

WAVE
WAVE
WAVE

FREE
FREE
FREE

E'A
E'A
E'A

R*
X
Z
Z

ER
ER
ER

SE
SE
SE

#

KN
KN
KN

2
2
2

*
*
*

4
4
4

ε

WINTER

'14
'14
'14

Contents

Arrows

Arenazia Cuevas

I Am My Father

Andrew DeLeonardis

on the avenue of ambition

Ontario Solomon

Excuse Me, Ordinary

Harry Thomas

I believe

Taisha Williams

Strong Soul

Infallible Davis

Staying Away

Ruben Hernandez

Yesterday in the Back of My Building

Tahara Lilly

My Broken Dreams

Cheryl Brown

Mask

Christy Wenas Cox

Sticks

Tiffany Marie Marrero

O

Thomas Fucaloro

my eyes

Abu Tahiru Sillah

Habitat

C.D. Hermelin

Mi Desayuno (My Breakfast)

Estaban Rivera

Bustelo

Cheryl Brown

Bacon Bits

Noel Cuadrado

Don't cry,

Christy Wenas Cox

The Good Fight

Marlita Dalton

Homesick

Argenis Castro

I don't want

Tiffany Marie Marrero

Defiant

Andrew DeLeonardis

Málaga, Costa del Sol

Christy Wenas Cox

Singel

Christy Wenas Cox

Coconuts

Cheryl Brown

Visuals

Christopher Wooden

12/15/97

Napoleon Felipe

Happiness can

Liz Pagan

John Rushmore (5th period in school)

Yasmine Lancaster

Candy Crush,

Barbara McCain

Violence

John Taylor

1 2 3 4 5 6

Tahara Lilly

Tripping NYC

Ontario Solomon

Pulchritudinous

Christy Wenas Cox

I know I am

John Taylor

Don't Believe in Ghost

Argenis Castro

Haiku Prayer

Michael Orimolade

It's Thursday

Anonymous

Single Rose

Peter Castaneda

and I didn't even know it

Christopher Wooden

Out There

Carlos Michel

Past Tensions

Andrew DeLeonardis

The Silent Affair

Peter Castaneda

The Things I Gained

Anonymous

I want

John Taylor

Thursdays

Peter Castaneda

Fried Chicken

Cynthia Finley

Bella Rose

Abu Tahiru Sillah

Food For Thought

Marlita Dalton

Deception

Gabriel Baerga

To Work

Abu Tahiru Sillah

Poetree

Ivette Laboy

The Narrated Story

Michael Guzman

Both Sides

Lloyd Jones

Help

Francine Burbridge

Homeless Prayer

Harry Thomas

If I Shall Die

Martin Tamfu

Life's a Marathon

Jabree Holder

G

Cynthia Finley

It's Times Like This

Peter Castaneda

Waiting Room Ghost

Cheryl Brown

anyone

Lyziel Quiet Storm Kahylil
Xyrrille Wylie

Poem #0

Abu Tahiru Sillah

Blank Canvas

Cynthia Finley

I don't use

Lyziel Quiet Storm Kahylil
Xyrrille Wylie

A Short Wicked Tale of Woe

Tiffany Marie Marrero

What People Don't Know

Lloyd Jones

Bless

Taqiy Witter

Peace Love Respect

Reverend St. Michael Barnes

Life is

John Taylor

Exchange Rate

Dave Johnson

I'm Not Crazy

Cristy Baptiste

The Guy with the Butterfly Tattoo

Cristy Baptiste

Listen,

Cynthia Finley

Stress Test

Darryl Williams

Grand-Ma Mafor

Martin Tamfu

~for my followers

Katuska Reyes

Life Expectation

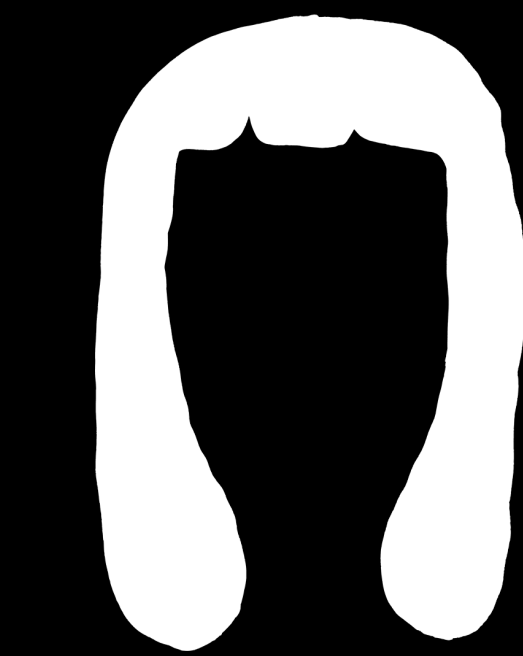
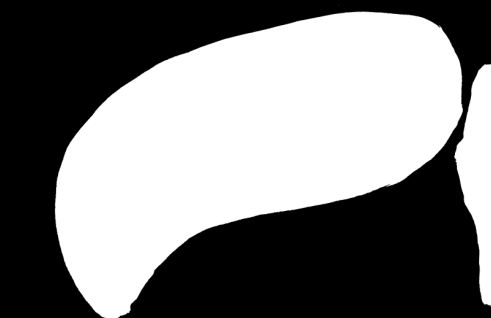
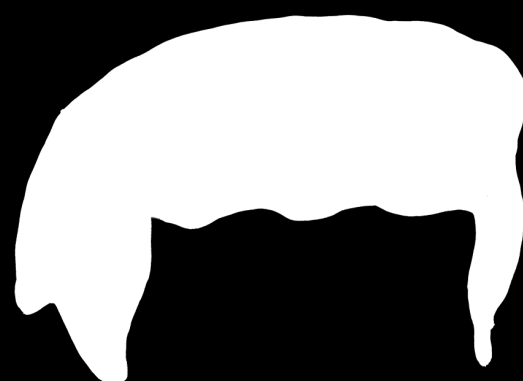
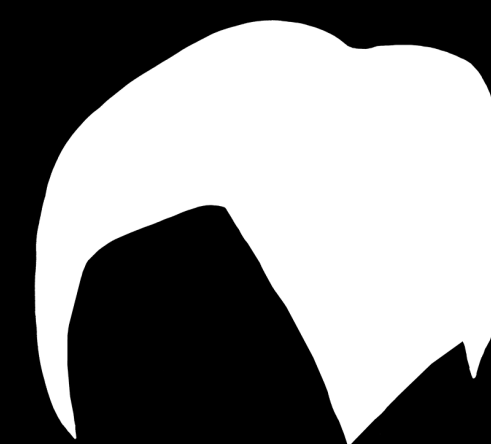
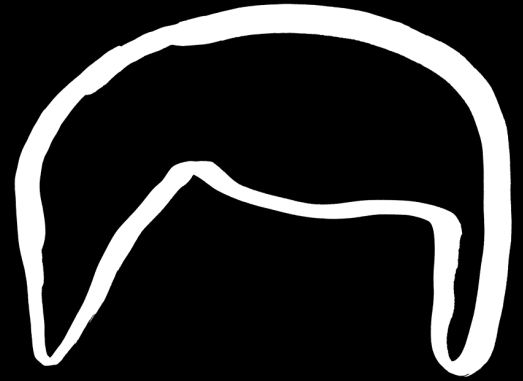
Cristy Baptiste

