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Cristy Baptiste

**Don't just wait in line. Write a line for Free Verse, the first literary publication born in a probation center waiting room.**

**Why? Because using the time you have to think and create—to write—can lead to a lot of positive outcomes. You'll up your chances of landing a job, finishing your GED, or even getting on track for a college degree. Every step equals success. And here, every success counts.**

**Even the smallest contribution—giving a one-line riff on a napkin to the roaming Poet-in-Residence, listening to the weekly open mic, or bringing a friend to a writing workshop—all of which happens in the middle of the waiting room—has a pay off.**

**Writing isn't easy, but it's rewarding. And like many things in life, the more you do it, the better you become. Ask any of the dedicated writers who made the leaps from riff to workshop to writing program—and who now serve as paid writing apprentices. That can be you.**

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

LONNI TANNER  
Managing Editor

**IN READING THE SECOND EDITION** of Free Verse, I am struck once again by the remarkably high quality of the submissions.

For all of the clever things the authors do with rhyme, diction, and pacing, what makes these poems great gets down to the very essence of art: honesty. Whether writing about addiction or religion, bacon bits or flamenco, these poems are the work of people who have taken a leap of faith and shared a piece of themselves with the world. Some of the poems are bleak, some of them are even a little scary, but that doesn't make them any less compelling.

**The poems in the second issue of Free Verse are a selection of “successes.” Chosen from more than 400 submissions, the magazine features new work by probation clients, officers, staff, security guards, friends, family, and professional writers, all of whom write in the inspiring, re-designed probation center space.**

**Many pieces for Free Verse are by new writers. Some returning writers are showcasing work that is the seed for a first book.**

**Free Verse and the writing program are springboards for more to come at other probation centers throughout the city. Programs like these can provide you with the necessary skills you need to reach your goals.**

**Yes, you're in a waiting room, but you don't have to just wait. Start doing. The door is open. Come on in!**

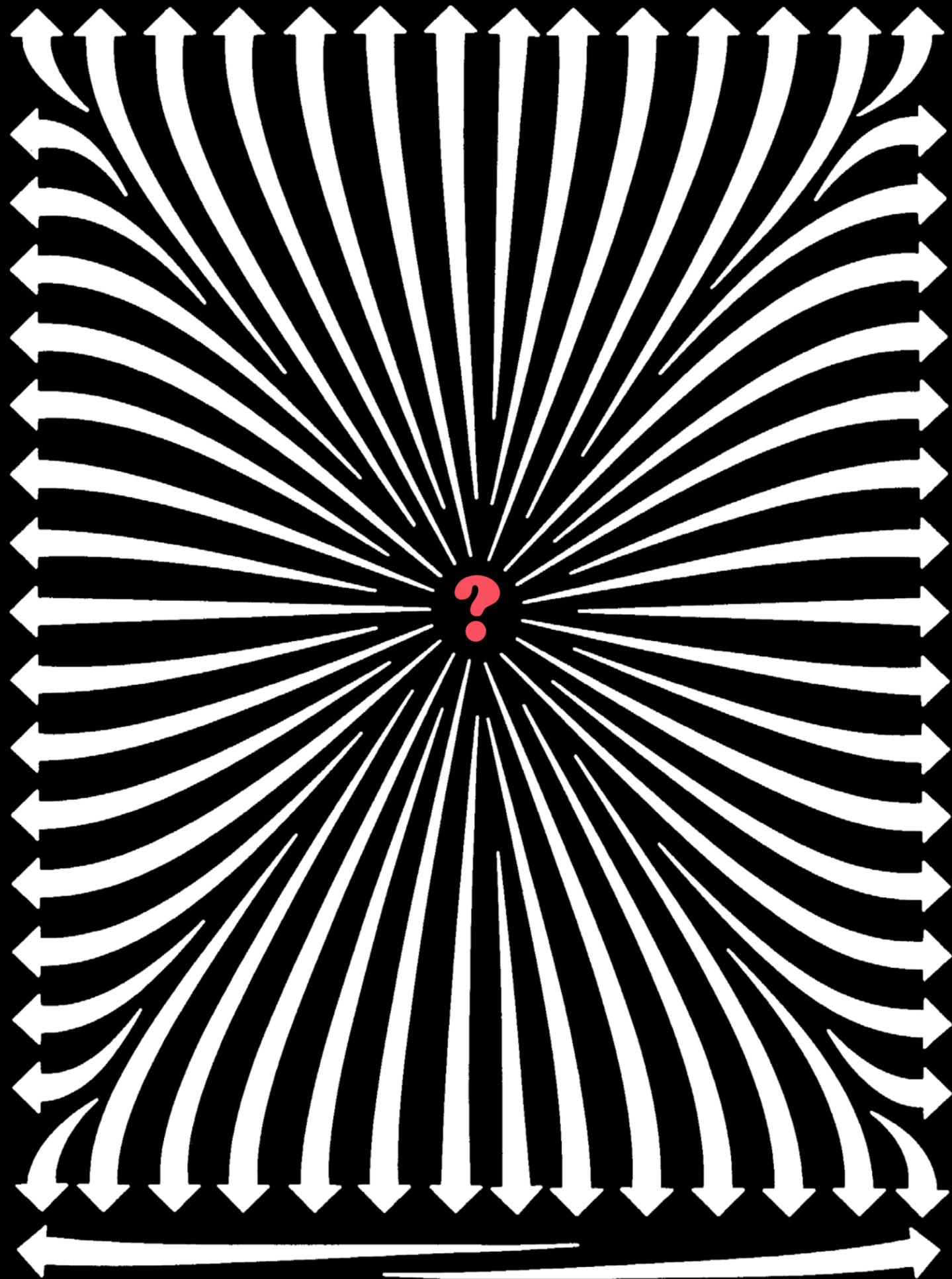
**— The Editors**

Free Verse says as much about this agency's challenges and ambitions as any of the memos or presentations we've put together over the years. We aren't connecting probation clients to the arts simply because it makes us feel good; we're doing it because when people have positive outlets to express themselves, they're less likely to break the law. And it goes beyond that—our most dedicated poets are now serving as apprentices and developing valuable job skills. This initiative helped lay the groundwork for our larger arts initiative, which currently includes songwriting and the visual arts and is

poised to grow significantly in the coming year.

I'd like to thank everyone who contributed their voices to this project, including the Probation Officers and Department of Probation staff whose poems are published alongside those of their clients and members of the community. Both your words and your deeds are an inspiration.

**VINCENT N. SCHIRALDI**  
Commissioner  
Department of Probation



## Arrows

Why don't we all just become arrows?

Crazy question, I know.

But hey,

look at it this way.

As you draw the arrow back, it goes toward your past, but as soon as you release, it flies straight into the future.

And the path of an arrow never turns sideways.

Never looks back.

ARENAZIA CUEVAS

## I Am My Father

I never knew exactly what my parents did  
But one thing for sure  
I didn't want to live how my parents lived  
Both doing drugs  
With me in their home was bad parenting  
They were both junkies  
So there's no comparison  
Everyone always asked me where my parents were  
I never knew  
And it was embarrassing  
But I said, "I am my father"  
And saved the embarrassment  
I was practicing self-learning, I had to master it

ANDREW DELEONARDIS

## on the avenue of ambition

p v e  
e i v  
o c e  
p t r  
l o y  
e r o  
s n  
d e  
i a  
v t s  
e t  
t o  
i h p  
n e s  
  
h f a  
e i t  
a n  
d i nothing.  
s  
f h  
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e  
  
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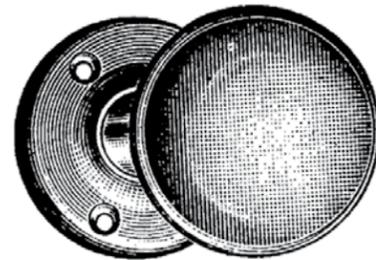


ONTARIO SOLOMON

## Excuse Me, Ordinary

I'm not trying to put you down,  
but you're just not good enough.  
In this day and age,  
you need to be *extraordinary*,  
Ordinary.  
I am sorry to say  
I need a little *extra*.

