

PREFACE

“Shall we begin like David Copperfield? ‘I am born. I grew up.... Or shall we begin when I was born into darkness, as I call it? That’s really where we should start, don’t you think?’”

– Louis, Interview with a Vampire

I first heard the aforementioned quote as a 17-year-old boy sitting in a movie theater in my hometown of Newark, New Jersey, oblivious to the impact those words (and that film) would have on the rest of my life. The film exposed me to relationships in a manner of which I was unaccustomed and showed me how love, lust, partnership, and sexuality can be covert and silent, which

were important as a Black gay youth living in the inner city. As I began the journey into writing and sharing this chapter of my life, the quote haunted me like the ghost of lifetimes past. I had many ideas, I had multiple thoughts, but I could not get anything on paper until I remembered that quote, exactly and entirely. Once I accurately and precisely reiterated the quote, I immediately became inspired and the writing process began.

I certainly do not maintain the belief the chapter of my life I share in this writing is about me being “born into darkness”, so much as it is about me stepping into the light; although, there were certainly aspects in that period of my life that were less than vibrant. The portion of my journey upon which you are about to embark is brief, covering only a few short and particularly potent years and events in my adult development. The portions I share in these pages were some of the most pivotal moments in my entire history, what I now refer to as the timeframe in which I came to life and made the decision to start living.

The idea for this book was birthed in my head over one full year before I ever wrote a single word. When I finally began writing the book, I was in the midst of re-reading Homer’s *The Illiad* and *The Odyssey*. The books inspired me to begin to write my words. I realized much like Odysseus, the time I explore in this book was a fantastic journey that would lead me *home*. However, *home* was not physical or tangible, it was inside of me. I needed to find my place of inner comfort, my safe space, my self-love, and my self-respect. Like Odysseus, I had some pretty fantastic adventures along the way. Events that seemed random, but were all interconnected, much like the trails Odysseus was tasked to complete. With each task surmounted, I got closer to home, closer to my goal. Reflecting on how each task, each event, was

dependent on what came before it and how all eventually aligned still amazes me, just as the story of Odysseus still amazes me. I am not Homer. Nor do I care to be. However, I do revere his work and his style of storytelling. I do not attempt to emulate him, though I like to believe I make some writing decisions Homer would appreciate.

An additional and unexpected inspiration for this writing was the book by Trevor Noah, *Born a Crime*. Although this book was already completely written by the time I read his work, I did enjoy some of his style choices. I was compelled, after reading his book, to re-edit my book and enrich the presentation of the information to add value to the manner in which the story is told. Thank you, Mr. Noah.

The main reason I wanted to write this book is to tell a story I believe is too often muffled or unspoken altogether. In the LGBT+ world there are issues, due to lack of diversity, that silence the struggles of many people of color, in a faction of people still struggling to be recognized as equal citizens with the right to exist. This book is necessary because it shares the journey of a 30+ year old Black man confronting the hatred and bigotry bred into him and searching for the truth within himself. This book documents the troubles faced by a man who decided to sexually and socially liberate himself later in life. This book exposes the difficulty of cultural clash with the desires of the heart and the search for that truth.

The purpose of this book is to give a voice to the silent, to be a beacon where there is darkness. The portion of my life shared in this book is necessary so it does not have to be the story of anyone else. Visibility creates an unspoken bond between people. When

someone can see her/himself in your story and see you achieve, it makes her/him believe and strive to achieve similarly.

So many people in the demographics I fit into during the time when the stories in this book took place, much like me, did not have anyone to look to as a mentor or guide. While I am certainly not attempting to mentor all Black gays struggling to navigate life, I do hope to help those who find my words know it is possible to reconcile the Black identity, the male identity, and the gay identity, no matter what stage of life. Most often when coming out stories are told they are from the perspective of very young, White, males. While 30+ is still relatively young, there are few Black voices in LGBT+ writing sharing stories about coming out beyond typical high school or college age. Ultimately, I wanted to stand up and allow myself to show other people who felt as I felt, who shared similar desires, those reconciliations and the coming out process can be completed — and that ideal, I believe, crosses racial, sex, gender, social, and cultural boundaries. We all want to live a life we feel is authentic and unrestrained.

For years I lived what seemed like a very full life. Meanwhile I was dying inside. I felt imprisoned by my own fear and the status-quo. I allowed myself to believe I would never be able to live and love out loud, because I was socially conditioned to believe I should not, could not, and would not. Therefore, while this story is about coming to terms with that knowledge, this story is also about overcoming social conventions and creating the life I most desired for myself. This story is about living in full unadulterated truth — unapologetically. This story is about not allowing fear to dictate the terms of your life. This story can be that of anyone, though I mostly wrote it for people like myself, who desperately want to know they are not alone and there is a place for them to

live in their full truth in this world. I found my place. Actually, I created my space. There is room for all of us to carve out a space where we can live freely and happily.

This book covers only a few impactful events from a specific block of my life, from 2008 through 2012. The work encompasses pivotal moments when I realized my problems and my potential, my impact and my responsibility, along with my reason for living. Attempting to summarize these events into digestible and interesting chunks was difficult. Yet, the events you read about here are those that most shaped my growth, maturity, and identity.

This book shares a deeply personal journey and provides insight into my introspection as a man living two lives I desperately wanted to meld into one. The 21st century has seen the lives of LGBT+ people take exponential leaps and bounds. Unfortunately, Black LGBT+ people, particularly males, are largely absent from these advances due to the masculine mystique of the Black man. The ethos that proclaims our masculinity is more virile and more precious than any other on earth, and the contradiction of the belief that to be gay means to lack the precious virility and masculinity.

For years I have been afraid of my responsibility to myself, to those I may inspire, and to the plethora of communities to which I feel obliged. Sharing the life events found in this book is part of the process of maintaining my accepted responsibility. I decided to share my story for many reasons, most importantly because I have a perspective many do not believe exists, and one with little to no exposure. I was brave enough to write my story down and share it with others, because I wanted to help people with my words and with my journey. It is important to me to help others however

possible. My hope in writing this book is that my story strikes an inspirational chord in the readers. My story is for the people out there seeking validation, battling loneliness, and seeking inner truth.

While this book centers on my process of coming to terms with my sexual orientation, the real journey is the exploration of and toward the truth — my own and hopefully yours. I believe the search for the truth in life is a universal journey. Therefore, this story is for everyone, regardless of your orientation, but it is written especially for all the fearful LGBT+ people in the world who feel alienated, marginalized, oppressed, and forgotten. You are not alone. I have been where you are, and I made it through. You can overcome. You must. Your story, just as mine, is important. Inspire with your resilience. Create your space in this world and live free.