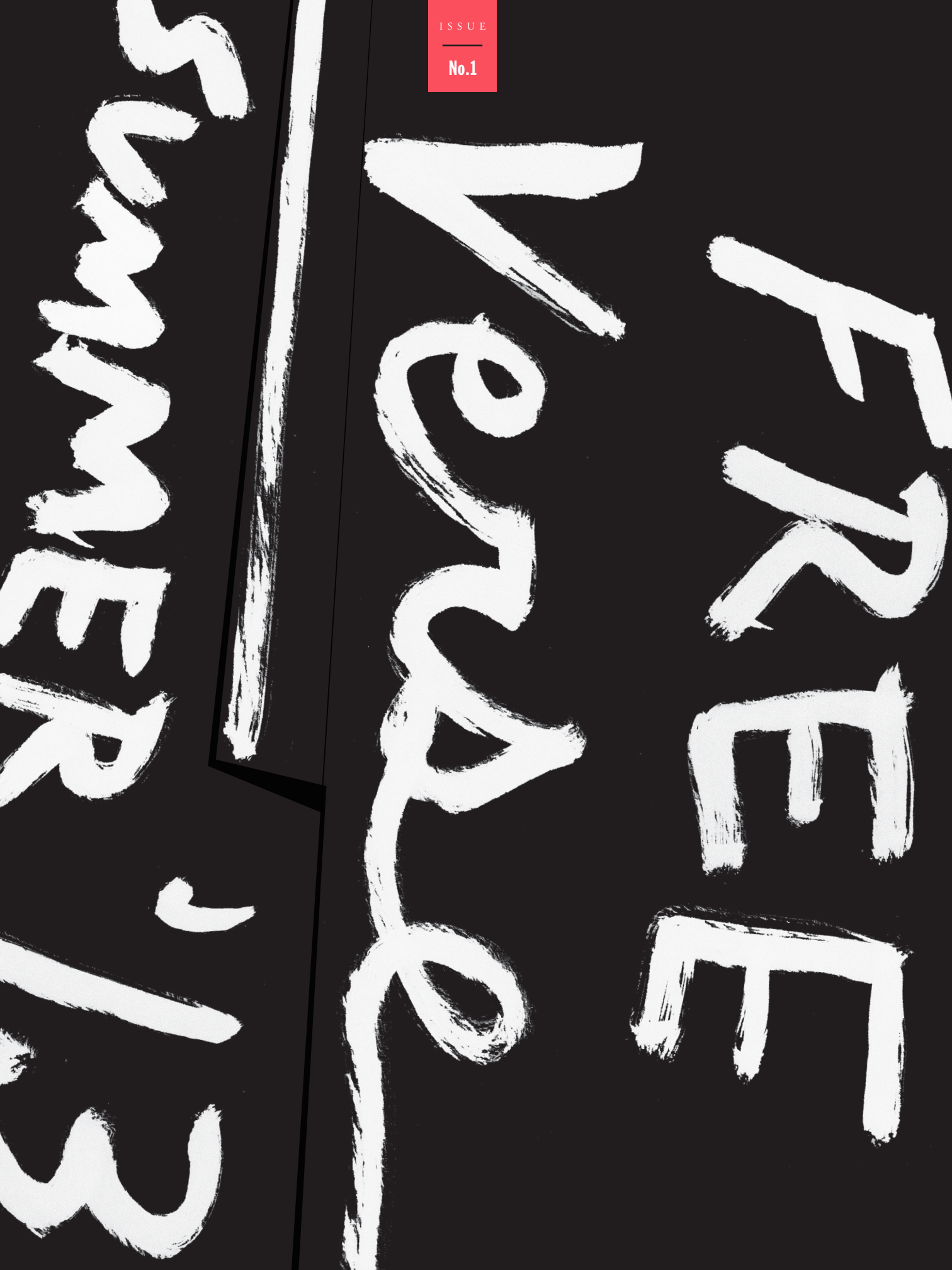


ISSUE

No.1





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**Free Verse is a journal of poetry, prose, and song that promotes turning waiting time into creative time. Headquartered in the heart of the waiting room of the new South Bronx NeOn – where probation clients check-in with their probation officers – Free Verse solicits new writing created while people wait.**

**Our editorial staff is a mix of probation clients and community members, employed to serve as writing apprentices – right in the waiting room. Together we take loose lines from dusty pockets, stories left in the back of closets and acrobatic lyrics written on cell phones, lunch bags, pay stubs, and napkins, and we polish and tune them until they sing.**

**The poems for the first issue of Free Verse were selected from more than 376 submissions and feature a selection of work by probation clients, officers, staff, security guards, friends, family and professional writers, all who wrote in the space.**

DAVE JOHNSON  
Editor-In-Chief  
Poet-In-Residence

LONNI TANNER  
Managing Editor

**WHY PUBLISH POEMS** by people on probation? It's a fair question; a lot of people not on probation have a hard time getting their stuff published, so why are we creating a forum for people who have "done wrong?"

I have two answers to that question. As Commissioner of the NYC Department of Probation (DOP), I can tell you that there's growing evidence showing that when people with a criminal record engage in the arts, they're less likely to commit another crime, which ultimately leads to improved public safety.

**Here, in the re-invented waiting room, everyone who walks through the doors is now encouraged – and we hope, inspired – to read and write. In place of filling out forms – out of the blue – people are asked to read poets such as Pablo Neruda, Audre Lorde, Bei Dao, and Quincy Troupe, and then to write their own poems and tales.**

**The writing is broadcast on TVs in the space and in service centers all over New York City. The space also hosts open mic events, speakers, counseling, musicians, and many types of classes.**

**Next feat: micro businesses will be popping up in the space. Tee shirts and posters bearing original poems will be made and sold.**

**A wave of change is directly coming from the waiting room and the goal of lifelong learning is being realized. Yes, we're in a waiting room. But don't just wait. Go! Do! Read on!**

**– The Editors**

But you don't need to know anything about criminology to understand that it isn't fair to write someone off on the basis of their worst act. As "Free Verse" proves, people on probation are more than the sum of their RAP sheets—they're parents and children and dreamers and skeptics and, yes, poets.

Thank you to everyone who contributed their voices to this project, including the Probation Officers, and DOP staff members whose poems are published alongside those of their clients. I would

also like to recognize the staff of "Free Verse" for the creation and vision of this amazing publication, and for bringing poetry to our South Bronx NeON.

As you'll see, Free Verse has been worth the wait.

**VINCENT SCHIRALDI**

## Go For It

Expect nothing.  
But when something  
comes your way,  
go.

JOHN TAYLOR

## Waiting

It seems like  
all I do is wait.

Wait for a sign,  
wait for a message,  
wait for someone,  
wait right here,  
wait over there.

All my life I've waited for something  
to show me  
a purpose,  
of why I'm here.

Who am I supposed to be?

At 47 years old, I am still waiting.

I look into the night sky  
for that magical moment,  
but it still doesn't come.

But I know  
with good people  
in good places,  
with patience,  
my time  
will come.  
My time  
will come.

My time has come.