HARRY THOMAS



## I believe

in justice for all,  
    though no one opens a door.  
in opportunity,  
    though the best ones don't reach me.  
in freedom, in equality,  
    but mostly I believe  
in me.

TAISHA WILLIAMS

## Strong Soul

16 and I been through a lot.  
From stitches, a stab wound, to even gettin' shot.  
Life is a gamble.  
Sometimes you have to take a chance.

INFALLIBLE DAVIS

## Staying Away

I remember macking my block  
with a bunch of friends that thought about selling rock.  
I moved away 'cause I didn't wanna get locked.  
And like 10 minutes later, all them hustlers got knocked.

RUBEN HERNANDEZ

## Yesterday in the Back of My Building

a man got hit by a car  
and it killed him.  
He was a guy from Mexico  
on a bike  
on his way to work.  
It was really crazy.  
I got up at 6 o'clock in the morning  
to go out and get a cup of coffee  
and his body was just out there,  
lying in the street for hours.

Ya'll didn't see it on the channel 12 news?

TAHARA LILLY

## My Broken Dreams

puff  
into smoke  
and bounce out my window

look how they circle  
the birds as they fly  
south  
in the sky

they blow  
into someone else's  
window

maybe someone else's dreams  
will blow into mine

CHERYL BROWN

## Sticks

and stones break bones,  
but these lips have stripped em'  
down to their soul.

TIFFANY MARIE MARRERO

## Mask

You sealed your mouth,  
camouflaged your face,  
put up a wall,  
to hide your ache.

CHRISTY WENAS COX

## O

my horrible  
everything  
is everything  
to me, every bit of.

How it festers  
in shivs deep  
in my back  
to hang  
lights on  
gently  
your hands  
how they wither  
with wisdom's  
lost  
age of drowning  
in vintage  
wine.

THOMAS FUCALORO

## my eyes

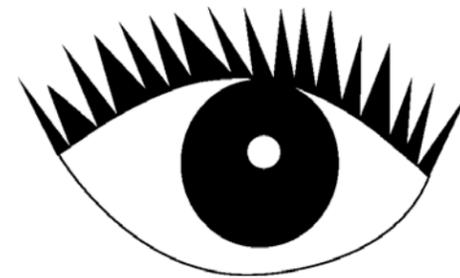
# miss you

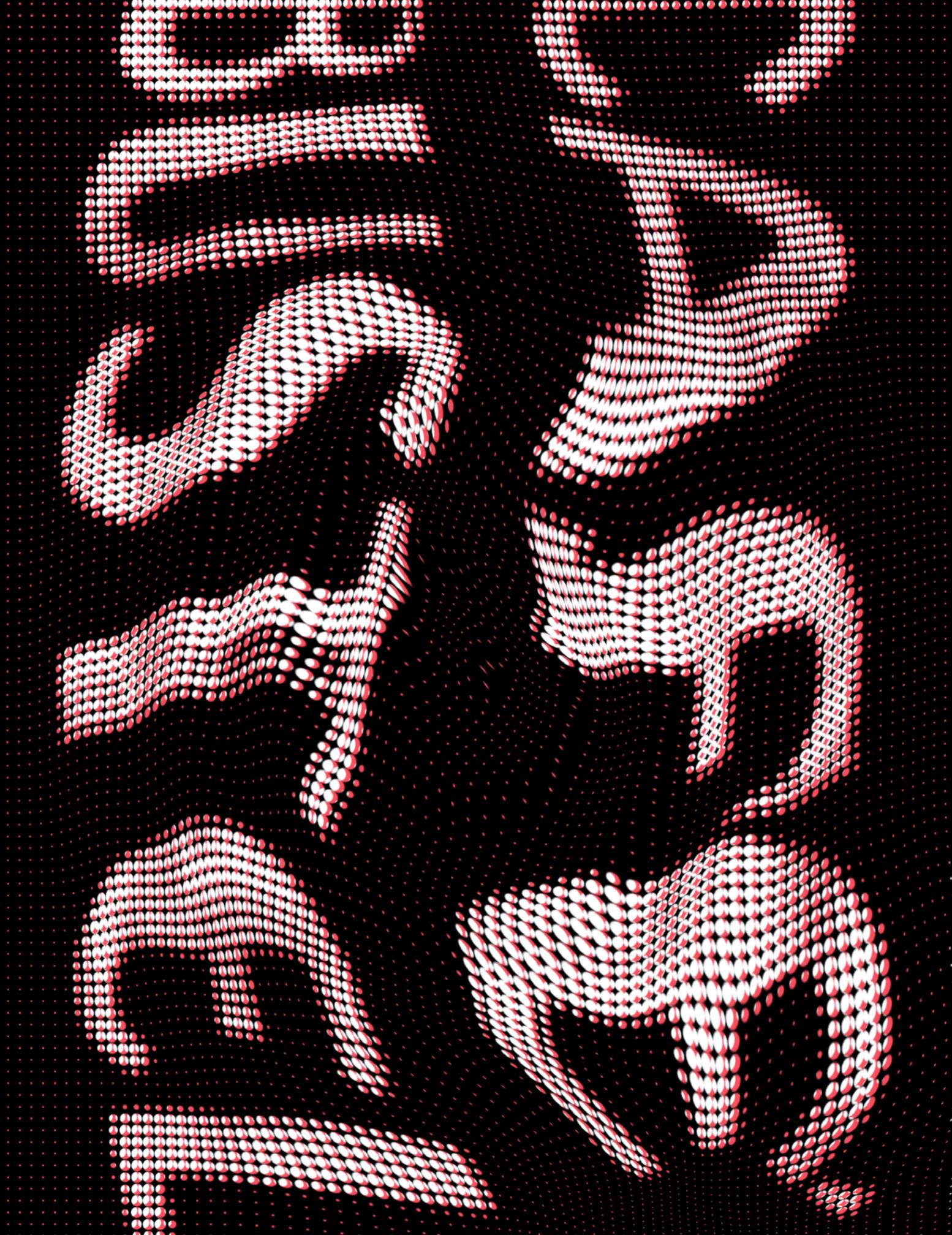
ABU TAHIRU SILLAH

## Habitat

I've never had occasion to call someone  
A snake in the grass  
Mostly because maybe that's where that snake  
Should be.  
The logic stops the words from coming out  
It's like saying  
You are exactly where you should be  
Which isn't much of an insult  
At all.  
(I shouldn't be insulting anyone anyway)

C.D. HERMELIN





## Mi Desayuno

(My Breakfast)

The aroma de café  
so rich, so black  
Abuela's alarm clock,  
what a sweet melody  
los canciones de ayer  
she would always  
sing  
with so much joy,  
so much sadness,  
Huevos fritos  
con fried salami  
toasted bread with butter,  
nothing better,  
a time of innocence,  
it was family.

ESTABAN RIVERA

## Bacon Bits

meteorites hitting the earth's surface  
covered in melted cheese  
an ocean spreading across  
my favorite wheat toast

a burning satellite dish  
caught between my wisdom teeth.

NOEL CUADRADO

## Bustelo

Slave to the coffee pot.  
I can't stop.

Black espresso floats *in style*.

Running on speed  
mellows me out  
without a doubt  
I can't do without.

This is not fiction,  
addiction is my affliction.  
Ah yes, Bustello,  
that's my good fellow.

CHERYL BROWN

**Don't cry,**

no need  
to suffer.

Just spit out the words.

CHRISTY WENAS COX

## The Good Fight

One day I will not have to fight you,  
the partner I was given in this lottery of life  
that looked so promising until the drawing  
as each number was pulled, it was clear, it was not a winner,  
just another one to go with the other ones  
in a pile of must forget yesterdays.

One day I will not have to fight the voices in my head  
of people's words placed wrongly in my spirit,  
the words that should have rolled off my back,  
but somehow, were deposited in my future.

One day I will not have to fight the urge to write about the sorrows  
that have been my tomorrows, before tomorrow has even gotten here.

One day I will fight the good fight of keeping  
the roaring laughter from my belly, fighting to make it out like a raging lion.

One day I will fight to open the cocoon, to let the butterflies I protected, go free.

You'll never know the pressure I endured, to be cut, into the diamond you see.

