# Six Poems

# Ian Williams

# Where are you really from

## 1.

In the guessing game, the white man gets many guesses. He may continue to guess even after the answer is revealed. Could you be loved, he is guessing, and be loved. If I answer correctly he wins. Say something. He is team captain and sole player and horse and foxhound and whistle and first person shooter to my birth. Say something. It's a complicated pursuit. Could you be, could you be, could you be loved?

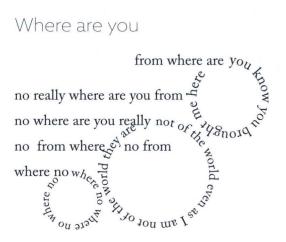
#### 2.

While a white man waits for me to answer he is searching his inner Wikipedia for a fact or a current event about the island or continent I am. Carnival, genocide, pirates, cruise lines, a woman he used to work with, blood diamonds on the soles of her shoes, a-wa a-wa. The list could be longer. He knows a lot about where I am from whether I am from there or not. 3.

I played tennis with a white man who would play my balls when they landed beyond the baseline and my faults as well as proof. There's a long wake across the ocean. Proof of. I don't know anybody who's actually still racist. I don't know why we're even talking about it. Because of you, I wanted to say while waiting to receive. I'm totally team postracial. He meant nothing by that which is not to say he meant well.

#### 4.

Post that, at a church potluck I intervened for a friend: He's not going to tell you that, man. And the white man looked at me as if I were his phone and had lost reception. He explained a genocide to a Filipino woman. And my friend with the French name from an African country, who was born post conflict and had never been a child soldier, said—Next time I'll just say my name is George, George, George of the jungle. The Congo is so close anyway.



### Tu me manques

is how the French miss. Backward. Like car wheels in commercials. You me miss. Every possible word in the wrong place. There are only three.

I had a farm in Africa, no just a friend on the French-Swiss border who argued the English *I miss you* didn't make any sense. Had? How could you meaning me miss you meaning him. Easy. You he explained miss me because we are not together. Who's missing? I wanted to know. You are. You are gone somewhere from me. *La lune*. I cannot be missing from myself. Ever. You are missing from me and here he clamped a love handle and that causes me great how do you say *l'angoisse*.

We are apart now we never met actually we Skyped our whole drosophiliac friendship together. He made a joke once when I asked for details (he had a postdoc on breast cancer proteins) that he was in charge of terminating the rats. By guillotine. That was the joke. Then he spoke very quickly the real way—an injection I think. How faint the tune. I could never tell how tall he was or ask correctly how high the moon.

As long as we're longing I had a farm in Africa, no just another friend on the border of Rwanda and the Congo who said *I miss you* for *tu me manques* was a perfect and incorrect translation. Just trust me. Everything makes sense until you have to explain it. Have? You don't say *tu m'aimes* for *I love you*. Correct. That is very true but *surtout* because I don't love you. See the stars How they shine for you. Wait, wait, wait. Not you, not your words, not your feeling. Why does everything have to be about race with you people?

Leave yourself

behind for a minute in this poem you are reading a poem and (I hate poems like this but) in that poem a man has left a note you have read that poem before you were supposed to be shocked by its audacity but you were nineteen and more strike struck stricken by the cost of the anthology than by that poem (stop saying poem)

now you are say sixty (sixty) and as you're downsizing you come across the anthology with that poem is called this is just to say (sixty) as I'm sure you've figured out by now and you are the type who cares more about the price of plums than plums themselves so do you keep the anthology or not (don't answer yet) you want to know what you wanted to know at nineteen why couldn't someone tell you straight up whether this poem is about more than plums or not is it just to say this is to say and or not you have lost your hair to grey and menopause that was irrelevant forgive me you are so sweet and so old

why should you

decide you will not forgive him for the note or the poem it's hard isn't it to parse who you are from who you ought to be to parse your creole from the queen hard isn't it to recognize yourself in that poem although he says *you* to the woman in that poem in this poem you know he does not mean you of course cannot even see you of course every poem (stop) every poem (stop) everything you have ever read has been addressed to someone beside you (stop) there you go there you people go again making everything about <del>yourself</del> yourselves or should it be you

# And Finished knowing-then-

I said we'd talk later—I wanted to dance with somebody—to feel the *heat* with somebody—I turned off the burner— The microwave beeped—Don't you wanna dance say you wanna dance don't you wanna dance— I said, We'll talk later—

then my inbox filled

with ears underwater. then I noticed all the shoes at my door were mine. then the slats of the bed came loose and I plunged into teeth. then all the onions turned black. then a loved one unloved me online. with somebody who—me. then the neighbour's unhooked landline stitched through the wall—

# Our eyes meet across yet another room

white	white	white	white	white	white
white	i	white	white	white	white
white	white	white	white	white	white
white	white	white	white	white	white
white	white	white	white	white	white
white	white	white	white	white	i