It's Ugly and Painful

Estaban Rivera

Today,

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!

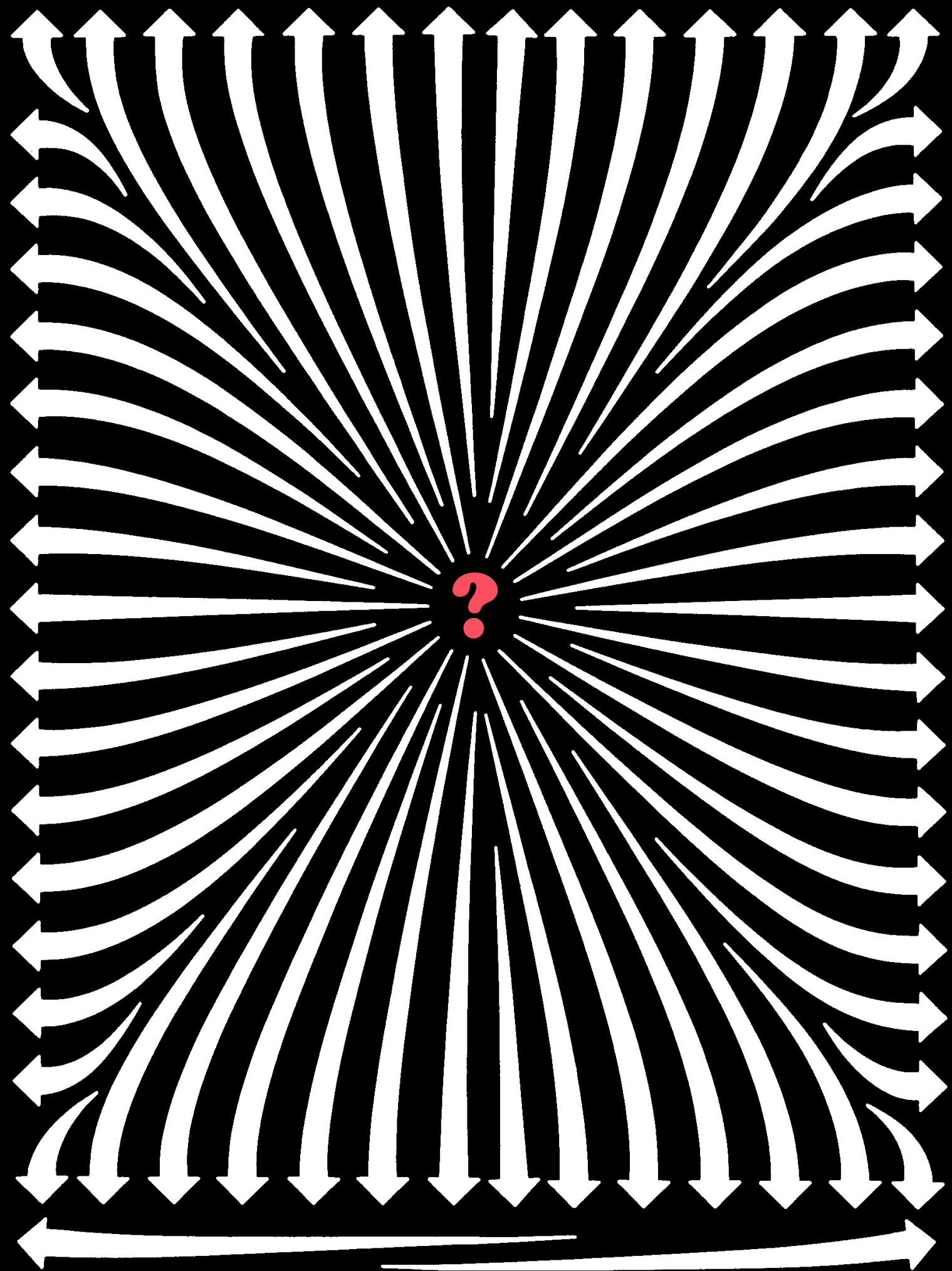
— The Editors

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.

ARENZIA 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
i l
r i
s n
t. e

a
r
e

m
a
d
e.