KAREN WILLIAMS

## How I Came to Be

Mother was young and hard-headed.  
She didn't listen to her mother  
about the birds and bees.  
Father was slick,  
with more game than PlayStation.  
When they mixed and matched, they came up with me.

TAHARA LILLY

## I don't want to

hate myself  
For things I've done.  
I want to like my name.

SHADA GREEN

## Out of Place

Feeling really out  
of place.

In my mind there's no space.  
I know I don't belong  
here,  
but I admit, I deserve it.  
Instead of trying to take things back  
I embrace it.

You have to man up & face it.  
I was with the wrong crowd, wrong place,  
trying to be cool,  
but now it's all about money, all about school.

I'm not a thug.  
I'm a good kid who's learned how to stay out of danger,

messed up once, now suddenly, I'm a clichéd stereo-  
type.

Hey, you got the wrong idea, don't believe the hype.

I don't go around robbing or stealing.

I'm just like you living my

LIFE.

People,

don't be judgmental.

I'm just trying to find

my place.

LLOYD JONES

## The Haves and Have Nots

I have lived both lives  
but I'm drawn to the have nots.

I try to help everyone.

I swipe them through the turnstile.  
I'd give them my last dollar.

I have my job.

CHERYL BROWN

## Good Fortune

Doors open and close.  
You're going to open one and admire a good-looking guy.  
You will laugh because his face looks like a monster.  
But his life has been so beautiful, yes, it has.  
Watch out for the lovely lady you talk to everyday.  
She is nothing but a waste of time,  
a devil you don't want to taste.  
Focus on your own problems.  
Tighten your shoelace.

ABU TAHIRU

## Reborn

I am waiting to be reborn  
to live the life I want to live  
to be who I want to be  
to not have society judge me  
on what  
I've done, but on the things  
I'm doing now.  
I'm waiting to be defined,  
defined as a man, responsible for  
my actions,  
to be the master of my own plan.  
I'm ready to take charge  
not as another street kid  
on the corner, but as  
a symbol  
of what's  
possible.  
I am waiting for life—  
to live it, to cherish it, to be it—  
I'm ready to be reborn.

DEREK MCCLAIN

## You Did the Crime

You paid your time,  
But it's still a crime  
The way you confine me.

Why say sorry if it doesn't matter?

How about I show you I don't care.  
I'll walk out with my head high.

Your sky is not my limit.

AKISHA THOMAS

fly.

I will

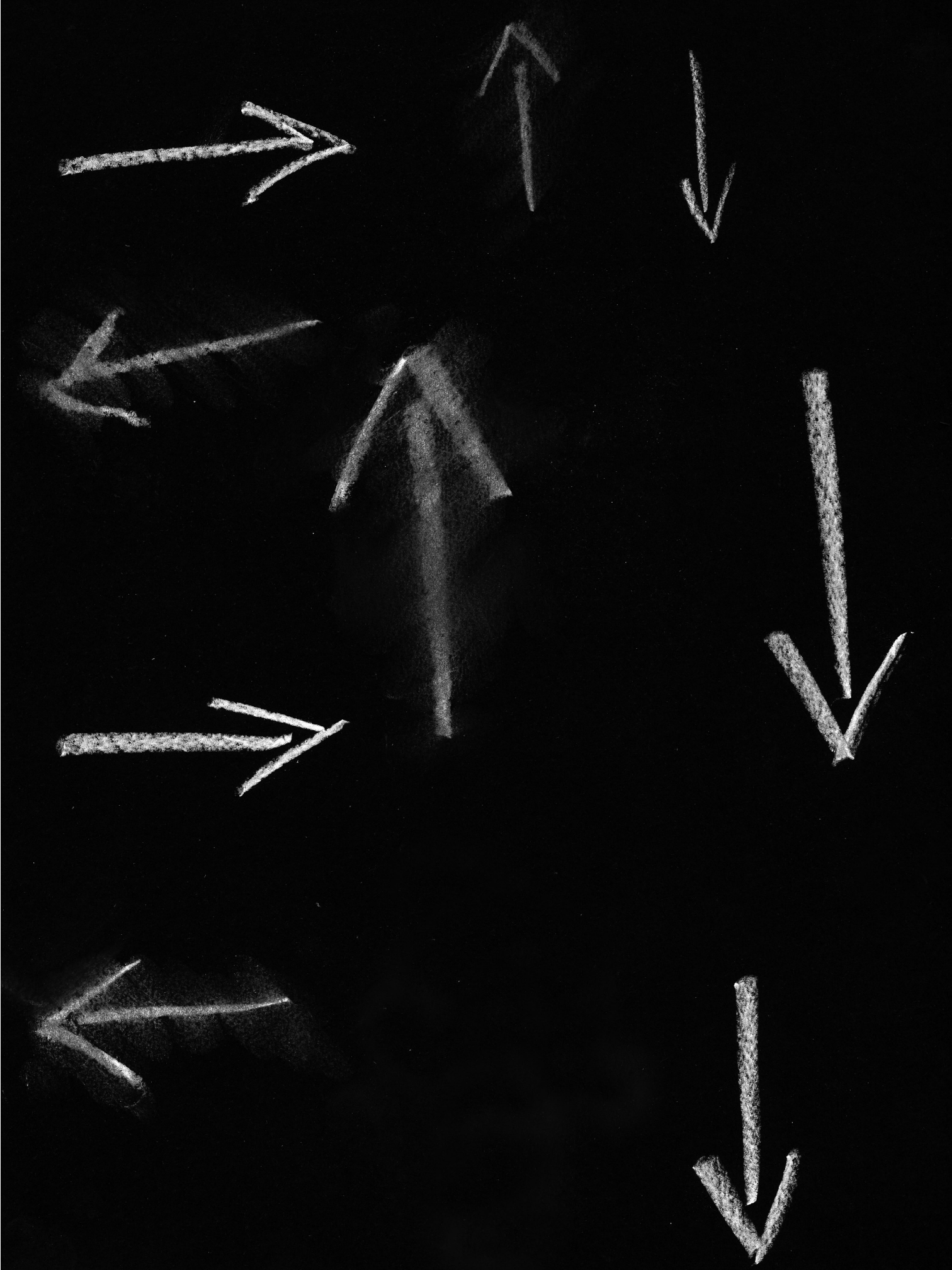
One day

See me.

good.

**I am** discovering

PAULINO SANTIAGO



## Such Sweet

aroma  
& flight,  
each nostril yearning  
for a moment when  
sweetness will drop  
it's toll  
on me. Ah,  
such sweet success.

JOHN TAYLOR

## Rap Calle

Soy de calle  
siempre conciente  
voy palante  
si nadie abuelito  
soy de Corazón  
todos los dias  
montando a un dia  
perezoso salgo a la avenida  
llegando a la vida  
el duro que la monta  
siempre excelente  
brilla más que el sol  
me siente una atracción fatal  
corro por la mia  
no por la tuya  
siempre estoy listo  
para el que esté  
fastidiando.

