

STANZAS

Written by

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**LOGLINE:** A couple's summer romance becomes unhinged when one's father passes away, compelling them to use spoken word to wade through their grief and splintering relationship.

Initially, OVER BLACK, we HEAR a raspy, yet lucid voice...

VOICE (V.O.)  
Next up, show your love for...  
"Soundtrack to Summer Love".

**INT. DAVENPORT LOUNGE - NIGHT**

PRESENT DAY

A monsoon of finger snaps ricochet throughout the modern-day speakeasy. Tables and chairs are filled, spilling toward the stage.

We HEAR a bold, sultry saxophone. Mellow, yet provocatively rolling over notes. As HER hands ease off the sax for a beat, she scans the audience. She's on a mission.

SAXOPHONIST  
Our poetry was never the same as  
before, before. / Before I would  
sax my way off to Juilliard... /  
Before you would write off to  
NYU...

Then, we HEAR a crescendo of SNAPS and SHUTTERS...

FADE IN:

**EXT. HERMANN PARK - AFTERNOON**

SUPERIMPOSE: JULY 2013

A humid, but gorgeous Houston day.

FEMALE VOICE (V.O.)  
Before money gets funny / Before  
Summer begets Fall...

A couple in midst of graduation photos. Meet MIA WINSTON (21) and TAYE GIVENS (21). She is the "Saxophonist", but much more, a brown endowed beauty with curious eyes, savoring the moment. He is a double dimpled brown brother, going places.

MIA (V.O.)  
We made a list of firsts to share  
together / I'd never been skydiving  
/ And you'd never been to Paris...

Their graduation garb flails in the wind, while they pose and contort their bodies against the manicured stretch of green fairway. The camera loves them.

The photographer hand gestures, 3..2..1, and FLASH! Their outfits transform from gowns to jeans and T-shirts. Mia sports a Juilliard School of Music tee, while Taye fits into a NYU one. A brief glimpse into their near future.

Once more the photographer signals 3..2..1, and FLASH! Taye squats down, his arms taut and ape-like, with a mean mug. He brandishes a *black* shirt, with *old gold* Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc stitched across.

Mia postures behind him looking into her hands like "mirrors" sporting a, *salmon pink* and *apple green* Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc stitch up. They pose... HOLD IT!

### INT. DAVENPORT LOUNGE - NIGHT

As we pan away from Mia, we take in a different audience on a different night at the lounge.

TAYE

Our first anniversary was  
approaching / But I wasn't keen on  
jumping out of planes, and we could  
barely get you into one. / So, we  
decided we'd win the local Voices  
Merging Spoken Word Competition /  
take the winnings / and road trip  
to the National Museum of African-  
American History and Culture.

### EXT. HERMANN PARK - AFTERNOON

A red and white checkered blanket and brown picnic basket surrounds them. Mia tees off on her saxophone. Adoration pours out of Taye's eyes. The photographer gestures 3..2..1 and FLASH!

They hold up both ends of a magazine cover that reads... National Museum of African-American History and Culture. Just as they kiss, a plane hums past the horizon. Maybe that same *plane*, they couldn't agree to jump out of.

MIA (V.O.)

21 hours from Houston to D.C. / and  
I'm afraid my anxiety will take  
hold / it was quickly I surmised I  
loved you / but my bones rattle  
when you study me / like when, I  
said, "my father never read me bed  
time stories with happy endings" /  
you never judged / when I said, "I  
wanted to live inside a Nina Simone  
ballad" / So fuck story book  
endings / cause at that moment, I  
was convinced / I wanted to spend  
the rest of my life between a  
chorus, a verse, and bridge with  
you.

CUT TO:

**INT. MIA'S APARTMENT - AFTERNOON**

A simple studio, with all her possessions in the world. On the wooden end table, sits a vinyl record player. Mia cycles through her treasury, arriving at Nina Simone's Pastel Blues. Carefully out of its cover, and gently on the scale, the needle sets.

TAYE (V.O.)

We were both 21, acting 12 /  
Flirtatious debates, phone calls  
after 9pm / falling asleep around  
5am / writing text messages / like  
they were 8th grade love letters...

As the record begins, a subtle intensity washes over Taye's brows. We see him listening... contemplating... a smile washes over his face.

*Something about Mia's tempo ticks up slightly. A tinge of urgency.*

MIA (V.O.)

The first time you looked into  
*These Eyes* / the croon of Jr.  
Walker's saxophone filled the space  
between us / My pupils dilated /  
while yours intimated there was  
history between us / All the feels,  
I reciprocated / thinking there was  
history to *make* between us...

**INT. MIA'S APARTMENT - AFTERNOON**

Mia's hands stroke the saxophone, like she's in a private concert. We can see Taye, but she can't. He's enamored. He bearhugs her from behind.

MIA (V.O.)

My saxophone blares between stares  
/ Sultry... rooted... nostalgic /  
Squealing like a Muddy Waters,  
Arkansas gut / But you're not a  
razorback, I raise in fact...