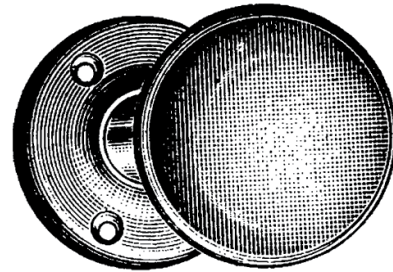


ONTARIO SOLOMON

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

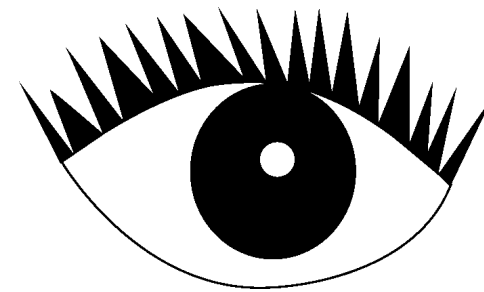
miss you

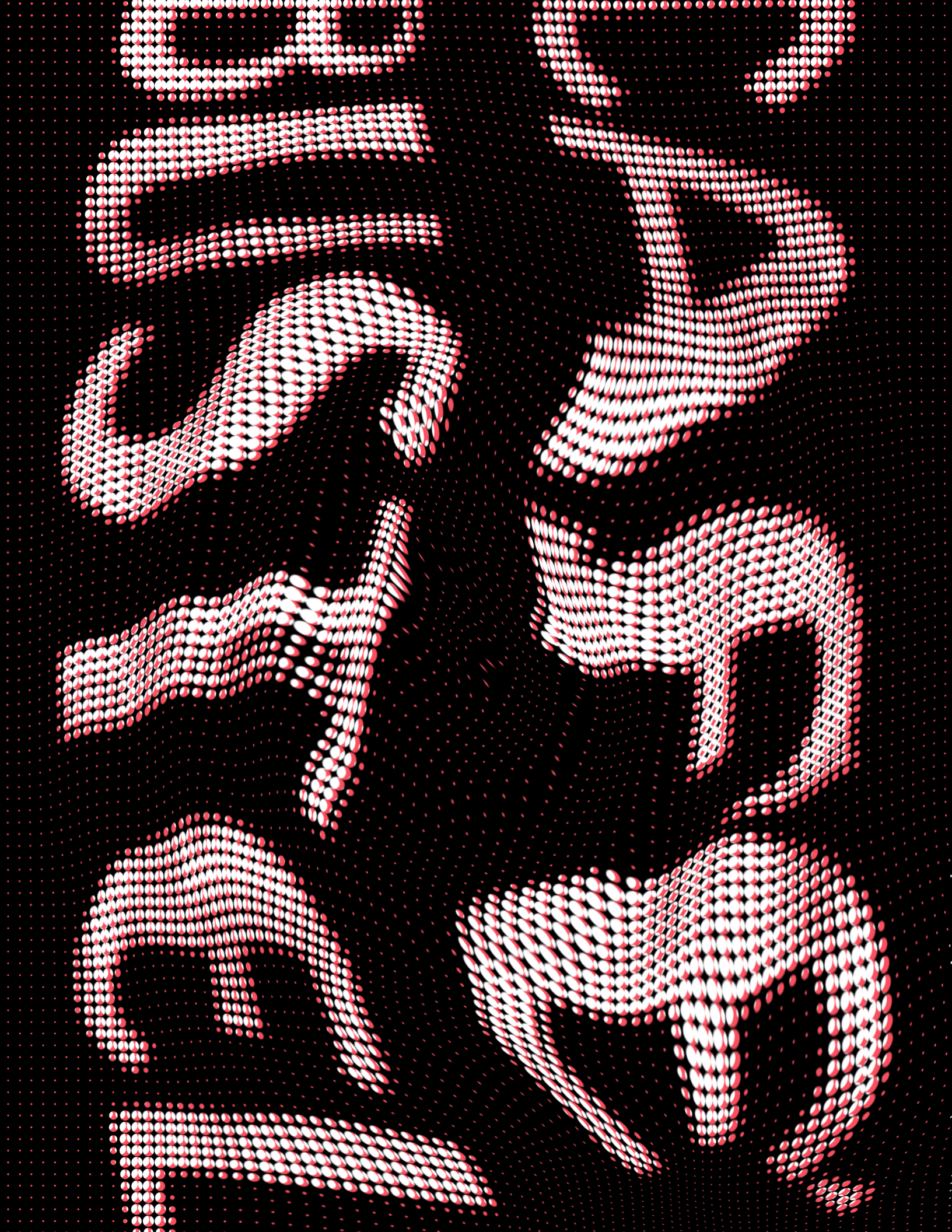
ABU TAHIRU SILLAH

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**.

vi-o-lin (vī'ə-līn') *n.* *Abbr. v.* **1.** A stringed instrument played with a bow, having four strings tuned at intervals of a fifth, an unfretted fingerboard, and a shallower body than the viol, and capable of great flexibility in range, tone, and dynamics. Also informally called "fiddle." **2.** A violinist. [Italian *violino*, diminutive of *viola*, VIOLA (instrument).]

vi-o-lin-ist (vī'ə-līn'ist) *n.* A person who plays the violin.

vi-o-list (vē-ō'list) *n.* **1.** A person who plays the viola. **2.** A person who plays a viol.

vi-o-lon-cel-list (vē'ə-lən-chěl'ist) *n.* A cellist.

vi-o-lon-cel-lo (vē'ə-lən-chěl'ō) *n., pl. -los.* A cello (*see*). [Italian, diminutive of *violone*, VIOLONE.]

vio-lo-ne (vyō-lō'nā) *n.* **1.** A 16-foot organ stop yielding stringlike tones similar to a cello. **2.** A double bass. [Italian, augmentative of *viola*, VIOLA (instrument).]

vi-os-ter-ol (vī-ōs'tə-rōl') *n.* Ultraviolet irradiated ergosterol, vitamin D₂ (*see*). [(ULTRA)VIO(LET) + STEROL.]