MARLITA DALTON

## Homesick

A woman's silence is her loudest cry.  
A man's smile is his biggest lie.  
A baby's joy is something hard to ignore.

My daughter is crying, I can hear her.  
My wife is quiet, I can't see her.  
I'm here, writing a poem. I just wanna'  
go home.

ARGENIS CASTRO

## I don't want

to be the woman who lives  
with fear in her heart.

TIFFANY MARIE MARRERO

## Defiant

I started off being a tyrant  
Vision was blinded by ignorant violence  
A child with no parents provided  
Brothers and sisters divided  
Where's the alliance?  
I guess that's the outcome when drugs and humans combine  
I just cracked the oppressor  
It's time to break the silence  
I had no parental guidance  
Meeting my real parents was like rocket science  
Years of therapy  
My therapist was the client

ANDREW DELEONARDIS

## Singel

On a street  
in Amsterdam  
with my backpack  
I sit by this canal  
watching the Dutch  
listening  
to their lexicon

CHRISTY WENAS COX

## Malaga, Costa del Sol

Flamenco  
by the edge of the cafe  
hypnotizes me,  
a sweet wine  
easing my pain.

CHRISTY WENAS COX

## Coconuts

cracked in the sun  
& the  
wind blows  
cool around the half moon  
& insects roam the sky,  
dusk to dawn.  
Beaches &  
barrier reefs &  
Caracol Mayan ruins,  
stone to sky.  
Ah yes, the sun of Belize  
makes me believe  
in Adam and Eve,  
and the sense of reprieve.

CHERYL BROWN

## Visuals

In my mind  
a  
k  
me  
s  
blind  
To  
h  
e  
kind of life  
I  
left  
behind  
Trying to find  
i  
m  
e  
lost, unkind.

CHRISTOPHER WOODEN

12/15/97

He busted through the front door,  
cursing, stomping, teeth grinding,  
fists clenched, blood dripping red  
like squeezed cherries.

I was only ten. His rage, intense  
and present. I dared not look at his face.  
I figured the angel in the room would  
calm him down! I prayed, *Lord, send your  
protection.* I feared he'd strike her  
to make his point.

The lights outside the window looked like  
Christmas. Men in blue came to ask  
a few questions. My father had plenty to say.  
I later heard rumors about that night.  
Nothing, clear. Everything, vague.

NAPOLEON FELIPE

## Happiness can

put away the dark.

LIZ PAGAN

## John Rushmore (5th period in school)

Nobody wants to play with the black crayon,  
in the Crayola box. It's broken. It's torn.  
Only bits and pieces stick around.

I paint myself white instead.  
I use other colors to substitute,  
Black is my last choice.

YASMINE LANCASTER

## Candy Crush,

you blow my mind  
can't get you  
to stay in line  
those who play will  
understand  
3, 4, 5, 6  
what do you get?  
an explosion  
I'm willing to bet.  
oh, Candy Crush,  
Candy Crush  
I can't put you down.  
and believe me,  
I know how that sounds.

BARBARA MCCAIN

## Violence

Why should anyone know  
such a word?

JOHN TAYLOR

dition of being violated. **2.** An instance of violation; a transgression; desecration; infraction: "*dead men, troubled in their graves by the violation of their last wishes*" (Charlotte Brontë). —See Synonyms at **breach**.

[REDACTED]

**vir-gate<sup>2</sup>** (vûr'gît, -gât') *n.* An early English area of varying value, often equivalent [Medieval Latin *virgata*, from *virga*, a m Latin, twig. See *virga*.]

**Vir-gil** (vûr'jäl). Also **Vör-gil**. Full name Maro. 70–19 B.C. Roman poet; author of the *Aeneid*. —**Vir-gil'i-an** *adj.*

**vir-gin** (vûr'jin) *n.* **1.** A person who has not had sexual intercourse. **2.** A chaste or unmarried woman. **3.** An unmarried woman who has taken religious vows. **4. Capital V.** Mary, the mother of Jesus. Properly called "the Blessed Virgin." **5.** Any female who has not been mated. **6. Capital V.** The constellation and zodiac sign, **Virgo** (*see*). —*adj.* **1.** Characteristic of a virgin; chaste; maidenly. **2.** In a pure or untouched; unsullied: *virgin snow*. **3.** Unused, unexplored: "*The North American drive had been unexplored*" (Gordon K. Lewis). **4.** Existing in nature but not processed or refined. **5.** Happening fortuitously: "*guiding my virgin steps on the hair of the needle*" (Maugham). **6.** Obtained directly from the source: *virgin vegetable oils*. [Middle English, from Old English *virgin*, from Latin *virgō*† (stem *virgin-*).]

**vir-gin-al<sup>1</sup>** (vûr'jə-nəl) *adj.* **1.** Pertaining to, or befitting a virgin; chaste; pure: "*Virgins are those who have never used to be*" (Sinclair Lewis). **2.** Reminiscent of virginity. **3.** Untouched or unsullied; fresh: *virgin-al wood*.

**vir-gin-al<sup>2</sup>** (vûr'jə-nəl) *n.* A small, legless chord popular in the 16th and 17th centuries, especially in the plural: *a pair of virginals*. [From VIRGIN (b) by young girls.]

**virgin birth.** *Theology.* The doctrine that Jesus was begotten by God and born of Mary, who was a virgin.

**Vir-gin-ia<sup>1</sup>** (vər-jin'yə). A feminine given name. Latin, feminine of *Virginus*, name of a Roman deity.

**Vir-gin-ia<sup>2</sup>** (vər-jin'yə). *Abbr. Va.* A Southern state of the United States, occupying 40,815 square miles. Capital, Richmond. See map at **United States**. [From Latin *virgō* (stem *virgin-*), VIRGIN (after the name of the virgin queen of England, the "virgin queen").] —**Vir-gin-ia City** (vər-jin'yə). A village of Virginia, flourishing city in the late 19th century after the discovery of nearby Comstock Lode (1859). Population, 1,000.

**Virginia cowslip.** A plant, *Mertensia virginica*, native to North America, having clusters of nodding flowers.

**Virginia creeper.** A North American climbing plant, *Nocissus quinquefolia*, having compound leaves and bluish-black, berrylike fruit. Sometimes called "ivy," "woodbine."

**Virginia deer.** The white-tailed deer (*see*).

**Virginia fence.** A worm fence (*see*). Also called "snake fence."

**Virginia reel.** A country dance in which couples move each other from two parallel lines, performing the dance to the instructions of a caller.

**Virgin Islands.** *Abbr. V.I.* A group of about 30 islands east of Puerto Rico in the West Indies and Caribbean Sea. **a.** The **British Virgin Islands** (*see*). **b.** The **Virgin Islands of the United States**, formerly Danish West Indies, including St. Thomas, St. John, and St. Croix and several smaller islands. Combined area of 133 square miles; population, 100,000. Charlotte Amalie on St. Thomas.

**vir-gin-i-ty** (vər-jin'ə-tē) *n., pl. -ties*. **1.** The state of being a virgin; virginal chastity; maidenhood. **2.** Pure, unsullied, or untouched.

# 1

## **All nine of my mother's baby fathers' beat her.**

Larry, Thomas, Michael, Carl, Keith, Tim, Paul, Henry, and even sweet ole' Stanley. They beat her 'cause they loved her and she didn't love them back. I took care of my mother's black eyes by slathering cocoa butter, witch hazel, and peanut oil on her face to smooth her eyelids back in place. I've inherited my mother's black eyes.

# 2

## **Mother had a baby every two years.**

My brother and I were the only two she actually brought home from the hospital. My sister was born in North Carolina under the name Michelle Jones. A minute later and mother was long gone. My grandmother had to get on a plane and go down there to get my sister before the state took her. Now there's nine of us. All from different men. Some light, some dark, some big, some small, but the one thing we all have in common is we definitely look like our mother.

# 3

## **My mother hid her pregnancy until she was seven months.**

She used to put ketchup on her maxi pads every month, fronting, like she was having her periods. When my grandmother saw her belly she whipped my mother's ass. The neighbors would go off about my mother having a baby. But she would go over there every Sunday for dinner. I guess that's why I love their cooking even until this day.