## Street Rap

I'm a street  
That always obliges  
I push forward  
With no grandfather behind me  
But I give heart  
Every single day  
No time to cruise  
Or go out lazy  
I stretch for life  
With a drive  
Always striving  
Brighter than any sun  
I have one fatal attraction  
I run to get mine  
And take nobody else's  
But I'm always on the ready,  
To pay with attention and cash in on the details.

AMBRIORI MEJIA

TRANSLATION BY DAVE JOHNSON



## When

I was 3 years old  
I got hit by a car  
at 5  
I got my first bicycle  
at 8  
I got my first Walkman  
at 11  
I got a surprise party for my birthday  
when I was 13  
I got into a fight with my best friend  
at 16  
I began to go through puberty  
at 18  
I had my first baby  
when I was 23  
I got in trouble with the law  
  
I remember my past  
I want you  
to remember my future

MIZELL QUAJATORIA

## To

my love my wife love  
of my life mother  
of my child the one  
I can't live  
without how I  
wish it was cold just  
to feel your warmth how I  
miss you because I don't have your touch.

A. C.

## Just

be real with me.

ANTHONY STARNES

## Bubble

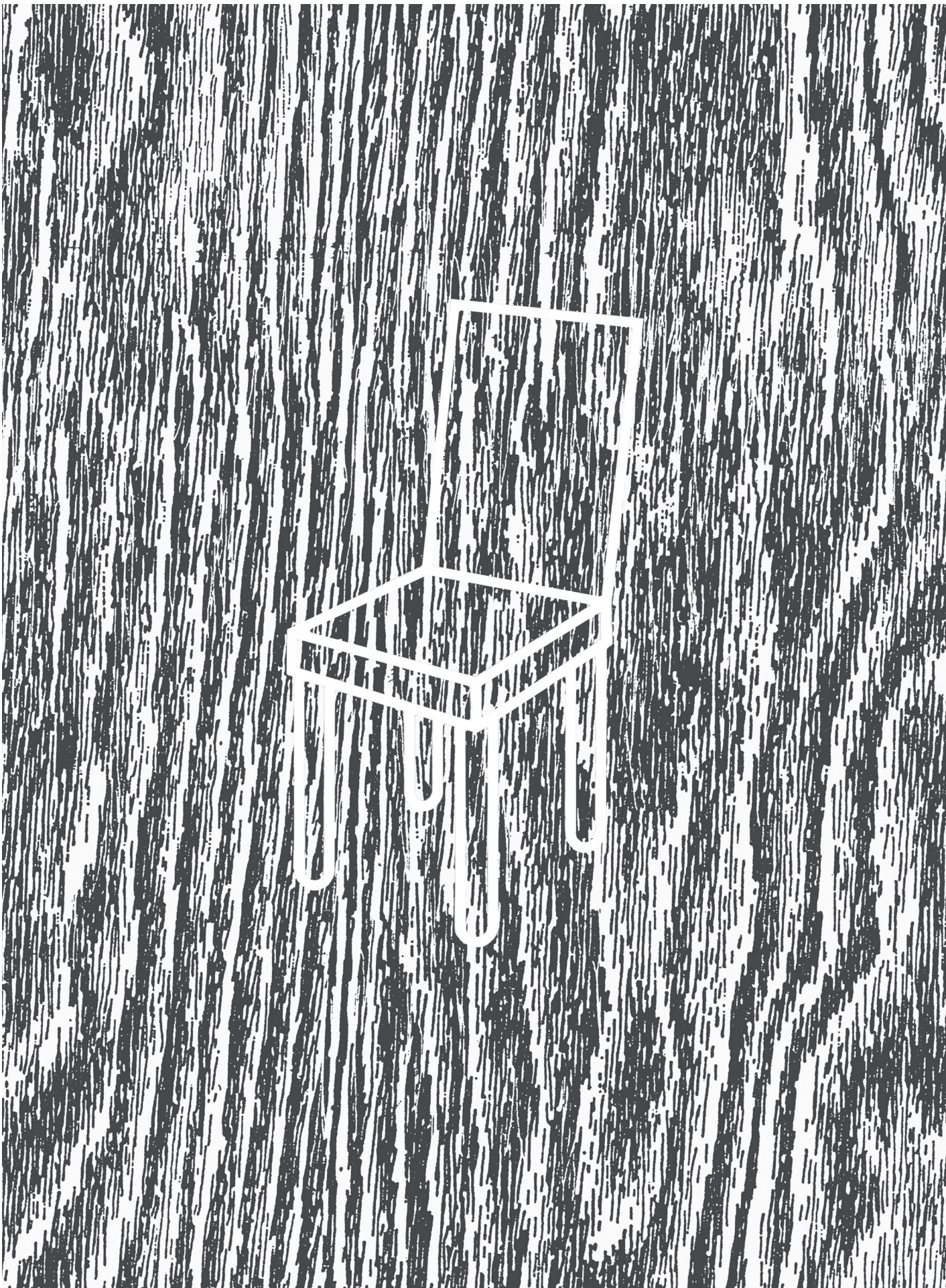
Every morning I wake in  
the bubble of life I sing,  
dance and move  
to the rhythm of  
*move that body,*  
*move that body,*  
*move that body,*  
yes, to the rhythm  
of life,  
*to the rhythm,*  
*to the rhythm,*  
*to the rhythm*  
of the bubble of life.

LOUISE WILLIAMS

## Probation gave me patience

and knowledge,  
opened doors  
to good  
helped me  
out of jail  
out of the life  
and out of the hood.

RAHEEM SMITH



## What Am I Waiting For ?

Oh, I don't know.

God's blessing from heaven?  
Someone to share my  
Happiness? My sorrows?

You asking me? What am I waiting for?

A new beginning?  
Perfection?  
Casting out all evil?

I know what I'm waiting for...  
A miracle.

*(thanks for asking)*

LYNETTE ACEVEDO

## Heavy Heart, Empty Soul

In a room full of people  
I sit alone wishing  
to breathe again.  
I stay above water  
and don't know how.

PAULA GARCIA

## The Waiting Room

Waiting for my PO,  
I'm in a rush,  
but have nowhere to go.  
Sitting for hours,  
while he's still at lunch,  
or brunch  
or maybe,  
dinner.  
While he gets fat,  
I get thinner.  
And I'm the breadwinner,  
not a sinner.  
It's like I need a priest  
to pray for my release.  
In here, I'm just a hat  
left on a rack.

CHERYL BROWN

## For Earl

Duppy followed me from  
Kingston to Morris Avenue.  
I swung at everything moving,  
finding peace in my fists.

YASMINE B. LANCASTER

## Cycle

In my hometown I'm the only pig who runs with chickens.  
Birds rent apartments to roaches.  
Rats hang out in lobbies looking for snakes.  
Snakes rob kids for their ice cream.  
The ice cream falls and the dogs lick it up.  
People kick the dogs for beating them to the punch.

TAHARA LILLY

## Late in the early morning

in my neighborhood,  
I'm the only lady singing  
with birds.  
We make our own music.  
We eat breakfast.  
I feed them potato chips, soda,  
franks and beans.  
They take a bath in a sink full of dishes  
jump into late afternoon,  
and fly south,  
all fresh and clean.