VIP *Informal.* very important person.

vi-per (vī'pər) *n.* **1.** Any of various venomous Old World snakes of the family Viperidae; especially, a common Eurasian species, *Vipera berus*, which is also called "adder." **2.** A pit viper (*see*). **3.** Broadly, any venomous or supposedly venomous snake. **4.** A treacherous or malicious person. [Old French *vipere*, from Latin *vīpera*, snake, contracted from *vīpara* (unattested), "that which produces living young" (from the ancient belief that vipers were viviparous) : *vīvus*, alive (*see* **gwei-** in Appendix*) + *parere*, to produce (*see* **per-** in Appendix*.)]

vi-per-ine (vī'pər-īn, -pə-rīn') *adj.* Of, resembling, or characteristic of a viper.

vi-per-ous (vī'pər-əs) *adj.* **1.** Suggestive of a viper or venomous snake. **2.** Venomous; spiteful; malicious.

vir-gate² (vûr'gīt, -gāt') *n.* An early English area of varying value, often equivalent [Medieval Latin *virgāta*, from *virga*, a m Latin, twig. *See* **virga**.]

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

vir-gin (vûr'jīn) *n.* **1.** A person who has not 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 the constellation, **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 west*" (Gordon K. Lewis). **4.** Existing in nature but not processed or refined. **5.** Happening fortuitously: "*guiding my virgin steps on the hair*" (Maugham). **6.** Obtained directly from the source of vegetable oils. [Middle English, from Old English *virgin*, from Latin *virgō*† (stem *virgin-*).]

vir-gin-al¹ (vûr'jə-nəl) *adj.* **1.** Pertaining to, or befitting a virgin; chaste; pure: "*Virgins are the women they used to be*." (Sinclair Lewis). **2.** Reminiscent of virginity. **3.** Untouched or unsullied; fresh.

vir-gin-al² (vûr'jə-nəl) *n.* A small, legless chord popular in the 16th and 17th centuries. *plural: a pair of virginals*. [From VIRGIN (before) + *virginal* (*see* **virgin**), by young girls.)]

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

Vir-gin-ia¹ (vər-jīn'yə). A feminine given name.

Vir-gin-ia² (vər-jīn'yə). *Abbr. Va.* A Southern United States, occupying 40,815 square miles. Capital, Richmond. *See* map at **United States**. [From Latin *virgō* (stem *virgin-*), VIRGIN (after) + *land* (*see* **land**), "the virgin queen".] —**Vir-gin-ia** *City* (vər-jīn'yə). A village of Virginia, flourishing city in the late 19th century after the 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 "fence."