# 4

## **My mother had me at fourteen.**

My grandmother said my mother was too young to be taking care of a baby. My grandmother still goes off about not knowing my mother was pregnant with me and how she made her a grandmother at 32. My mother hid me. My father denied me. That's at least what my grandmother said.

# 5

## **Game**

By the time I was ten I was already playing our secret game.

*Tick tock, the game is locked  
and nobody else can play,  
and if they do  
I'll take my shoe,  
and knock them black and blue.  
Hooray.*

That was our code. And by the time we reached our seven eleven, we were already on our way to seven minutes in heaven. Seven kisses, eleven humps. If you got caught in the exit, you would have to kiss the boy who caught you seven times.

# 6

## **Week Days**

There was this one boy that went out with a different girl every day of the week. Monday was me. Tuesday was Shamane. Wednesday was Ritchie. Thursday was Nicole. And whoever had him on Fridays was special. She would get him for the whole weekend.

TAHARA LILLY

## Tripping NYC

As I travel

Below the city

Crowds

Demand mobility

Energy

Forcing

Groups together

Hoarding space

Indignant folk

Joking so carelessly

Kindling flames of

Leaves

Many events

Nearing Delancey

On the local

Patience, people

Questioning time

Rushing

Service haults

The train sits

Under my breath

Vague

Words

Xit the station

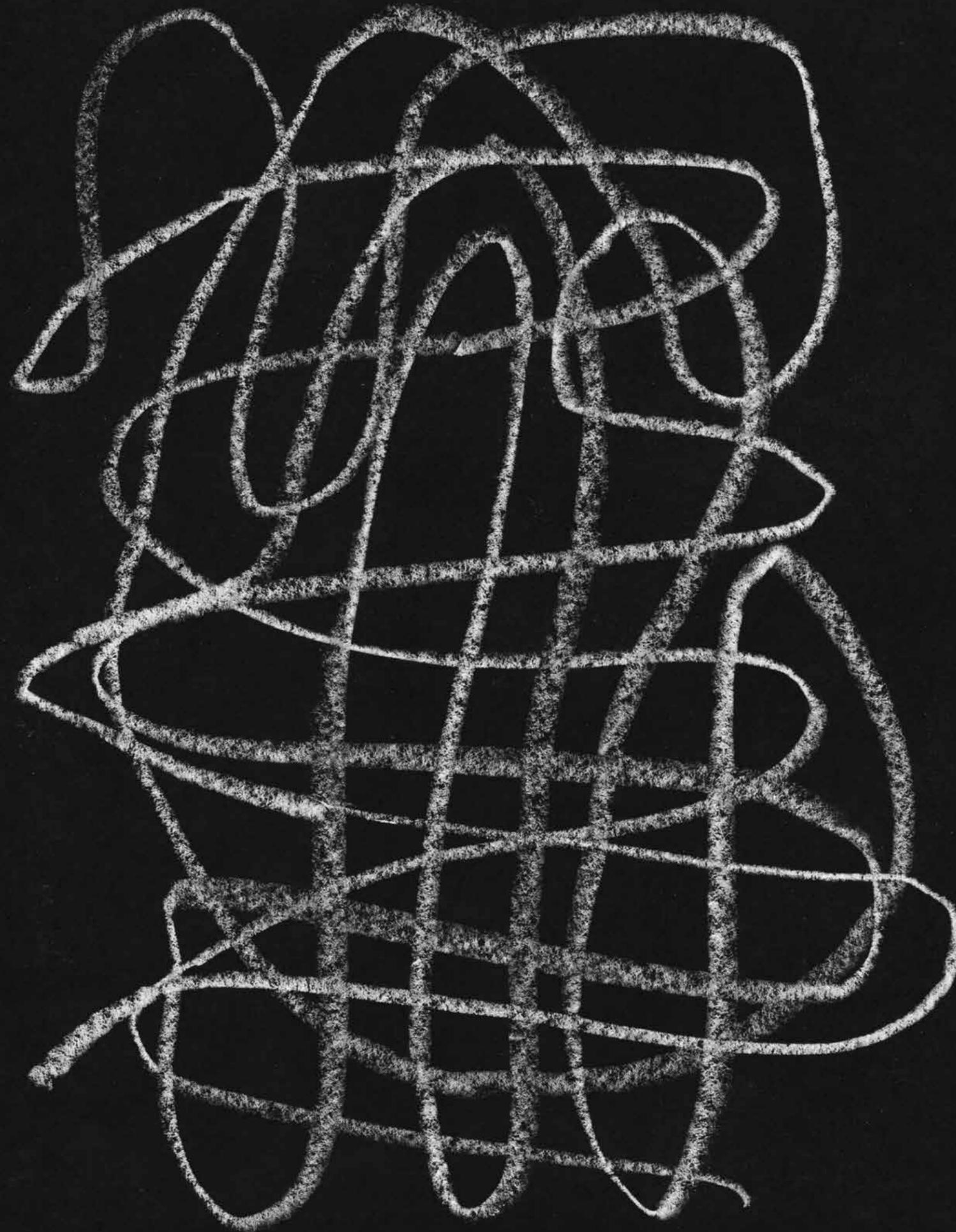
Yield to traffic

Zoom

straight

home.

ONTARIO SOLOMON



## Pulchritudinous

If you tell me your story  
I'll tell you mine  
do not eclipse  
the blind of the tunnel

controlling your soul  
let it  
blow in the wind  
let it  
be spare on the nebula  
of the universe's

unrestrained  
birds  
so high

like the dust wiped  
from the rain  
in the morning light

CHRISTY WENAS COX

## I know I am

the same as the stories of life  
that are shocking to you.

JOHN TAYLOR

## Don't Believe in Ghost

We carry things inside  
that no one else can see.  
They hold us down like anchors,  
they drown us out at sea. I look  
up to the sky,  
nothing there to see.  
But if I don't believe in him, why would  
he believe in me.

ARGENIS CASTRO

## Haiku Prayer

Oh love, life is good.  
I learn to count my blessings  
heavenly father.

MICHAEL ORIMOLADE

## It's Thursday

I'm going to go home,  
eat and go to sleep.  
A week of hard work  
is about to end.  
Next week, I'll get paid  
and then,

ANONYMOUS

## Single Rose

True love lies behind a single rose.  
If you give a woman a dozen roses,  
without a doubt, it looks beautiful.  
But she is not focused on any single rose.

She's enamored by the bunch.

If you give a woman a single rose,  
she will focus on that one single rose.  
She will feel the connection to that single rose.  
And that's all a single rose represents.

PETER CASTANEDA

## and i didn't even know it

I don't have any money  
I didn't come to probation  
I went to the bank  
My girl called me on the phone  
She called me to complain  
She tried to make a scene

CHRISTOPHER WOODEN

and I didn't even know it.  
and I didn't even know it.

## Out There

I don't know exactly where,  
but it was like  
twelve, midnight,  
two young guys  
were selling.  
A little guy,  
like 13 years old or so,  
was buying.

That's not supposed to happen.

What they sell  
is destroying my world.

CARLOS MICHEL

## Past Tensions

They knew how bad it was  
Notice, this is past tense  
It's not my fault I was born  
from two addicts  
That had drugs stashed in a cabinet  
Both mother and father sharing a passion  
Passing a needle back and forth  
was traditional practice  
Had me eating out of the garbage  
I just started to scavenge  
Turned out to be so humble  
And respectfully mannered  
instead of living the life of a savage

ANDREW DELEONARDIS



## The Silent Affair

I wake up, I think of you.  
I lean over, I grab you.  
When I'm mad, you're there.  
When I'm happy, you're there.  
When you die, I bring you back to life.  
You're the reason I argue with my wife.  
Some may think, you run my life,  
and I believe they're right.  
Sometimes we don't even sleep at night.  
If we go out to eat, you're the first to know.  
If I'm at a funeral, everyone knows.  
It's just not right. And I'm tired of it.  
I can't keep this relationship going.  
It has to stop.  
I hate what we've become,  
I'm a slave to you.  
I love you.  
I hate you. Phone.  
Leave me alone.

