



JOSHUA TREE (PART 2)

DEATH GIVES LOVE ITS MEANING

an offering for you

why this book or this story...

Pema Chödrön wrote a book called *How We Live Is How We Die*. The book was written in response to our fear of death, inviting us to consider the daily intentions, or lack thereof, that inform our relationship to death.

And when we, as Black folk, think about our relationship to death, we often move toward fear. That is a fair response. So much of our understanding of life and death is intermingled with white supremacist desires to control, contain, and consume us.

The work of this book and this story is much like the actions our ancestors took at Ibo Landing. Some might call it a mass suicide; others, with a different type of memory and mojo, have recognized that our ancestors understood the state-sanctioned violence awaiting them and instead chose to walk hand in hand into the waters. While “mass suicide” may be the most relevant language we have for it, I am not highlighting the manner in which they exercised agency in their deaths, but the fact of it. They chose to die with dignity, and reverence for life informed their death. This honoring of death, especially for the countless others who were not protected or honored, serves as the mortar of this project. Black people are deserving of good deaths, and it starts with a remembrance of the love of our people and our ways of being.

This book and this story seek to evoke that memory. They invite us to imagine death with dignity. They invite us to move beyond the belief that we have to die to the sacred understanding that we get to die. They invite us to reclaim our bodies and our experiences while we are living, so that we may embrace, as with birth, the beautiful, sacred process of transcending from one portal to the next—what we call death. This book is a story of love that is deeply informed by death.

This book, for us anyway, can be a first step in imagining Black death as beautiful. As challenging as that may feel in our bodies, the more we embrace these imaginations, the more we create art from this center, the more we know that life will imitate it. So to these beginnings, we say ayibobo; we say ase.







some context

On August 4, 2024, I spent my first birthday alone. Instead of being with family, I went to the studio to record an EP that came from my heart and my solitude. What unfolded in the months that followed was life-altering, and it all began with that choice to turn inward. Exactly one month later, I attended death doula training to study under the tutelage of Alua Arthur and received the inspiration for the context behind a song I had started on my birthday, Joshua Tree, Part II. I then invited Lalin St. Juste to join me on the song, to sit across from me, stare into each other's eyes, daring to transcend space and time as we knew it. This book traces that journey. May it be as much a blessing and as life-altering a medicine for you as it was for us. Thank you for the ways in which you, the reader, have contributed to this story.

the text (a transcription)

(from Tiffani to Lalin)

Let me know how this track lands with you.

This is a real real rough with some of the harmonies that I wanted on the back of it.

They're gonna be buried in the track for the first half of it and then the second half they'll be pretty dominant...but what has come to me and what I wanna do, um, first half... so that the ideas.. there are these lovers and you kind of walk through their relationship from them first meeting to them falling in love, and they're queer so you know that's the first day (laughs)...um, all the way till death. So the first half is kind of the living part of their relationship and the second half of the song and you'll hear that sudden shift, um, is a really beautiful burial, um, where one partner is burying the other so you go from the sexy to the sacred, um, and I'm hearing the first half a conversation between the two and then the second half the partner, um, kind of reading them burial rights. So I was wondering one, how it lands with you and then if it resonates, we can talk more, but totally understand if it doesn't; let me know.

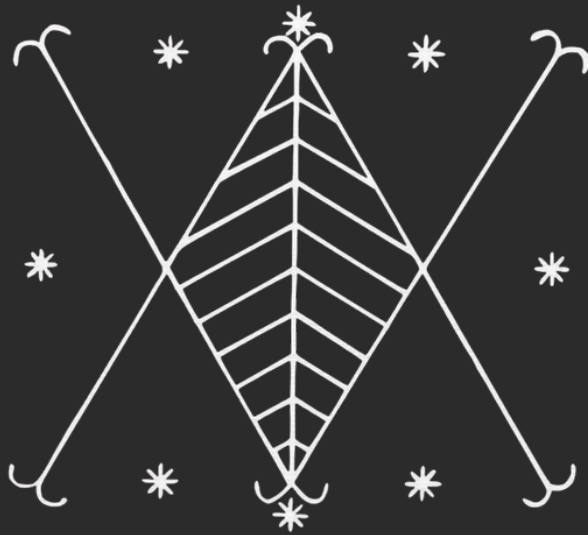
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10/29/24

Redtone Records - Approximately 7:30p

*what if all of life came with the intensity of recording a
passionate song, dancing with love and death, while
face to face with another human being beneath a single
red bulb.*





Lalin to Tiffani (10/30/24) 7:17a: Last night feels like a dream

Tiffani to Lalin (10/30/24) 7:18a: Yes. Present Tense. (Tiffani then sends Lalin a recording of herself that she sent to Tiffani weeks before about dreams:

“to dream is to heal; to dream is to have vision; to dream is to have insight; to dream is to open up yourself to the dimensions that we are truly present to and so I've had to sit and ask myself why are there times I allow myself to be distant, to be disconnected...”





getting hidden temple involved

From Tiffani to Hidden Temple (4/2/25): We really want this to be beautiful, intentional work, and we know [what we can afford] may not fully reflect the level of artistry ya'll bring. If it's not a fit budget-wise, we completely understand and can explore other options; but please know, you're our first choice.