Taye reads from his notebook as his right hand bounces to the groove. Mia sits, her turn to swoon.

*Now, something about Taye's voice rises to match Mia's subtle urgency.*

TAYE (V.O.)

You asked what I liked about you /  
And I was trapped between internal  
and external /

Taye's head rises from his journal, with a "let's see if you can do better," smile. She smiles back with a playful eye roll, before she reads from her journal.

TAYE (V.O.)

*Baby it was ya Face / that sweet  
countenance / only the genesis For  
the Cool In You / the pool of grace  
and ghetto / I was Fortunate to  
swim to the Maxwell through.*

As her lines come to an end, she locks eyes with Taye... exuding the sort of pressure that cuts diamonds.

**INT. MIA'S APARTMENT - LATER - EVENING**

Taye and Mia sit on the couch, in each other's arms, staring at their vision board of poetry and photos. Easily, exhausted, but elated.

MIA (V.O.)

Your aura is so Houston /  
Confidence, just the beginning /  
Your temple fade is Fifth Ward  
fresh / Unblemished line-ups / 180  
degrees sharply eclipsing / at 90-  
degree angles around your black and  
wavy slopes / I imagined my fingers  
would ski down.

Taye has drifted to sleep, as Mia cleans her saxophone. Just for a beat, Mia stops and runs her hands through Taye's hair.

Then we see Mia's phone light up.

SUPERIMPOSE: Call from Stepmother

She picks up the phone. Her residual smile, ever so slowly, fading, now shriveling into panic. Off her lips, escapes a series of, "Whats?!"...

**INT. HOSPICE - NIGHT**

Mia's stepmother wraps her arms, ever so slowly around Mia. The type of sorrowful affection that emanates of long roads ahead.

MIA (V.O.)

I marvel at your *Marvin* to my *Tammi*  
/ already *Building My World Around*  
You / I could tell you were *Sweet*  
*Thang* / my deepest *Chaka Khan*  
played for you.

Mia looks hopefully at her stepmother, then at the DOCTOR. Her stepmother's eyes have weeped and reddened. The doctor braces, and begins pointing at his heart.

MIA (V.O.)

I'm a bit old fashioned / and  
you're God's proof, sent before  
hand / that at the very least / you  
were a soulmate / at your most...  
Godly / God knows I probably /  
needed secure arms during insecure  
times / when music wasn't *medicine*  
*for melancholy...*

**INT. HOSPICE - ROOM - NIGHT**

A sterile, still, and dim-lit space. Mia creeps in uncertain, with gaping eyes. A long, thick blue tube leads from, what seems to be a support system, and feeds into the sick stranger.

Closer to the bed, Mia follows the blue tube to a greying gentleman, with a familiar brown endowed richness. It's her father: DAVID WINSTON (57). Barely alive. She kisses him on the cheek and takes his hand into hers.

*We hear Mia inhale, and exhale carefully. Her words begin to tremble out like...*

MIA (V.O.)

It had been a while since I met a  
superhero / Beyond the chivalry of  
a cape / he tucked me in, read me  
stories, and taught me Nina Simone/  
Taught this dark girl how to glow /  
Taught me old school / How to line  
step through the *Maze* of life /  
just *Before I Let Go*.

**INT. HOSPICE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT**

Taye scribbles in his notebook with a fury of mojo.

Mia ambles into the room, zombie like. That luscious joy we  
saw from her in the park, has been vacuumed from her spirit.

Taye doesn't notice her initially. She stares, until she  
mouths, "Taye". As Taye pops up, she falls into his arms.

*Not confident nor robust, Taye's pitch feels... bare.*

MIA (V.O.)

Your kisses... are old school / I'm  
too elated to manage *The*  
*Temptations* / The way you *Ain't Too*  
*Proud To*, bend and fold your lips  
into mine / I needed them always...

She quells just a notch, enough for us to see her wave Taye  
away. He rejects, but she insists. He picks up his journal,  
gently embraces her, and makes for the exit.

**INT. HOSPICE - LIVING ROOM - MORNING**

Sun rays stream through the blinds. Mia is still, sleep  
when...

Her father's body begins to convulse violently, until lights  
from the monitors are FLASHING through the room, like a fire  
drill. Mia awakes from a nap into a nightmare.

A trio of nurses file into the room. Monitors are being  
checked, vitals are being taken, while needles are being  
prepped. Just when a nurse pulls out a needle, one of them  
ushers Mia toward the door. She puts up a bit of fight, but  
eventually, she's on the outside. Her head leans against the  
door.

**INT. HOSPICE - LIVING ROOM - MORNING - LATER**

Mia's stepmother has her head buried in her hands. Mia is curled up into a ball.

TAYE (V.O.)

But there was a gulf... deepening,  
widening / between what you needed  
/ and *when* you needed it / a  
winding labyrinth, a fair distance  
/ from the eden we travelled... / I  
didn't understand / how to give you  
space / and be present all at  
once...