PETER CASTANEDA

## The Things I Gained

I'm leaving with my head high.  
My confidence level went from a 4 to a 9.  
I can now join the conversation,  
and talk to people.  
Before I was a mouse.  
I bit my tongue, even when I had wonderful thoughts.  
But you guys took the time to listen.  
I walked in, on probation.  
I walk out, proud.

ANONYMOUS

I want

to be better  
than me.

JOHN TAYLOR

## Thursdays

I was never into writing  
never into poems  
but along came this program  
it changed my mind  
it changed a lot of things  
come Thursday, I know it's time  
freedom  
passion  
the words, the story, the lesson  
it's all an expression  
to gain confidence, self-esteem  
and most of all  
it's a gain of one's true self  
reading and writing, it's a lifestyle  
come Thursdays, my courage level rises  
and stays with me all week  
it reloads every Thursday  
when I meet up with the group  
just like me  
in this life, sometimes, that's all you need  
a sheet of paper that you write on will not  
judge you  
it's yours, write away, thank you, Thursdays.

PETER CASTANEDA

## Fried Chicken

I.  
The batter is ready,  
the seasoning too.

The frying pan's hot,  
where are you?  
In the barn?  
In the supermarket?  
In the fridge?

II.  
Found at last in the least expected place  
right on the table, in front of my face  
marinating while I was salivating,  
already dipped in flour  
I figure in an hour  
you'll be on my plate.

III.  
You were hunted,  
seasoned  
fried  
and eaten.

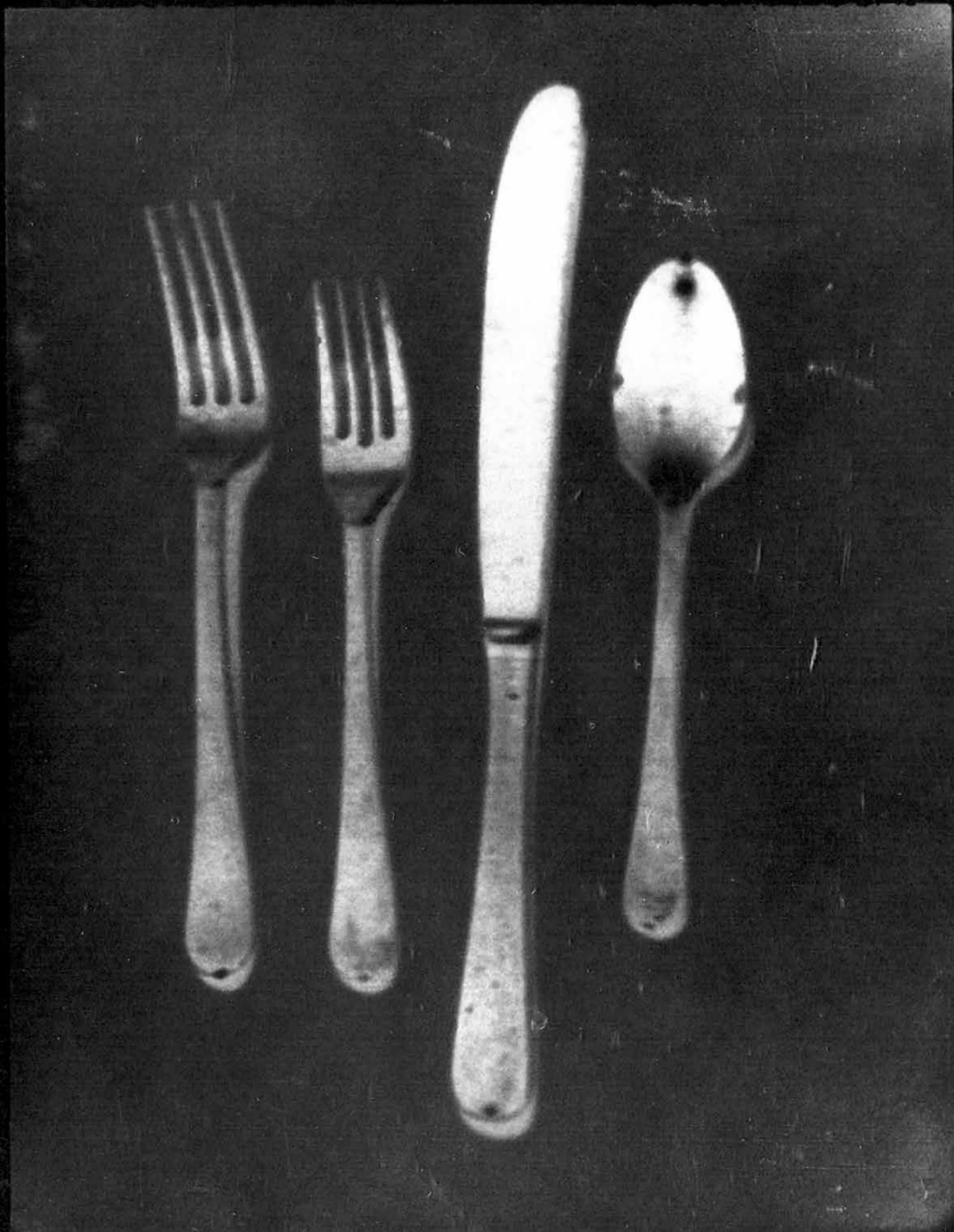
Now that I'm  
full, the battle is  
beaten.

CYNTHIA FINLEY

## Bella Rose

Your skin and flesh,  
smooth.  
As red as you are,  
I wonder  
if you are angry.  
I'm still going to put you  
on the cutting board.  
And chop your hat off.  
  
And make a tomato pie.

ABU TAHIRU SILLAH



## Food For Thought

Chitlings, I don't eat.  
But I understand the history, so deep.  
You eat this. We don't want it.  
Thrown out, just like we were,  
from a society where they did not fit.  
Made to feel like we were what ran through chitlings,  
something to be discarded, not loved, not appreciated.  
Today we still fight what our ancestors were given,  
food poured into their bellies, minds, and souls.  
In the end, just like chitlings,  
we will become the delicacy that everyone admires, upholds.  
Chitlings, I don't eat.  
But I understand the history, so deep.

MARLITA DALTON

## Deception

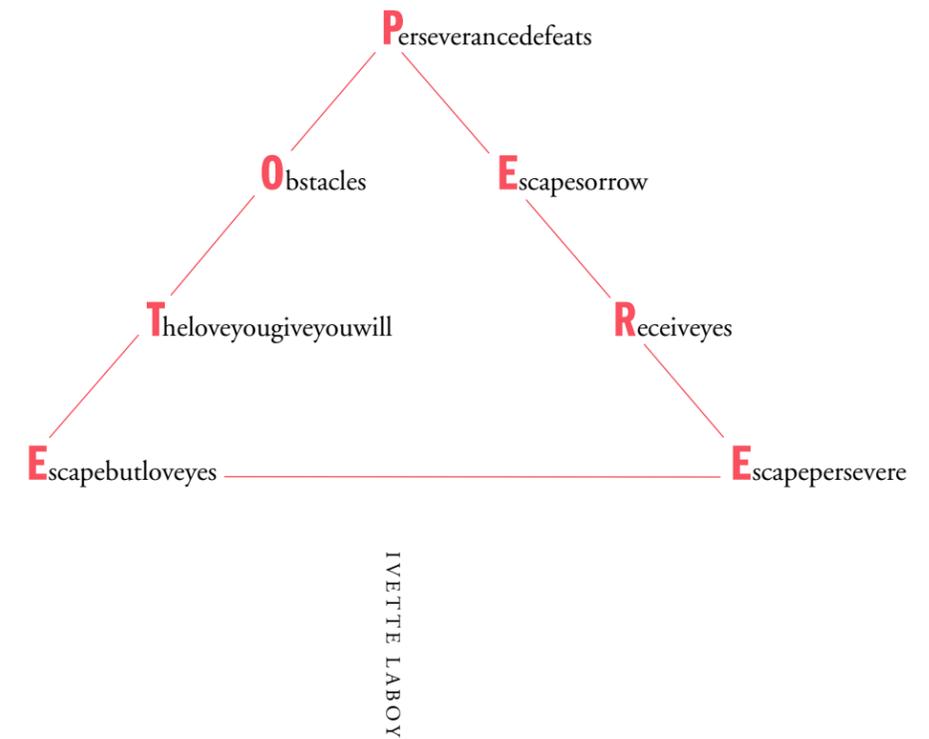
Like an ace up your sleeve,  
truth is in your face  
with no mother, nor race,  
but hides in plain sight.  
Deception conceives  
a steed of the devil,  
a seed in rubble,  
but that ain't no lily  
baby, more like a Venus Fly  
Trap that preys off how you  
act, ooooo deception bites  
back, so don't slack, cause  
you're playing with power beyond reach,  
setbacks you can't teach,  
but voices of deception  
say, "Preach brother, preach!"