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

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

vir-gin-i-ty (vər-jīn'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

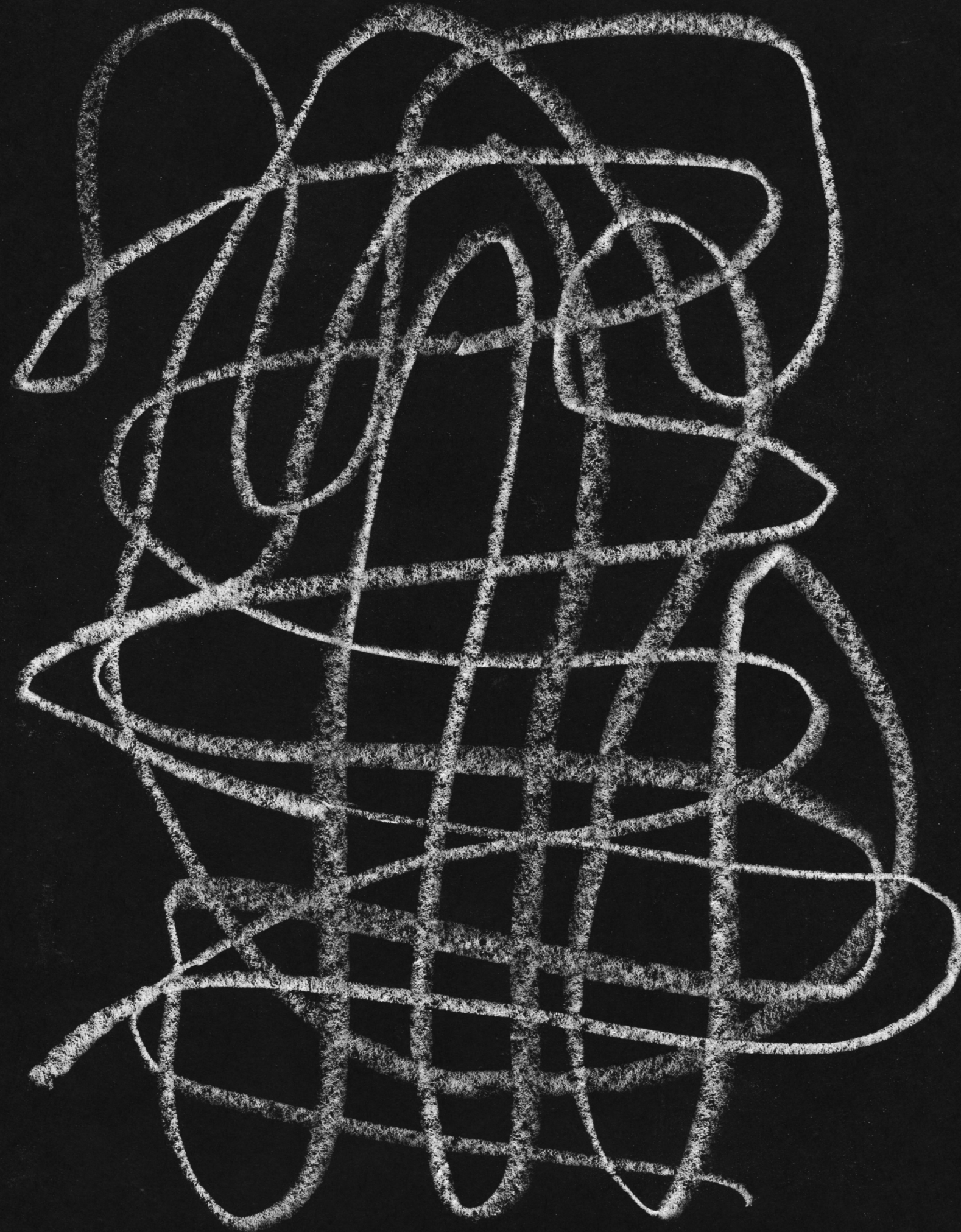
Yield to traffic

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

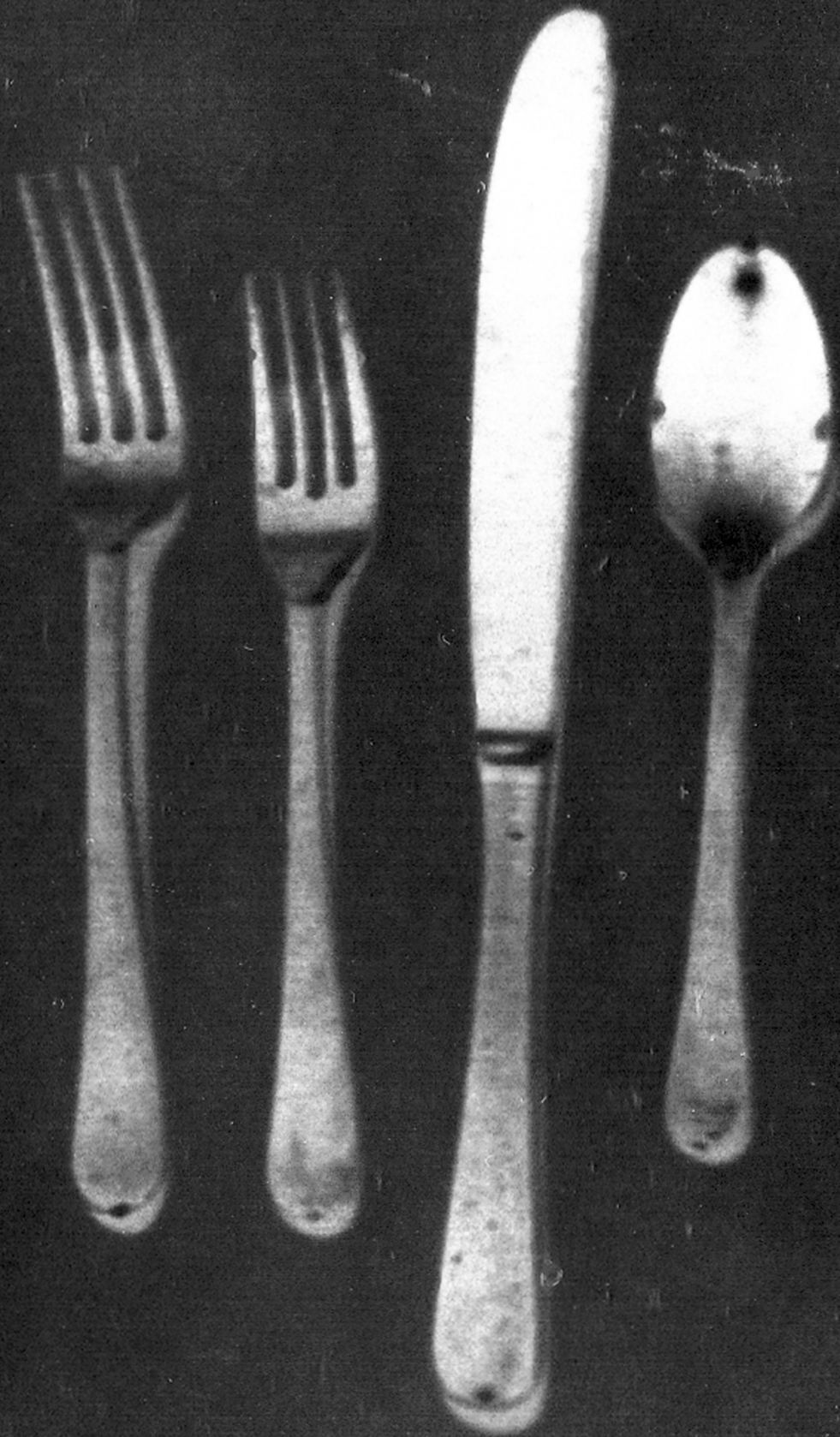
CYNTHIA FINLEY

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

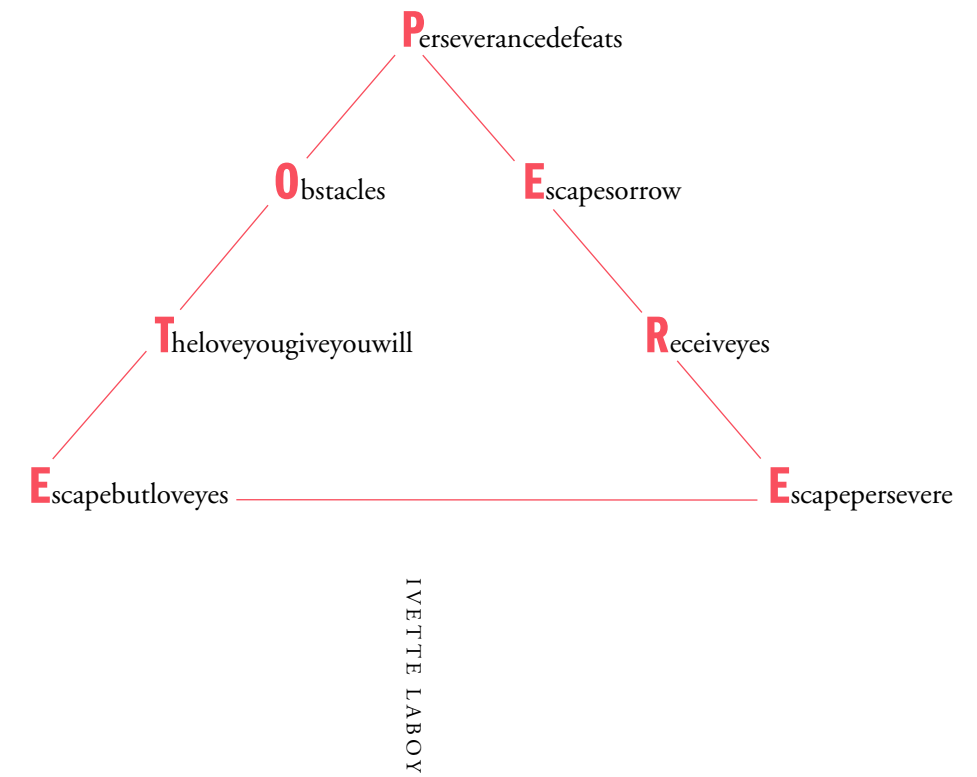
Like an ace up your sleeve,
truth is in your face
with no mother, nor race,
but hides in plain sight.
Deception conceives
a steed of the devil,
a seed in rubble,
but that ain't no lily
baby, more like a Venus Fly
Trap that preys off how you
act, ooooo deception bites
back, so don't slack, cause
you're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