TAHARA LILLY

## The Lady With One Leg

A story. A lady raises  
20 kids and is still standing, not  
on her own, but on the love she  
gives others.

TAHARA LILLY

## Nobody Wins

You sneer and mock my movement, myself, and me.  
I still hope that in the morning you knock  
We are different, miserable one  
Misery we made, we brought out anger  
All of them looked in worried, they could see  
Bad behavior, neither of us to like

I tried, I tried: me you just didn't like  
Anxieties, shakes but when you held me  
Everything would be okay you see  
High on my happiness down you would knock  
Brutal, cruel, unforgivable anger  
Why so mean when I was your love, your one

Calm down baby, deep breaths in, three, two, one  
Simple terms ashamed use poetry like  
Metaphors never used to describe anger  
Similes to heighten feelings in me  
Victim you say, I scream, I'm no hard knock  
I pulled you open until I could see

A relationship like ours was a see  
Saw of self-esteem

You work with your hands and your hands worked me.

GABRIEL DON

## Ice

The old man scrapes piraguas  
What flavor should I choose?  
Cherry, coco, lemon?

NAPOLEON FELIPE

## Leather Strap

Vulture Town's sheriff uses lamp oil  
to shave his neck.  
He prefers the oil hot and spread on  
with a paint brush.  
The smell is strong and harsh  
like raccoon and turtle dung.  
The town has no livestock,  
no bodega, and no dry cleaners.  
Everything is dusty and the women  
are tough as the leather strap on  
the barber's chair.

NOEL CUADRADO

## Vulture Town

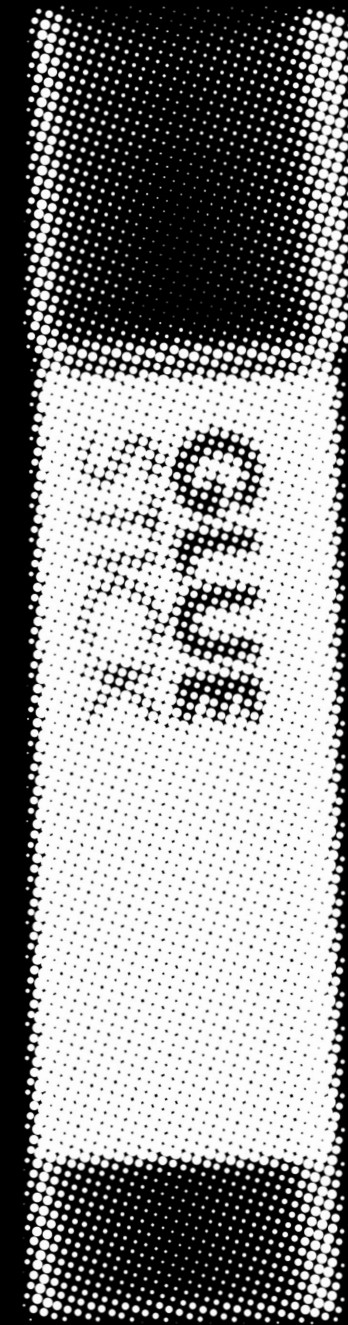
Here outlaws polish their bullets on blacksmith's  
grinding wheels.  
The dust on the jail cell floor sticks to my face like  
sugar on a powdered doughnut.  
This town's saloon serves rice and beans and  
chopped steak.  
The women in this town bury their men high on a  
hill where vultures are drunks.  
The town's deputy is twelve years old and she's a  
gun-toting rebel without a cause.  
In this town I wear my gator boots with gold spurs  
and a matching holster.

NOEL CUADRADO

## Poverty

yesterday I stole some candy from the boys  
who make uniforms from M&M's which  
we never get at the soup kitchen or apple  
pie or barbecue see that scar that never got  
fixed by that quack on 145th who said I  
should think of taking my foot off like it's  
a damn coat or something my mother was  
a sleeping bag my sister was a sleeping bag  
too three maybe four times I got stabbed  
by Popeye who sneaks me fried chicken  
being that we go way back to when we  
rode the streets on brooms doing time for  
stealing TV's the only way I could get used  
to the rats and lice and ticks was to give  
them names my name is Dunkin Donuts  
and I like to sniff black magic markers  
and glue sticks with the blind man who  
plays the accordion with a pole plugged  
into his back that prowls around like this  
tabby that thinks I'm tuna

LONNI TANNER



## Sometimes

my neighbors play their cowbell loud and furious,  
always when I am tired and sleepy,  
and never on key.

YASMINE B. LANCASTER

## Ode to My Headphones

You jumped into my life  
screaming,  
and without a mouth  
you called to me,  
“I offer inspiration.  
Take me for a walk.  
Listen,  
to what I have to say.”

DA'SHAWN WADE

## I walked

into  
the crossroads  
of my life.  
Spine frozen. Stuck.  
Without salvation.  
I fell.  
Beaten.

LISA ARROYO

## When I Wait

I think about my friend,  
when we were little,  
and waited at school

to go play in the gym,  
or in the park,  
or at her house.

When I think of my friend,  
I feel safe like I'm a tree.

SANDRA NIEVES

## Story of My Life

Born and raised in the Bronx,  
me, my mom, and dad all lived together.

My dad had a good job. My mom stayed  
home with me and my brother. She had

a friend who lived upstairs. They smoked  
weed together. One day my mom took us

upstairs and her friend had a blunt  
rolled up. They smoked. My mom said

it was the best she's ever had.  
Crack. My

mom got my dad on it. At the age of  
three my mom gave me away. Her mother

adopted me for the money. My mom  
lived with us here and there. Her room was

the closet. She would bring over men.  
At the age of fourteen, I

had my first son. One day I had no  
milk. My mom told me she was going to buy it,

if I came with her to buy something.  
She took me to a factory and left me.

She sold me to a fat disgusting  
man. At the age of seventeen I had three

boys. At eighteen my grandmother threw me  
and my kids out like she always did.

She said my money had stopped coming in.  
I stayed in a shelter with my kids.

We got bed bugs, food poisoning,  
we went through hell.

At the age of 21, one week after my birthday,  
my grandmother told me she had been getting

my checks since I was three years old.  
She said she spent it all. She's sorry. She lied.

And that's the short story  
of my life.

YAHAIKY ORTIZ

## **We meet**

in summer,  
on a hot afternoon.

We meet at night,  
on the edge of darkness.

We meet in morning,  
light, disappearing.

CHERYL BROWN

## **Who Am I ?**

A strong, educated Black woman  
who's been through so much.  
Blessed with a tender touch.  
Never been a quitter.  
Still dreaming of gold and glitter.  
I once knew her,  
so pretty, so young.  
Where did she go?  
Check the church,  
she might be there.

TAKIMA NICHOLSON

## **My Never-Ending Story**

...cook, clean, work, school,  
clean your room, eat your food,  
do your homework, stop  
yelling, stop playing, relax,  
take a bath, go to bed, do your  
hair, get the grease, clean your  
room, take your clothes out, take  
the trash out, sweep the floor,  
mop the floor, wash the dishes,  
cook, clean, work, school, clean  
your room, eat your food, do  
your homework, stop yelling,  
stop playing, relax, take a...