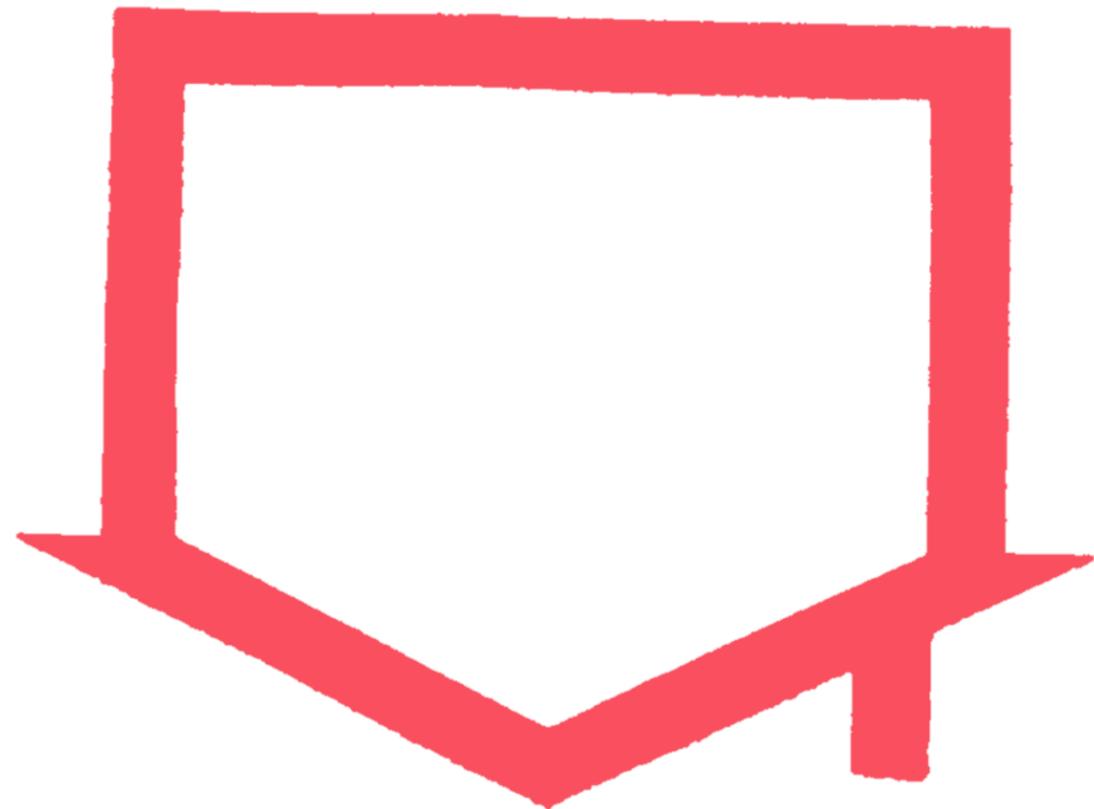
GABRIEL BAERGA

## To Work

On block 45,  
all the stores close at five,  
because  
all the robbers come out and clock in at six.

ABU TAHIRU SILLAH





## The Narrated Story

Three streets over  
from where I live,  
on University,  
they got a store  
and a park.

Out front they shot two kids.  
They died. It was by mistake.  
Dude came out with a gun,  
wrong place, wrong time.

And I knew them, too.

They were humble kids,  
They worked. They went to school.  
They kept to themselves.  
That's about it.

This happens to a lot of people.  
If it's not the criminals,  
it's the law. I mean,  
what am I supposed to do?  
I got to get home. You  
got to get home, too.

MICHAEL GUZMAN

## Both Sides

Trying to be another person while being yourself,  
the truth is always on the highest shelf.

But that shelf will break,  
with lies

and fall. You can't  
breathe underwater.

When you're unmasked, all that's left is a blank stare.

And the people you thought were with you were never really there.

Time flies, feelings die.

And you wanna' ask me why?

I tell you, that's what happens

when you

try to play both sides.

LLOYD JONES

**H**eal

**E**very

**L**oving

**P**erson

FRANCINE BURBRIDGE

## Homeless Prayer

There is smoke  
in the station.  
Police dogs bark  
in the street.  
Car horns blow.  
Pickpockets watch.  
It's raining.  
It's snowing.  
God, you try sleeping  
while park benches cry,  
sidewalks laugh,  
and lice bite.  
And here come the bed bugs.  
I don't even have a mattress.

I drink.  
I smoke.  
I gossip.  
The devil laughs  
and preachers pray.  
They say, *Repent.*  
*Go to rehab.*

And the church choir sings:  
*Dear Lord*  
*Dear Lord*  
*Dear Lord*  
*Help him help himself.*

And I say, *Give me strength to carry on.*  
*Please God, Amen.*

HARRY THOMAS

## If I Shall Die

Think only this of me.  
I was born on the mountains  
And raised in the jungle  
in the secret  
land of the village  
of Nkambe, near  
the Tea plantation of Ndu town,  
in the generation of the Tamfu, where  
the souls of our grandparents  
rest in glory.

Today I shall hand over the take  
to my children and they will  
do the same for their offspring.  
And together we shall sing  
to the drums of thee, gracious spirit.

MARTIN TAMFU

## Life's a Marathon

Cause I'm running from the devil  
Digging my own grave  
And grabbing my own shovel  
Making my own fort  
Clutching my own medal  
Made up a book of rules  
Making my own level  
You people playing tough  
You're fruity – just like pebbles  
No time for playing games  
I'm changing my whole schedule  
Cooking in the kitchen  
No gas  
And no kettle

JABREE HOLDER

## G

etting wet when it rains  
roses in the air  
burnt toast  
aroma of bacon  
chatter  
chirping  
the sound of cars flying by  
these things tell me, *you're alive.*

CYNTHIA FINLEY

## Waiting Room Ghost

Why am I waiting so long?  
Am I in trouble? I don't even  
remember. It could have been  
mistaken identity. I feel  
the frustration in the room,  
the anxiety of doom.  
They too, have been waiting.  
Give me a chance to show you  
I can be good. If you give me  
a chance, I can show you I am  
someone, somebody, anybody.

CHERYL BROWN

## anyone

who feels they can't see me  
is in dire need of an eye exam.

LYZIEL QUIET STORM KAHYLIL XYRILLE WYLIE

## It's Times Like This

I wish I didn't exist.  
I wish I could take a long walk  
and fade off into the mist.  
Always angry,  
I stay with clenched fists.  
Something's gotta' give,  
why am I so pissed?

I'll tell you why.  
No lie.  
*You're gonna' die.*

These words cut deeper than any blade.  
These words are the truth.  
You may not want to hear them.  
But your ears can't block out the sound.

The truth is loud.  
The pain is steel.  
I say what I feel.  
I'm death. I'm real.

PETER CASTANEDA

## Poem #0

Perched high,  
All white,  
What does it take?  
Paint?  
Brush?  
Idea?  
I wait.

