

**Arianne Benford**

**Q Train Afro-Punk Girl**

And Lord can you pluck it. Curve of Stravinsky  
and Mahalia. Curve of Rosewood and the in  
betweens of Mingus. Post Hip-Hop. They will call  
you exotic. Throw you in everything- the pulse and  
flavor of the time. Call you special. Tout you as  
yet another example of a racially equating society.  
Treat a Black girl fifty something years after the  
Civil Rights Act, treat you like a credit to your race.  
Cause you play the king's music. Cause some Negro  
finally got it right. Again.

What a Black girl does. Constantly remind herself  
of the sound of her own name. What a Black girl  
does. A ripple edging a fire across unturned  
page. Dark matter seeping through the backside.  
What a Black girl does. Always be more than

this.

Find the first tune. Find it true. Find it still down  
where you first heard the cry. Find that wholeness.  
Bend with raspy voice.  
Strum key. Make blues.

## Carson & the Paso

Mark Carson, 32, a gay black man, was stalked & murdered by Elliot Morales in New York's historic West Village on May 19, 2013. Morales was convicted of murder in 2016.

Paso Doble is a dramatic dance with sharp footwork and beautiful body shapes. It's based on the bull fight where the man represents the matador, and his partner the flowing cape.

The high that May Saturday was a welcomed sixty-five  
Winter had been an extended refrain  
on New York's West Side  
Like the end of love, fingers clutched and holding on  
For months winter just dragged  
And dragged  
The chill's aftermath was still trapped in Carson's bones

Bare legged in jubilation of spring's dawn  
Of insecurity's sabotage, an unsuspecting pawn  
Carson walked easy that evening, without noted fear  
Masculine with sashay  
It had to be his way  
That focused Morales' jeers.

In fitted tank top, cut offs, boots, the papers don't tell you  
How ripe Carson's legs looked in shorts, ample view  
Of plump and rise his rounded ass,  
The fit, the gait of broad calf  
West Village gender ninja  
Taunt avenger  
Stepping to West 8th and 6th Ave.

Drowning in the well of his own desire, Morales followed.  
Stalking, screaming faggot after this high priest of Apollo  
On hallowed ground of leather men, bears and twink  
Round native trails, cross ol' Greenwich lane  
Morales came  
Hunting sass with silver revolver and enraged with drink

Here was the most Carson knew of safe  
Rainbow flags draped over its Stonewall's and fire escapes  
On this Montgomery Bus of turf he needed no camouflage

Just another pretty boy walking about  
On a night out  
Shooting the shit with his entourage

But Morales' voices were too many,  
Carson's confidence was too clear  
Even here in the storied home of Sylvia Rivera  
and rioting queers  
"Look at these faggots" Morales just had to intercede.  
The proud black man stopped. Turned toe in place  
Now, nose to nose with the brown man, face to face  
"What are you two? gay wrestlers?"  
Morales continued to proceed  
Cause those thick thighs shouldn't make him rise  
Those thick thighs shouldn't talk smart and incise  
Shouldn't say "FUCK YOU" you and strut away  
Elicit "hey girl" eyes  
And "ooh child" cries  
Carson couldn't be contained,  
his pride too real and on display

For those who may blame Carson for shouting back  
For sizing up Morales and talking smack  
How do you dance with a mad man?  
Do you follow his, or do you take that lead,  
Watch his every move, take heed?  
Let'm hold tight, to your waist put angry hands?

You let him rule you? Run you round the dance floor  
Hurling swears and threats, to core your core?  
Do you cow-tow to the dreaded demon  
and his silver side kick?  
Or do you with grace and speed  
Of frightened gazelle that truly sees  
Down the street bolt with your love? Quick!

And when the madman follows, takes hand, bends your wrist,  
Do you tell him then awkward angel, of all this?  
That you are not his to crack open and suck the martyr from  
And when he laughs insidiously,  
and still blows open your cheek  
To keep you quiet, to make you meek

And coats himself in the perceived righteous extinguishing  
of your sun

Morales would later brag to the arresting officer  
“That its the last thing [Carson] would remember,  
diagnosis is dead doctor”  
Touht that he shot Carson cause he was acting like he  
“thought he was tough in front of his bitch”  
Show no remorse over months and months of court dates  
Plead insanity to ease his fate  
“I don’t have a problem with gay people,” he’d even pitch.

But, HERE was the most Carson knew of safe  
Rainbow flags draped over its Stonewall’s and fire escapes  
On this Montgomery Bus of turf he should’ve  
Needed no camouflage  
Just another pretty boy walking about  
On a night out  
Shooting the shit with his entourage.

## Turn Off The Lights

Theodore DeReese “Teddy” Pendergrass  
(March 26, 1950 – January 13, 2010)

For: Melvin, Jerone, Amber, and the Ackies

We use to sing yo shit at the top of the lungs.  
After church on Sunday. Herb Kent, Chitown’s  
The Kool Gent would have you backed-up-against-  
backed-up-against-backed-up-against another  
Philly/Motown sound. Another black MAN  
wrapped in sex and right on.

Voices drawn like fists in a title fight. Imagine  
pelvises thrusting, swiveling as wooden spoons  
in a dense Black woman stew. If You Don’t Know  
Me By Now, crooning through the back speakers  
and me wondering when I would know the kind  
of love that made my bones ache the way  
your tone did.

Maybe it’s because we are born on the same day.  
Always would come a point in the evening  
when somebody trying to be cool would throw  
on a dusty. And either You or Marvin or Barry  
would come running baritone down our still  
soft bones, our still open, sweat soaked spines.

We’d be gettin grown to you Teddy. Our hips  
grinding like pestles underneath the Christmas  
tree lights snaking basement pipes. We, we  
understood the sticky thick thick of throbbing  
8th grade thighs in dank dark club basements  
basements turned clubs, when House Parties  
were still so notorious that their movies came in  
three parts. With rap star movie star upstarts  
that had their own dances.

We thought we were grown then.  
Did what our parents did.

We thought we were the shit then.

Based my image of what it means  
to be a man off of your sexy and  
your sweet and your real.  
Did this, cause you swooned my Mama.