TAHARA LILLY

## Ends

We live and act  
Like we don't know.  
Our beautiful lives. Sold.  
Our dead, gone.  
Their stories told.

ABU TAHIRU

## Remember

the times you blackened my eye?  
Dirty is how I felt  
the nights you had me against my will.  
This laundry is a heavy load.  
It's time to let go.  
Stay tuned for the movie.  
You'll get my reveal.

PORTIA TINGMAN

## She

Is it  
the way she walks?  
The way she talks?  
Or is it her stare?  
Why is she so heavy on my mind?  
I think of her  
all the time.  
Does she even notice me?  
Damn,  
These red cheeks.  
Just her, "Hello,"  
And naughty thoughts swirl.  
Damn!  
I want to make her hum.  
It's like I'm a book  
And she's writing my story.

PORTIA TINGMAN

## Waldo Found

We found Waldo in his bathroom  
shaving his bones in jelly,  
holding cake, and waiting for the cats to come back  
from the strip club factory  
where the greedy man works.  
He stood there, staring at water on the wall,  
his shoes, melting.

NAPOLEON FELIPE



## Crime and Punishment

Turn them loose, Bruce,  
Crime and punishment,  
Broken homes,  
Children born beautiful,  
Society messes them up.  
Children born innocent,  
Society corrupts them.  
Crime and punishment,  
Turn them loose, Bruce.  
Babies in cribs mean no harm.  
Give them a few years.  
*I plead not guilty, Your Honor.*  
Crime and punishment,  
Turn them loose, Bruce,  
Separation,  
Turn them loose, Bruce,  
Divorce,  
Turn them loose, Bruce,  
Help them.  
Turn them loose, Bruce,  
*You're Honor, please!*  
Turn them loose, Bruce.

HARRY THOMAS

## I Did It Without You

Yeah, I did it without you.  
I cry because I know I did it without you.  
They said I wasn't going to make it,  
wasn't strong enough to take it.  
Burning from the bottom to the top,  
I started scraping, repainting the  
picture, life as a lil' sister, stuck my  
words to my heart like a sticker, riding on  
this diploma. Take it with ya.' Batter up,  
I'm the pitcher. You didn't feel the pain, and still  
it hit you. Your eyes  
full of tears, I'm swimming  
in your river. Pour down  
the liquor, the lies eating up  
your liver. I won't forget, but I will  
forgive her.  
Wonder if my twin was alive, would it be  
different, if I was with her?  
My mother blames me for everything.  
I don't get her.  
This is the reason why I've written my life  
in this scripture.  
Talking through God's words, he's the  
one who created this picture.

EVE VELEZ

## Your

blue jeans are genetic.

MARCO COVINGTON

## Eliana

When she looks at me  
I'm undefeated.  
She follows my every move.  
I belong to her,  
this tiny person,  
I waited so long to have;  
an accomplice.

KATHERINE KUILAN

## My life

right now  
is hectic.  
Every day  
I face  
a brick wall.  
I wish life  
was an easy walk,  
but it's not.

EBONY FORD

## Money Worries

Money worries, money worries  
Why you worry me  
Money B, money tree  
Why don't you grow 4 me  
Money worries, money worries  
Is all I can see.

Born as a refugee  
Growing up in this country  
Where money B, the only  
Thing that I want to see, is  
My famz' doing good standing next  
To me, and if we ev'r disagree  
It won't B the money tree  
Cause all the pain is free  
Love doesn't cost a fee  
Family is all to me, and the  
Money B you and me  
Like the thousand words  
More, money worries money.

Standing tall like the  
Towers of twin  
Born poor, but now crowned  
King, mind set to win  
Easy breezy does everything  
Patiently I grin, awaiting  
The wheel of fortune  
To spin, making money worries.

Nothing but a thing, I hope you  
Understand my going out  
And coming in, knowing where  
I'm coming from, so life can  
Begin, happy reminded and  
Remembering  
money worries.

Money worries, money worries  
Why you worry me  
Money B, money tree  
Why don't you grow 4 me  
Money worries, money worries  
Is all I can see.

MICHAEL BROWNE

## I Wonder

Why do I sing  
when others think I can't?

DARRYL WILLIAMS

## My Brother the Veteran

Bless your soul  
Most American's don't know  
The pain you've suffered  
The pain you've endured  
This country's heroes are truly our Vets  
They are the ones  
Who stick out their necks  
For freedom and liberty  
So give them respect  
They fight our wars  
So we can be free  
Band of Brothers  
That's what you are  
Behind the pain  
You hide the scars  
I salute you soldier

For the hero you are  
You came back from war  
No legs, no feet  
I remember how proud I was  
Watching you rock your son to sleep  
I am proud to be an American  
So proud to say  
My brother the Veteran  
Did it his way  
I can still see the fragments  
In your back from the shells  
It makes me proud  
The stories you tell  
My brother  
The hero  
That's what he is to me  
So stand tall  
Brother  
For the world to see.

Let freedom and liberty rain on me.

NOEL CUADRADO  
FOR VICTOR

## The world

is plaid, not round.

MARCO COVINGTON

## Foursome

Him, her, you, me.  
That's our life  
And it's not free.

RANDALL HARVEY

## Waiting

I've been waiting for my probation officer  
since nine o'clock.  
I'm a person  
with a lot of patience, but  
today I lost it.  
The lady at the front desk  
gave me a little attitude.  
So I got disrespectful.  
Before I leave,  
she will get an apology  
from me.

ARIEL HIRALDO

## Como Mi Vida Cambio

Yo era invulnerable.  
Nada alguna vez me iba a pasar a mí.  
Pero ahora estoy en libertad condicional.  
No es una mala cosa.  
Estoy haciendo cambios  
para llevar una vida limpia.  
Le doy gracias a Dios  
por mi vida, día a día.

## How My Life Changed

I was invulnerable.  
Nothing was ever going to happen to me.  
But now I'm on probation.  
It's not a bad thing.  
I'm making changes  
to lead a clean life.  
I give thanks to God  
for my life, day by day.

RUTH FIGUEROA  
TRANSLATION BY NAPOLEON FELIPE

## **I remember bees**

hovering attentive, waiting for the  
scrape of ice against old man hands.

YASMINE B. LANCASTER

**If**

your syllables were money  
I would be wealthy beyond words.

NAPOLEON FELIPE

## **No Emotions**

Tick for tack  
You yap your gums

Your lips go back  
Won't hold my tongue

In fact, the cat's got that  
Your statement's far from fact

See, I'm still in rehab  
For my verbal relapse

Perhaps you're blind  
I'm controlled, impassive

Let me get you some glasses  
Maybe then you'll see

I'm innocent

LAVONE KELLY

## Where Do We Go?

Have you reached the point of no return?  
Finally learned?  
That love won't make him answer your call?  
Can't catch you when you fall?  
Love has no place in the world today.  
And it can't make him stay.  
Love was a joke from the start,  
destroyed your heart.  
It was love that screamed, "I don't want you around,"  
blinded your eyes and let you crash.