ABU TAHIRU SILLAH

## Blank Canvas

CYNTHIA FINLEY

I don't use

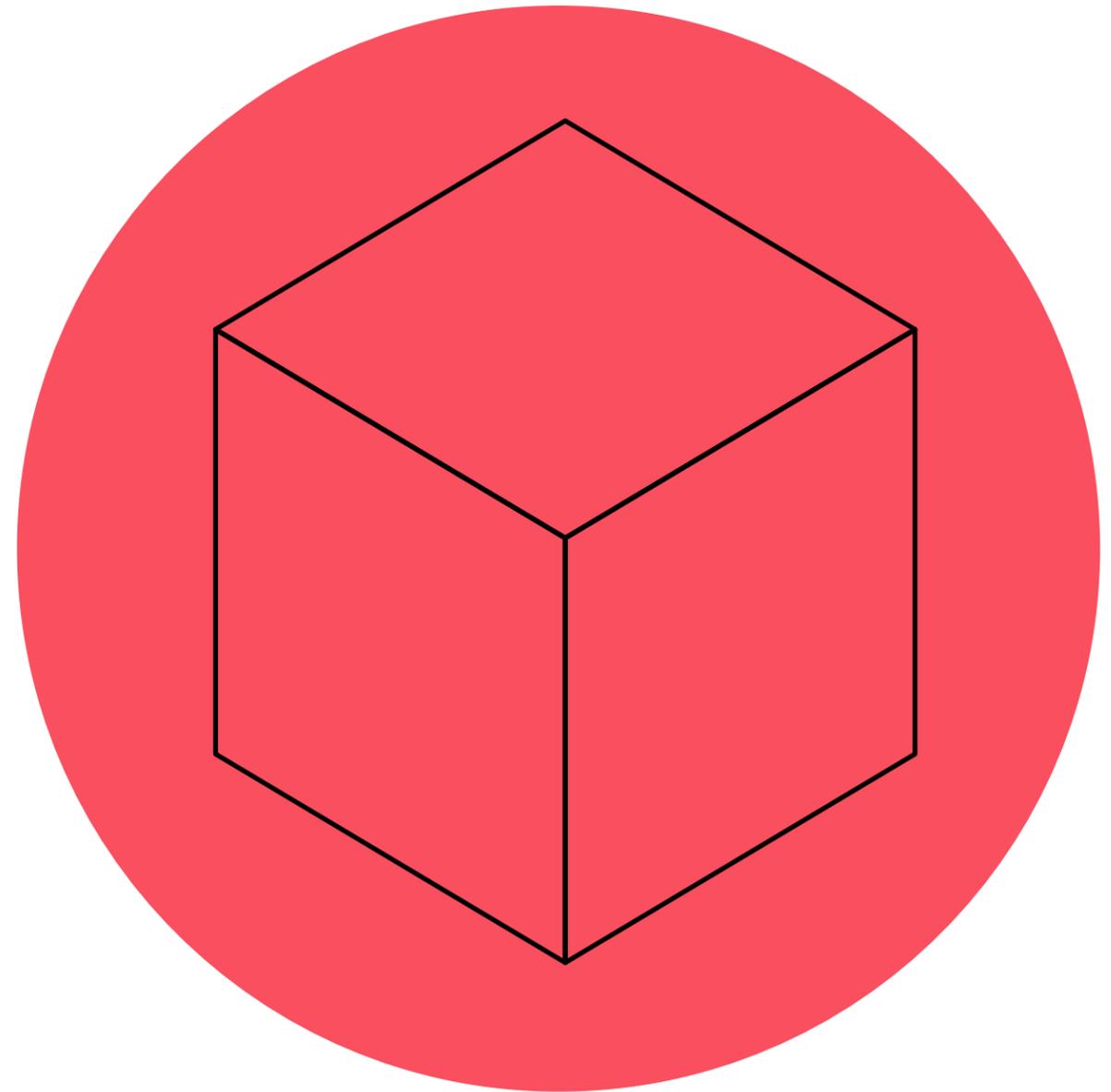
## my future as a Rubik's Cube.

LYZIEL QUIET STORM KAHYLIL XYRILLE WYLIE

### A Short Wicked Tale of Woe

Poor dear old Grandma begged and pleaded  
for her Little Red to go to bed.  
Grandma foresaw the dangers ahead.  
But Red was none at all convinced. Dazed  
with stars in her Bambi eyes, she  
waved dear old Grandma off with a  
sweet goodbye. Far too late you see, for  
that Big Ol' Wolf had found his way  
through Reds' skin and into her heart. A darkness  
in those big brown eyes  
built, and within her a sea trembled  
from hip to thigh, intricate pieces of  
herself, so soft in that Big Ol' Wolf's  
palm. The more that wolf  
possessed Red, the more he hungered.  
What an appetite indeed. Desolate  
hours of woe ravaged him  
and longing swelled in the neon night.  
Soon, Red grew hungry for flight.  
The very same lips that spilt  
endearing, framed phrases, I  
*bid you adieu became farewell to you.*  
She gave him the finger. Then she gave him  
her back.

TIFFANY MARIE MARRERO



## What People Don't Know

Behind a smile is pain  
that endures hate.  
Anger helps it heal.

LLOYD JONES

## Bless

Can't tell lies, so I must confess.  
From that day you left,  
my whole life's been a mess.  
Baby, tell me, why you so stressed?  
And now when we speak, why so tense?  
We used to be the closest friends.  
This separation makes no sense.  
Late nights in the park holding hands,  
I've been loving you ever since.  
Our lives used to be filled with romance  
I pray to Jah, I get one more chance.  
For you to get an abortion, I refuse to accept.  
I always hoped we could start a family.  
I know it wasn't wasted time we spent.  
The love, just got up and went?

TAQIY WITTER

## Peace Love Respect

To our father and children,  
be with us,  
carry us through trials, temptations  
and tribulations.

REVEREND ST. MICHAEL BARNES

## Life is

gentle.  
We create the bottomless pits.

JOHN TAYLOR

## Exchange Rate

The dark currency in my heart  
is you, a hostage waiting trade  
for arms and ammunition.

I'm about to pass you off  
when you strangle me.

*Don't walk out of here without me.*

*The love we make  
will be your strongest weapon.*

DAVE JOHNSON

## I'm Not Crazy

you know?

Even before I woke up this morning I was already staring at my bedroom wall,

thinking in silence because I'm not crazy  
you know?

I saw my life story like a silent cartoon in black and white images running across the ceiling.

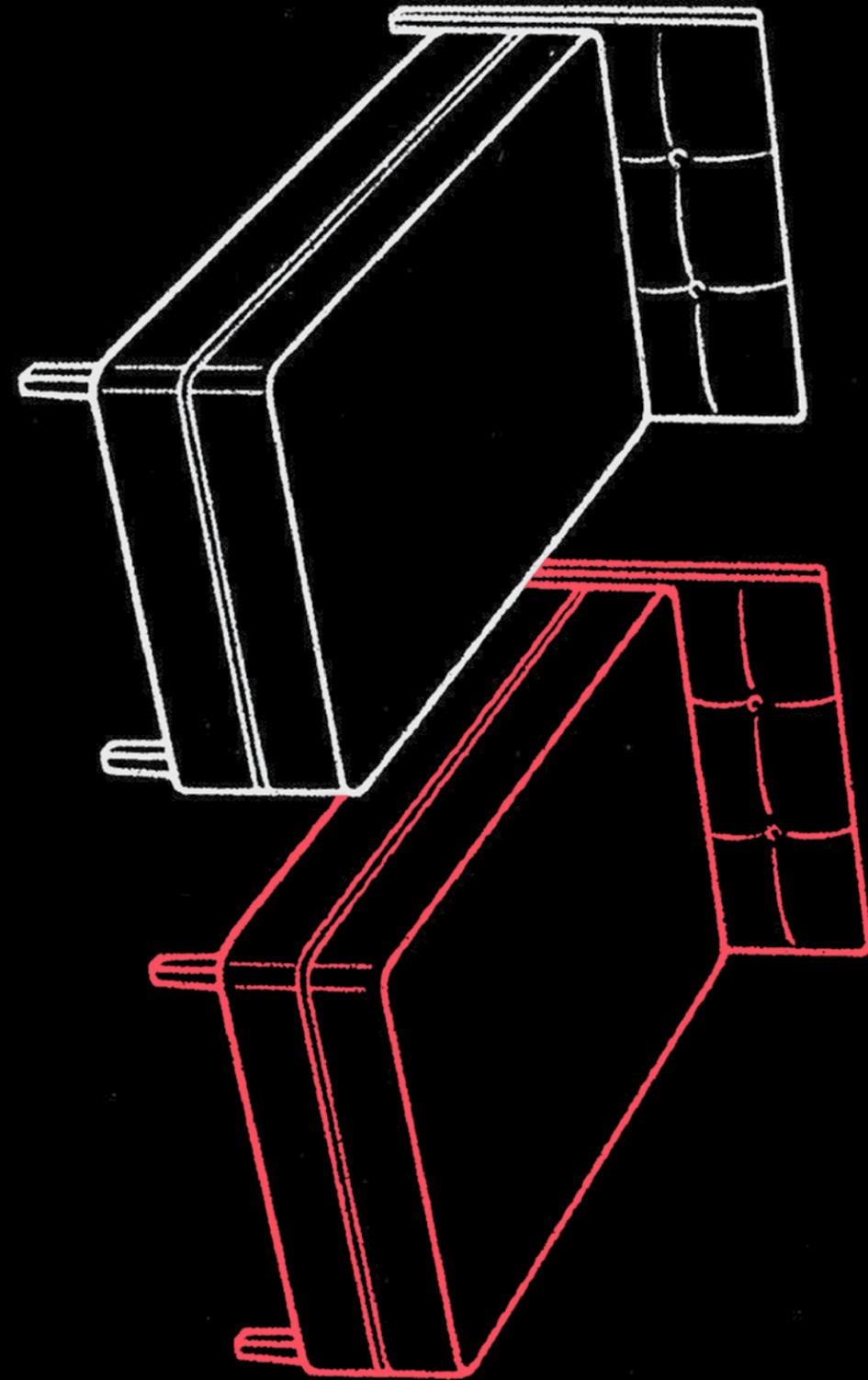
But I'm not crazy.  
you know?