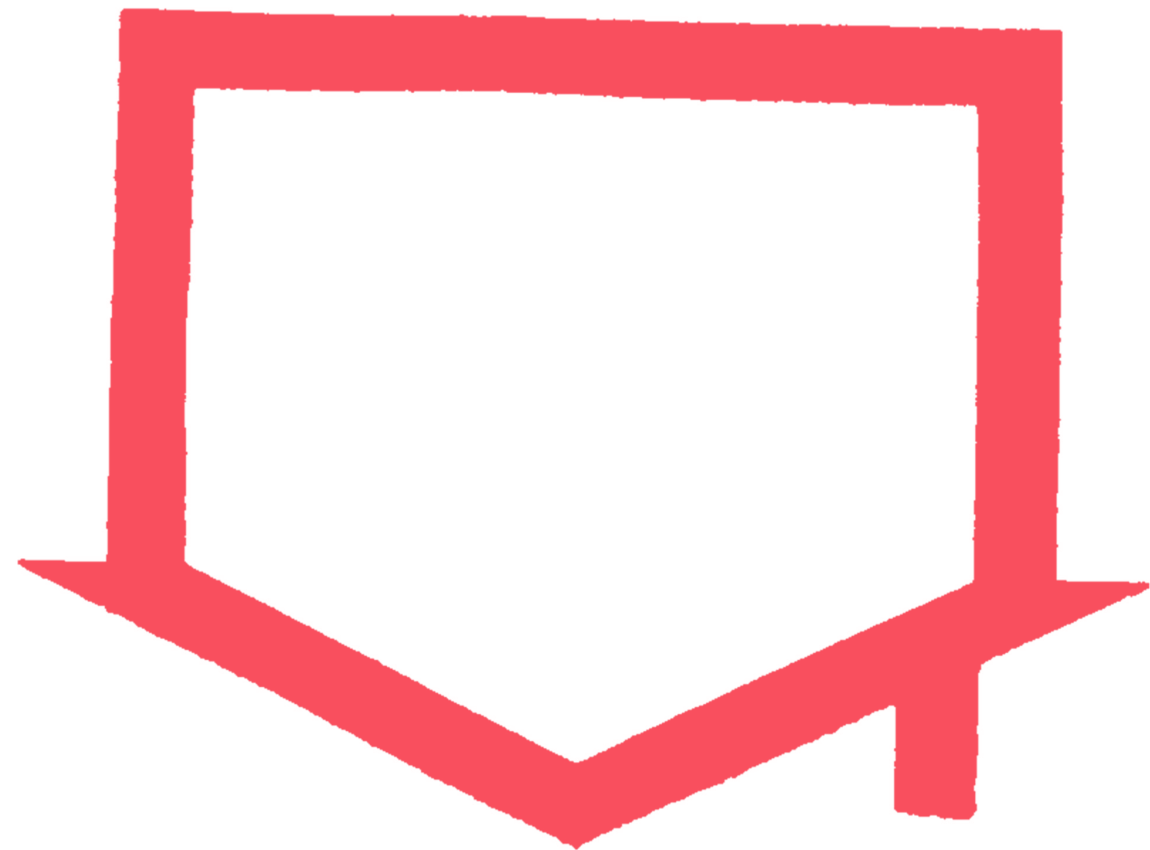
GABRIEL BAERGA

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

Heal

Every

Loving

Person

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