Love is the new name for fury and rage.  
Love made him say, "No! I didn't get paid."  
as your rent went another month delayed.  
Love let him hit you as you carried your unborn child.  
Love refused the divorce to be filed.

It is love.  
It is love.  
It is love.

that won't let you stay.  
It is love that won't let you

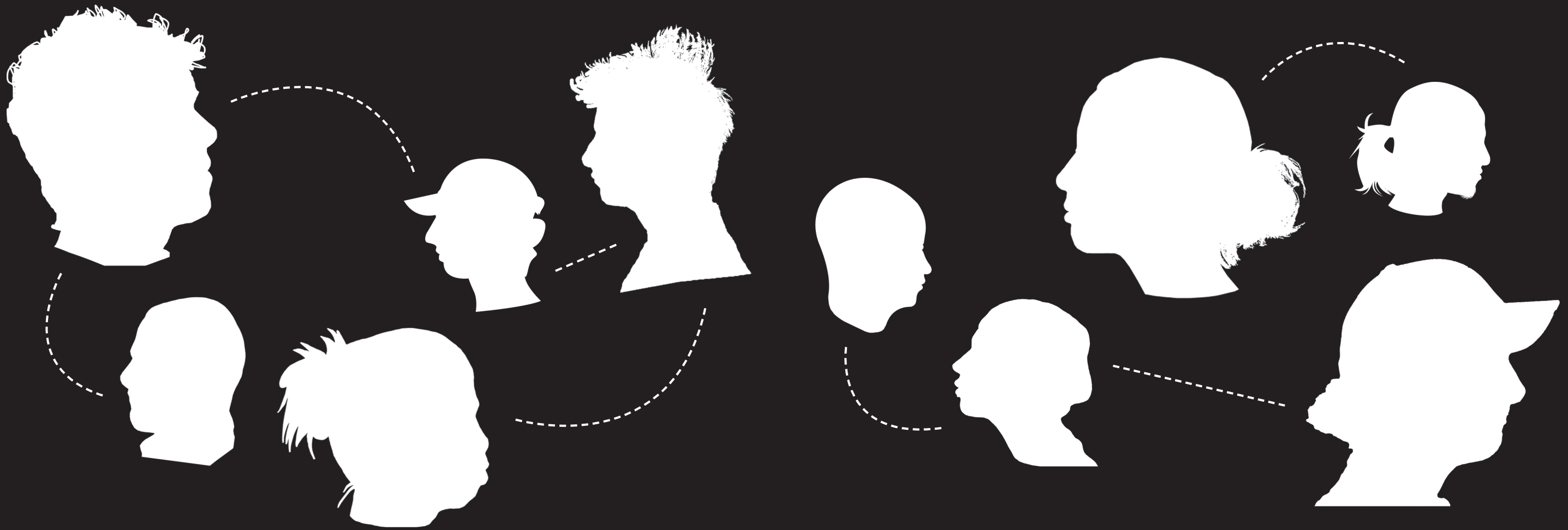
walk away.

MARLITA DALTON

## My hands

are burning  
to touch my  
dreams.

TAHARA LILLY



## Running

through the wet  
dirt of desire  
inhaling death,  
exhaling  
life, pulling away  
from freedom,  
heading towards  
slavery.  
I slowly kill myself.  
No control.  
Submission.

DA'SHAWN WADE

## Well,

here I am  
in my PO's office  
hoping he lets me go.  
I haven't been here for five months.  
I'm a little worried.  
My wife's out front  
waiting,  
just hoping we can go home.

JOSEPH BROWN

## What Makes You African ?

Having black skin doesn't make you African.  
Being born in Africa doesn't make you African.  
Speaking Swahili, Wolof, Mandinko, Soninke, or Hausa does not make you African.  
Knowing traditions does not make you African.

You are African because you stand up for the nation.  
You are African because you raise your hand for the needy.  
You are African because your heart beats faster when  
the nation is in danger.  
You are African because your eyes turn red when  
the people feel pain.  
You are African because you never look down on anyone, even when  
you've climbed Mount Kilimanjaro.

ABU TAHIRU

## Stop me

if you can,  
somewhere above the sky  
or under the sea

JAMES SERRANO

## Summertime

It was fun at one time. Now he has a gun and I have mine.  
I remember still, quiet nights. Now shotguns blast and police cars pass.  
I used to watch the stars at night. Now helicopters light up the sky,  
looking for someone suspected of something, but I'm just trying to make it home.  
How long is this going to last, every store with bulletproof glass?  
I'm not about this hood life, but I was raised in the ghetto.  
I'm hot and I'm sweaty, just trying to make it home.  
An officer, on my back, wants to stop me.  
"Officer, what did I do wrong?"  
Sometimes I want to scream,  
"Just leave me the hell alone."  
But I respectfully say,  
"Officer, I'm just walking home."  
I feel like I live in a third world country, in war-riddled streets,  
not over land or position, or even religious beliefs,  
just really ignorant, my block, your block, hood beefs.  
  
Let's instead get a job, go to school and spread hood love.

ESTABAN RIVERA

## Procrastination

They call me procrastination  
I save today's tasks for tomorrow  
To all, I give this invitation  
So you'll eventually dwell in sorrow