Then the Devil showed up and the white spaces turned red and I heard music, the Devil's music.

But I'm not crazy  
you know?

You know?

CRISTY BAPTISTE



## The Guy with the Butterfly Tattoo

The guy with the butterfly tattoo.  
The guy with the butterfly tattoo.  
The guy with the butterfly tattoo.

He's white.

He's a cartoon.

He's a poet too.

CRISTY BAPTISTE

## Listen,

Millie's down the street trying to sing a song.  
Bobby's on the phone, but he can't  
get a dial tone.  
Mary went to the pet store and bought  
a pair of doves.  
Gabrielle's playing the saxophone.  
Debbie's dog got a new bone.

Are you listening to me?

CYNTHIA FINLEY

## Stress Test

What the hell for?  
I don't need this now

I deal with it everyday  
From the smallest things to the largest  
Can't I go a day without it  
Holidays are good, REALLY?  
Bills, over-indulgent eating, drinking, sleeping  
And who knows what else  
I don't need this now

Families gather and we find out cousins, aunts and uncles  
Are not who we thought they are  
You figure that one out  
I don't need this now

At work there is so much to do  
Who has enough time in eight hours  
The job is simple with complicated people  
Simple tasks overblown  
Major tasks understated  
What's with all this new stuff  
Still trying to major the old stuff  
I don't need this now

I look at everything around me  
Joy, sorrow, happiness  
No matter what's going on  
There is stress  
I guess, I will accept this, now.

DARRYL WILLIAMS

## Grand~Ma Mafor

We feel empty and redundant  
out of thou sight.

We know you have gone before  
to prepare a better place,  
where the spirit continues  
to protect this great family of  
the Nsames.

We are now married, blessed with  
many children and grandchildren,  
all because of thee.

Let your glorious tale reign forever.

MARTIN TAMFU

## ~for my followers

so sorry to say  
but I like it,  
it rubs my ego  
makes me smile  
makes me relevant  
and you,  
well, envious

KATIUSKA REYES

## Life Expectation

Accusation  
Destination  
Jail or Probation  
Drug Abuse, Medication, Different Situation  
Bad Communication  
I can't pay attention  
I'm busy claiming my own proclamation.

*Be successful,*

that's my life, expectation.

CRISTY BAPTISTE

## It's Ugly and Painful

but everyone wants  
to promote social inclusion  
irreverent and revolutionary

ready to give it their best shot  
success is in the sauce  
this time it's a different  
locker room strategy

we question every single part  
in this corner  
of this stage  
out of the ring  
leading the charge  
preparing for the toughest fight

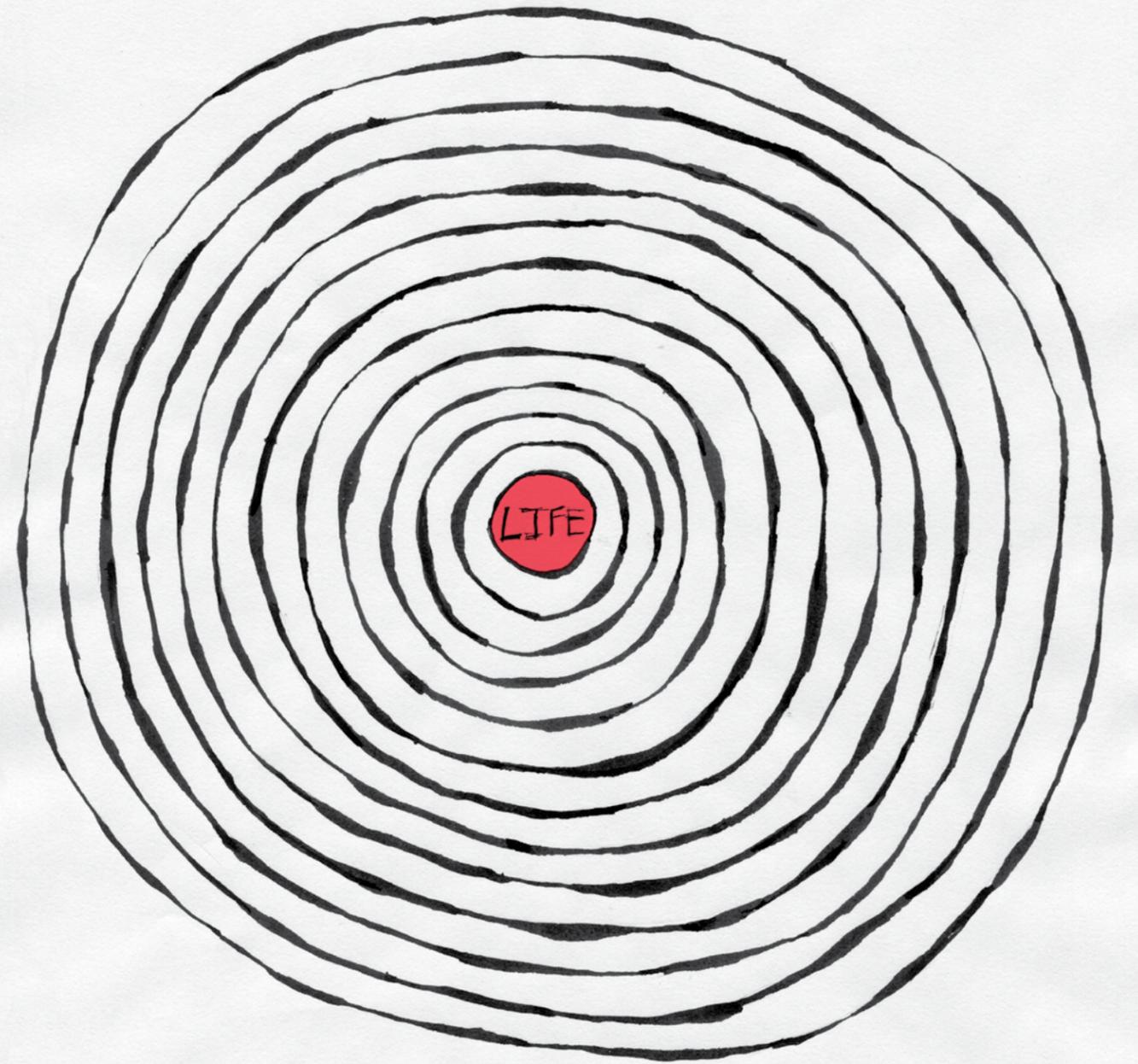
gore or glory  
in the end it will get  
you a lifetime of stares

ESTABAN RIVERA

Today,

I'm a life.  
I'm not just passing by.

CRISTY BAPTISTE



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