, drenched in agony, and libidinal.

I don't know what time it was when your arms became the portal for me to leave the ground no longer familiar in search of this new footing. From car to plane to car to hospital, Charleston - New York. I think around 1 PM.

Close. I checked the texts.

12:52 PM

I'm in the building trying to find y'all.

We're in the waiting room 8th floor down the hall.

But you weren't in the waiting room. You were just outside the door. I can't explain the energetic navigation that led me straight into your arms. I beelined to you - into you.

You held me, and I held you back as fault lines broke and breaths became gasps. There had been a tectonic shift. The earth had quaked. I needed a new wake to sojourn.

Your arms said

*I got you
you are not alone
you belong here
I understand
let it go*

⁵ The Manhattans, 10.

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*your vulnerabilities are protected
you are safe
the light will come
you are loved*

I felt I could implode without shattering. Your vessel contained my grief, which was bolstered by the ancestors who watch over us. You held me, and they held us while we grieved with our bodies.

What is love if not the safeguarding of our undoing?

Your embrace realigned a spine beveled by the weight of a broken heart.

I will never forget it.

Dedication

Love in Grief is dedicated to my dear friend, Georgiana Pickett (December 15, 1968 - February 5, 2024), and the Black women who made these memories. *The Song* (Georgiana), *The Call* (Anna), and *The Embrace* (Okwui).

Lisa Yancey is the founder of Yancey Consulting. She specializes in systems analysis, cultural interventions, and generational forecasting to advance just, equitable, and thriving societies. She co-founded “The We’s Match,” an emerging online platform dedicated to helping women entrepreneurs from marginalized communities scale their businesses via curated matches and concierge support. She also launched THE DASH, a three-day excavation journey set in luxurious spaces, where Lisa and her team support individuals in identifying what they truly want to be doing with their lives and mapping a plan to get there. Lisa matriculated from Emory University and Boston College Law School, is a New York Bar Association member, teaches Dream Planning at Yale University’s David Geffen School of Theater Management, and serves on the board of Fractured Atlas.