The doctor (from before) approaches with a worn mug. He looks them over for a beat, then shakes his head.

Stepmother's body buckles, while the pools overflow on Mia's countenance.

MIA (V.O.)

(slowly)

It's hard finding another cape like  
Superman's / Would they fly right  
or fly away?

Mia pulls out her phone and makes a call.

**INT. HOSPICE - ROOM - LATER**

Just still. Mia sits at the edge of the bed, while her Stepmother gives her late lover, her own kiss on the forehead.

Taye walks in. Mia runs into his arms, and we stay there a beat. Mia looks into Taye's eyes. She breaks.

TAYE (V.O.)

While I was busy running ahead, you  
were shrinking in place / I wasn't  
present enough for presence / never  
listening enough for lessons...

**INT. MIA'S APARTMENT - AFTERNOON**

DAYS LATER

Mia packs her sax into a box and pushes it into a nearby closet.

Mia sits on the couch morose, while the television watches her. Taye walks in front of Mia with flowers in his left hand, with his right hand concealed. She eyes the flowers, but doesn't move. Just as she takes them, Taye's right hand swims into her view, holding two tickets that read: **National African-American Museum of History & Culture**

Mia rises and dryly kisses Taye on the cheek and walks away, as the tickets sit on the couch.

**INT. MIA'S APARTMENT - AFTERNOON**

NEXT WEEK

Mia sits on the couch with her hands clasped over her eyes. As she removes them, we take in a row of organized and candlelit cupcakes. They spell: **Happy Anniversary**. Taye is beaming.

Taye sits and holds her hand as 1...2...3... he blows out his half of candles. Looking in Mia's direction her candles remain lit, face still. Taye limps away.

**EXT. DAVENPORT LOUNGE - AFTERNOON**

Taye writes in his journal, as his phone lights up.

SUPERIMPOSE: *Text Message: Mia Winston - Need you. Can you talk?*

Taye considers for a slight beat. He types: *Call you in 20?*

He waits as the bubbles toggle for a beat, but then disappear.

**INT. DAVENPORT LOUNGE - NIGHT**

Everything comes a to a halt.

TAYE

All poetry aside / and all truth to  
the center / I felt inferior. I  
wasn't spiritually connected enough  
to anchor your torn interior / But  
god I loved your scent / the sweet  
reminder of you left on my pillow /  
the way your hair curled from your  
mohawk / the way you made me work  
for the 1st kiss.

**INT. MIA'S APARTMENT - NIGHT**

Taye reads from his notebook like we've seen before. Mia more idle, than intrigued this time. When it looks like her turn to read... she just stares at him somberly, like plates are colliding and worlds are dividing.

As Taye sits on the couch, Mia's head props on his shoulder as we take in the vision board, that is more bare than the first time we saw it. No torn out words making verses, no museum, no happy photos of them, just the program from her father's funeral.

**INT. TAYE'S APARTMENT - AFTERNOON**

MONTH LATER

Piles of boxes. One box in particular stands out marked, *Mia*. Graduation photos and other things. Taye gradually pulls a T-shirt to his nose for a beat...

INTERCUT:

**INT. MIA'S APARTMENT - AFTERNOON**

Mia pulls a T-shirt away from her nose to fold it. Similar piles of boxes, have replaced that end table with the vinyl record player.

**EXT. HERMANN PARK - NIGHT**

A cool, but still Houston night. A row of park lamps illuminate this trail we're on. From the left, Taye approaches with a box in tow. From the right, Mia with the same.

MIA (V.O.)  
I'm 106& Park after Rap City in the  
Basement, years old / And I never  
thought I would find a *Rick*  
*James...* / for this millennial *Mary*  
*Jane*.

Mia and Taye meet right in the center. Each look like a breath of fresh air, on this starry summer night. A tinge of hope glimmers in Taye's eyes, while Mia's countenance shifts--re-wrestling with unchangeable events.

She hands Taye his box. He looks for a beat, but takes it... extending hers in return. She looks for the same beat, and gathers her box in hers.

Taye smiles and Mia nods, and we hold for a beat. The same way they came, is the same way they turn and walk away.

The screen splits while, we follow Taye walking. Then, Mia walking. Taye slows up. Then Mia, slows up. They turn around, ever so gradually...

**INT. DAVENPORT LOUNGE - NIGHT**

STAGE

The screen remains split, as Mia's eyes methodically wander across her crowd. Taye casts his eyes at his audience, with a soft intensity wafting from him.

TAYE

Things will never be the same / But  
this is my 8th grade love letter to  
you / with my name, us as the  
subject / romance as the mood /  
with *Patrice Rushen* as the artist /  
Cause I'm sending you a *Forget Me*  
Not to forget me never.

MIA

At the end / I will be daring /  
with a box for yes / and a box for  
no / asking.../

Mia and Taye brace for a beat, before...

MIA/TAYE

Will I find love like you again?

We hold for a moment... and we hear a swell of finger snaps and hand claps until we...

FADE TO BLACK.