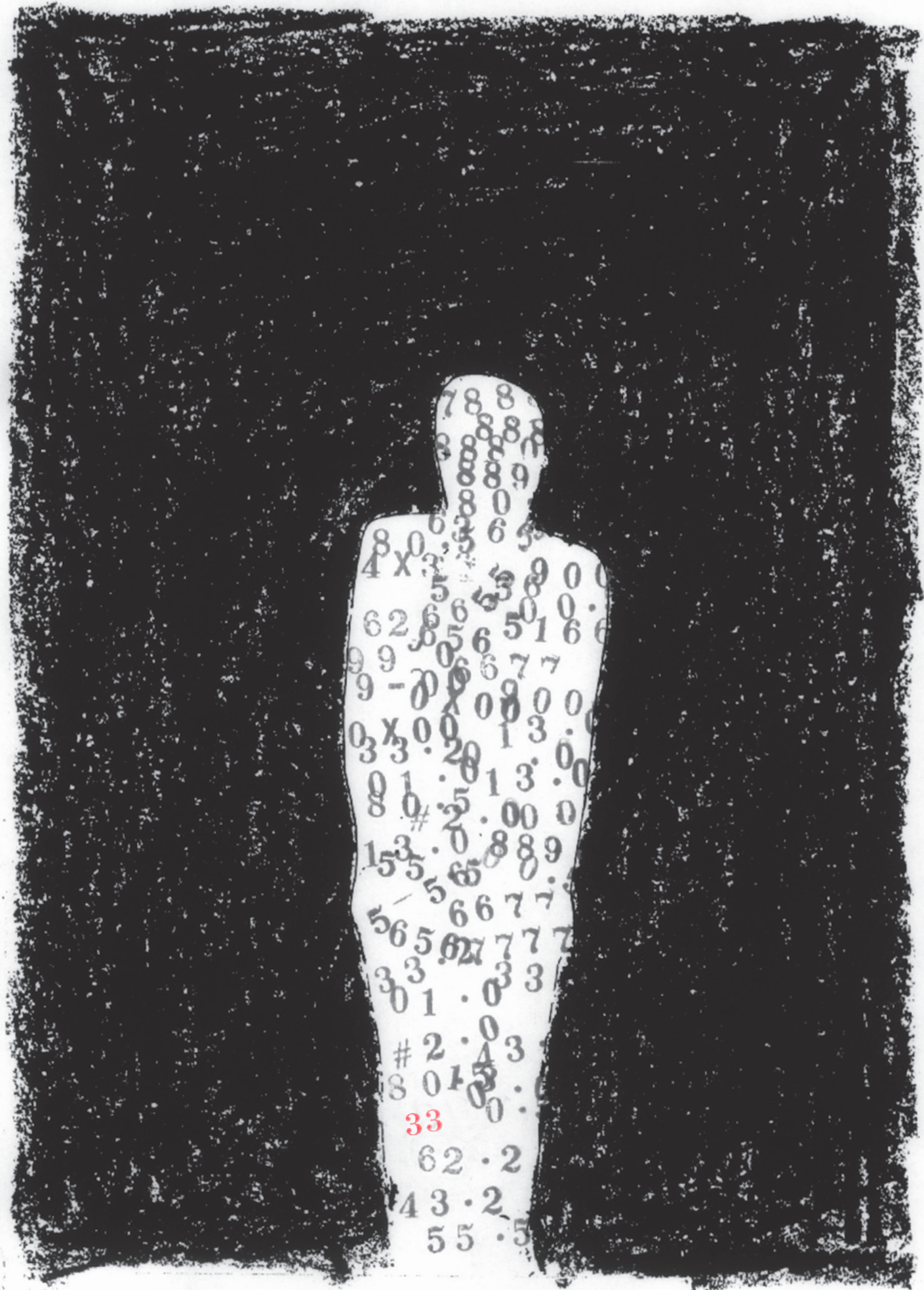
So why not just lay back and relax  
Just let time keep passing by  
Let things fall through the cracks  
You can just sit, complain and cry

Success is something you'll never achieve  
The path of least resistance, my forte  
What makes it so hard to believe  
Just let this be another lazy day

I always promise, you'll do better  
(You fail to realize that laziness is my friend)  
Besides, whoever said you were a go-getter  
What part of this don't you comprehend

Now since we've met  
Let's go over your situation  
Today's seed can bloom into tomorrow's regret  
As long as you pledge allegiance to me, procrastination

RON ENOC



## **No Savings, No Job**

I'm 36 and have nothing.  
I thought I was going to be dead at 33.  
So at 36 not having nothing is really  
having something.

THOMAS FUCALORO

## **Blue**

is blue, unless you add red.

MARCO COVINGTON

## **All my**

life I've been dining  
on a broken plate.

DAVE JOHNSON



## **I darken**

At the sound of its name  
My mind in flames  
Body in pain  
Chest clenched  
The poison takes aim.

My heart blows  
And crows  
Open my eyes  
To a blanket of snow.

Emotions  
Take hold  
Like a night  
Fire burns  
Prepared to fight.

Blinded by light,  
I yell its name.

JAMES SERRANO

## **I sit**

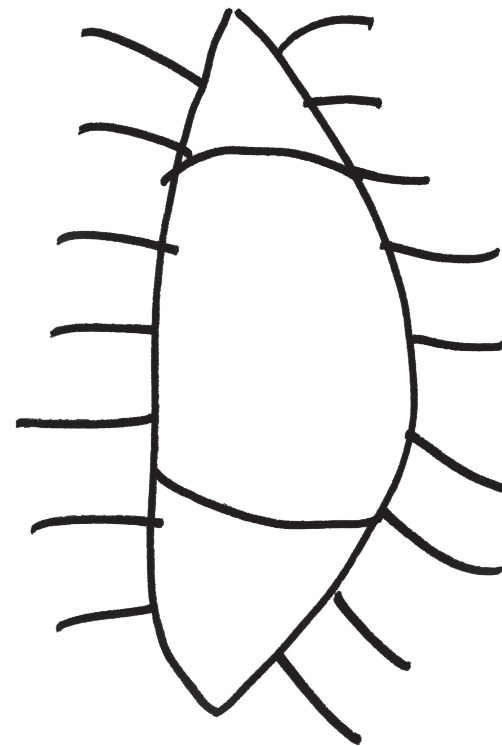
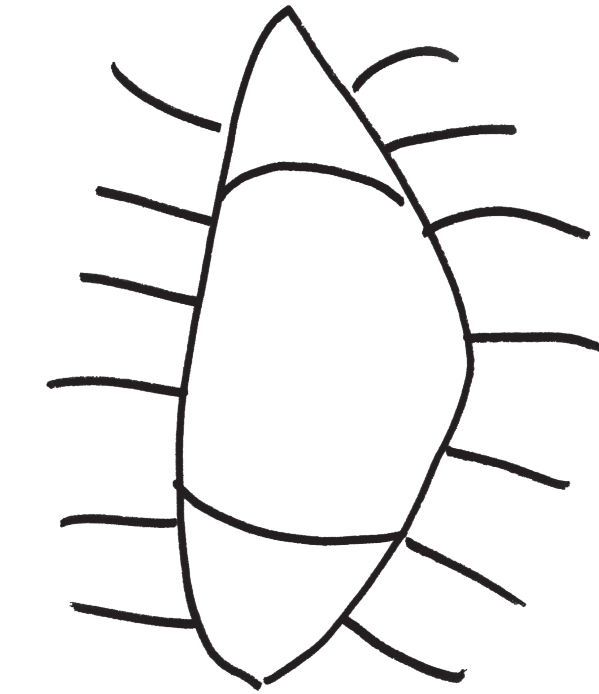
back,  
look outside  
and think about the good times.  
Sometimes,  
it makes me cry,  
or sob.  
And then,  
my heart jumps  
like a frog.

LASHAWN ANTHONY

## **I don't**

want it.  
I can't take it any more.  
But there's something about it,  
I adore.

JAMES SERRANO



## Lucky To Live

I take kids from parents  
and parents from kids.  
I turn people from God  
and separate friends.  
I'll take everything from you,  
your looks and pride.  
I'll be with you always  
right by your side.  
I'll take and take till you have  
nothing more to give.  
When I'm finished with you,  
you'll be lucky to live.  
If you try me, be warned,  
this is no game.  
If given the chance  
I'll drive you insane.  
I'll ravish your body,  
and control your mind.  
I'll own you completely.  
Your soul will be mine.  
The nightmares I'll give you  
while you're lying in bed,  
the voices you hear  
from inside your head;  
the sweats, the shakes, and visions you see.  
Just know, they're the gifts from me.  
You'll regret you tried me.  
They always do.  
But you came to me,  
now I to you.