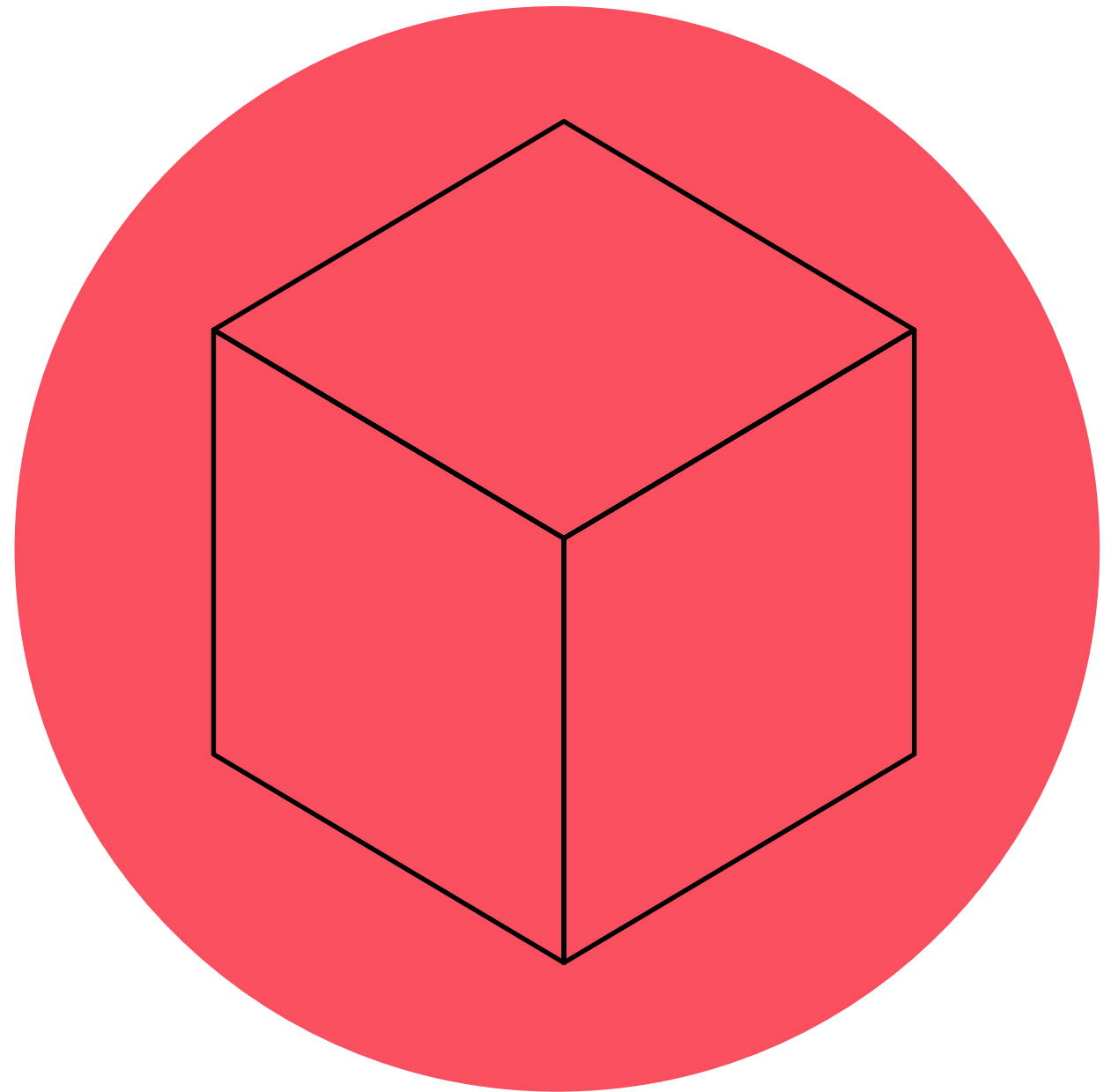
my future as a Rubik's Cube.

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.

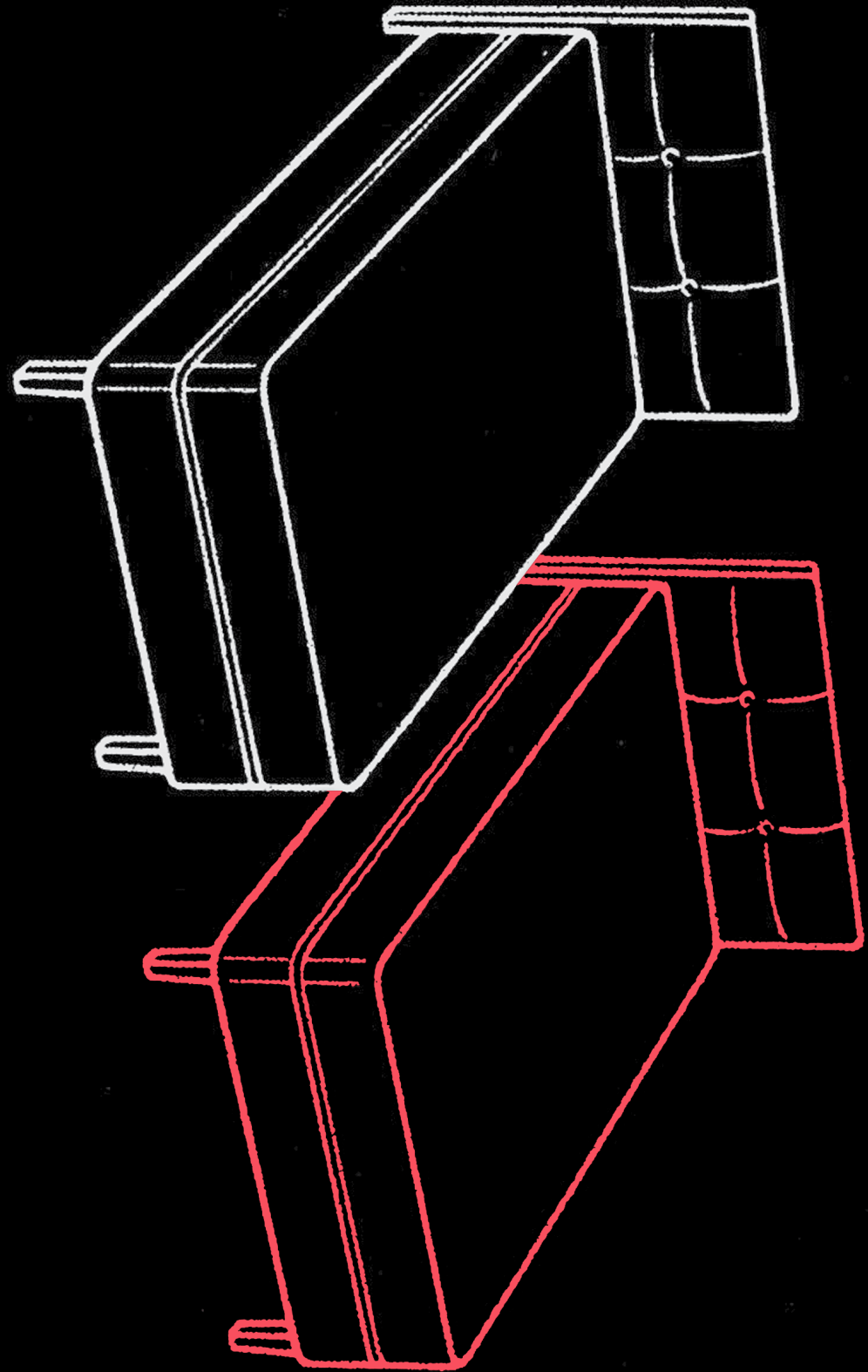
But I'm not crazy.
you know?