This piece is being created as a free offering, something we hope will shift perspectives and open hearts across the country. It's meant to invite people, especially those who look like us, into new ways of thinking about life and death. Too often, we're denied the space to reflect on these sacred transitions, and this story is meant to change that. I want it to be used as a powerful educational tool, something life-affirming and transformative.

Because this vision is coming from my own funds, I'm not able to stretch the budget beyond [what I offered]. But I truly want this project to be stunning and life-altering and I'd love for ya'll to be the one to help make that happen. Let me know what you think, and thank you again for your time and care...

Kellen to Tiffani (4/2/25): Hi Tiffani, Thank you for your message. I hear you on the budget and really admire the passion you bring to this project. I also appreciate you considering us as your first choice for production.

I understand that this project is supported by your own funds, and we're happy to take it on for [what you can give]...



getting Alua involved

Tiffani to Alua (3/19/25): Alua (Darlin),

How are you? Can we talk after you listen to this **song** and read the attached treatment? This is the project I was mentioning in Portland.

Alua to Tiffani (3/21/25): hi sweetness! its so beautiful. and yes lets talk!

Tiffani to Alua (5/7/25) regarding filming: ok awesome. Can we lock you in for the 14th?

Alua to Tiffani (5/15/25): hi yes lets do it!

FILMING IN JOSHUA TREE

On May 28th, 2025, Tiffani and Lalin flew to Palm Springs to film part of the video. Breonna Carter joined the film crew for three days. They experienced the heat and stunning beauty of the area known as Death Valley. They deemed it an incredibly appropriate place to film, and while there they witnessed snakes, coyotes, spaceships, and the stunning beauty of the stars.



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filming with hidden temple

June 14th and 16th, 2025, BlaQyard, Oakland, CA



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death gives love its meaning

A love so intense that staring into each other's eyes for six minutes feels like a lifetime.

Several weeks after recording Joshua Tree, Tiffani Marie and Lalin St. Juste became part of the very story they set out to create. With intention, they became their dreams; worlds they prayed for took shape. For Tiffani and Lalin, that night recalled a love that felt ancient, a love that preceded them. They were reminded of each other's heartbeats and invited to see the greatest parts of themselves reflected back. Through the making of the song and the film that centered death, Tiffani and Lalin became partners with a newfound understanding of love.

To this day, their love stands as a testament to the power of death, to what happens when we surrender to the beautiful, sacred darkness of the unknown. To this relationship, this awareness, these remembrances, we say ayibobo and ase.

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THE 1ST MARIE-ST. JUSTE WEDDING, MT. SHASTA - 10/11/25

ritual and remembrance

OCTOBER 29TH - NOVEMBER 11TH



After the recording, we were called into a portal, so to speak, into dimensions adjacent to the ones we resided within. In this third space, we remembered each other and a love that only the ancestors and other spiritual forces could evoke. We remembered the power of death as a sacred portal to the unknown, to the greatest space of possibility. We embraced the fear, surrendering beyond the whys toward the why-nots. Together, we gave our unwavering yes to each other, to the calling of our ancestors, to the knowing that as powerful as our love became, as present as we were in each other's lives, the power of what we felt in that moment would one day come to an end. It will one day metabolize into grief, a different form of love. From this center, we now dedicate, annually, our prayers and sacred utterances to The Days of Reverent Love, to honor the energies, beliefs, and courageous practices that undergird our story and affirm what our art had been teaching us all along: impermanence teaches us about love.

Death gives love its meaning. The promise of impermanence invites us to live more intentionally and presently. Through love experienced deeply and with intention, we transcend the fear of dying and embrace the stunning possibility of earning our death, that we get to die. In bearing witness to the inextricable ties between endings and life, we learned better how to define love, understand love, receive love, and give love. These days are a ritual container for that wisdom: a reminder that six minutes can hold a lifetime when we meet each other with intention and courage. In this time, we honor our ancestors, named and unnamed, whose deaths made our remembrances possible, and we invite the kinds of love and lovemaking that will shape new possibilities for how to live and how to love when we die.

These are the tenets of our Days of Reverent Love:

solitude • prayer • intention • vulnerability • ritual/practice • courage • celebration

Across these fourteen days, we practice sacred witnessing and dreamwork; we call our people by name. We light candles and pour water for those who have died, visit places of remembrance, and offer gratitude through various mediums. We treat the body as prayer and surrender to the intensity of life with deep reflection. We seek sacred connection, even reaching out to those we long to know, and we conjure belonging by bridging sacredness and parts of ourselves that beckon reunion. We close in song, giving thanks for love that outlives us. May these days be a blessing and life-altering medicine. May they call us to lean in, to embrace, and to reclaim our lives (and deaths) with intention, in reverence.

- Lalin & Tiffani