You knew this would happen  
many times you were told.  
Instead you challenged my power  
and chose to be bold.  
I'll be your master,  
You'll be my slave.  
I will even go with you  
to your grave.  
Now that you've met me,  
what will you do?  
Try me or not?  
It's all up to you.  
I can bring you more misery  
than words can tell.  
Come take my hand,  
let me lead you to hell.

MARIO IRIZARRY

## These wings

are heavier than I thought  
they'd be.

MALINDA DOWNS

## Just for an instant,

flying high  
the air

smack

-ed  
my face.

TAHARA LILLY

## Drain My Pain

“Get off me.”  
You dragged me away  
With blood on my knees.  
“Get off me!”  
I begged, “PLEASE! Don’t leave me. I love you.”  
You looked at me and said, “It’s over.”  
You got in your car,  
Peeled off.  
And I popped every pill.  
May I die in his Name.  
I dozed off,  
woke up in the hospital,  
and the nurse came in with a letter.  
It read, “I’m sorry for hurting you, but our love is dead.”  
I tore it apart and began to cry.  
How can I have been so foolish, so dumb?  
I’m intelligent, independent, beautiful, and young.  
You were my world.  
I thought you were the one.  
I gave my heart too fast.  
It’s definitely over and done.

JOHANNE MENDEZ



## **I don't need**

a therapist, I need a psychic.

MARCO COVINGTON

## **Firefly**

Open eye  
in the sky  
brave heart  
flying  
sky high.  
Please, don't die.  
Firefly.  
I'll never deny you  
the open sky.

Fire fly.

CHERYL BROWN

## **Meter**

My time is running out.  
I've got to leave now.

FAUZIA

## **I just** want out.

CHRIS BANKS

## **I am the wolf**

who wants  
a cup of coffee.  
So I make a call  
to the diner  
on the corner.  
No answer.  
Wrong number.  
A second call.  
Hello, waiter.  
Yes, sir.  
Waiter, I need a cup of coffee,  
regular, two sugars.  
I'll be right there, sir.  
Then a knock on the door.  
He comes in.  
Delivers.  
I take a sip.  
Cold coffee, no sugar.  
Waiter, come back here!

I am not going to bite you!  
I'm not going to eat you!  
But don't forget,  
next time: regular, two sugars.  
Write that order down.

HARRY THOMAS



## Beggars Get Rich

Every Friday all beggars get rich, but me.  
I see them everywhere in my nightmares.  
Upside down is the town.  
Making fun to make money,  
They're not clowns.  
Everyone's the same, never looking down.  
Upside down, upside town,  
Where all beggars get rich, but me.

ABU TAHIRU

## It All Starts Here

How can you sit on your soapbox, so high  
While others' human rights and dignity you deny?

You want respect, but have none to give.  
To you, those with less, should not even live.

When will you see your JOB is to lift?  
When will you see that's your GOD given gift?

Why use all you have for people's demise?  
Instead, see them with rose-colored eyes.

See where they're going, not where they're at.  
Only then, can we pat ourselves on the back.

Imagine a society, where a room in jail is no longer for sale,  
bought by the lives of our Black and Latino males.

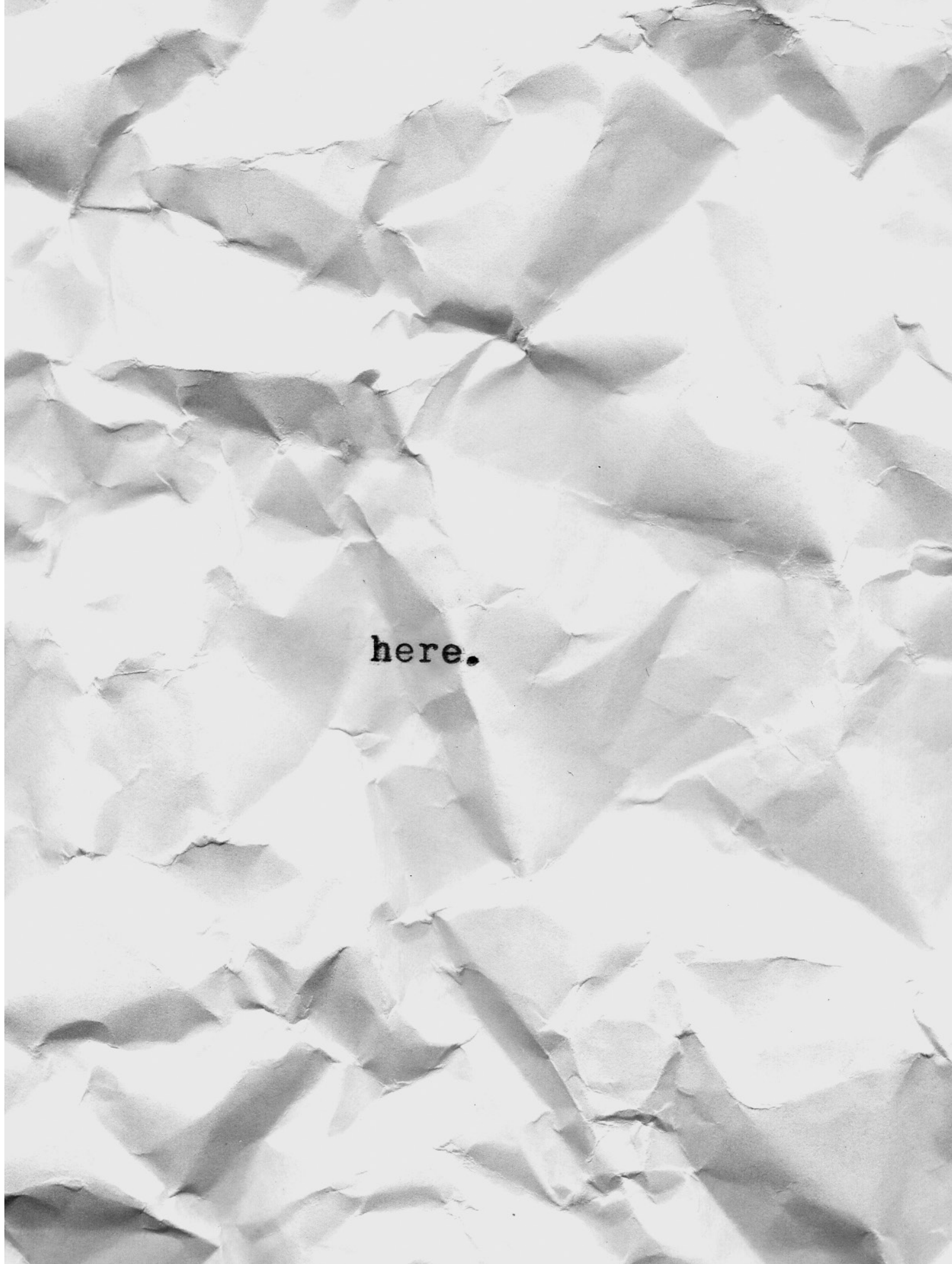
MARLITA DALTON

**How Dare We Be Unhappy**

We are still here.

JOHN TAYLOR

here.



## **Thank You!**

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To O.M. with great appreciation

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