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

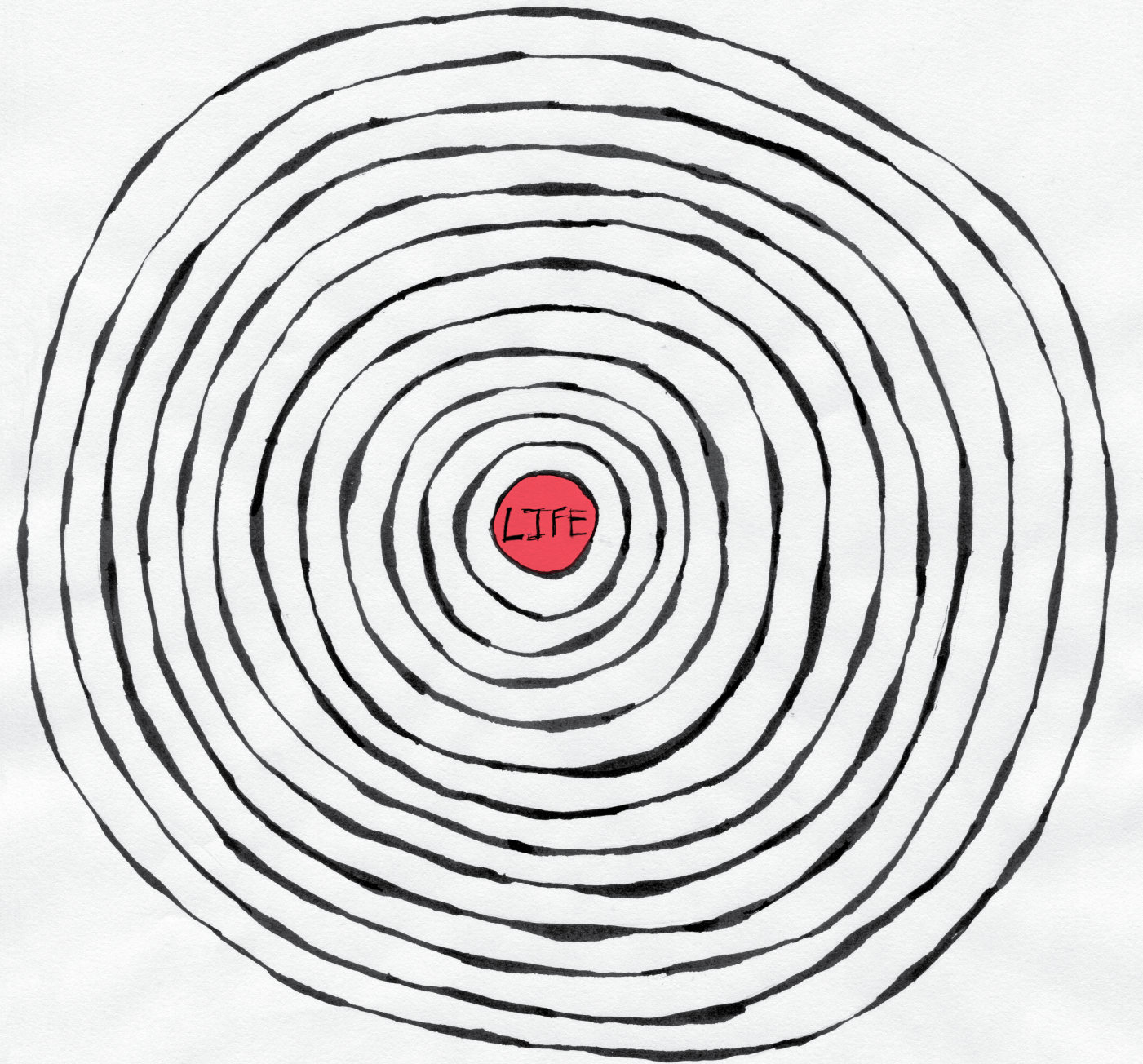
gore or glory
in the end it will get
you a lifetime of stares

ESTABAN RIVERA

Today,

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

CRISTY BAPTISTE



Free Verse Staff

Editor-in-Chief

Dave Johnson

Managing Editor

Lonni Tanner
Chief Change Officer
New York City Department of Design
and Construction (DDC)
and Executive Director
See ChangeNYC

Associate Editors

Thomas Fucaloro
Christopher Hermelin
The New School MFA Writing Program

Writing Apprentices

Cheryl Brown
Noel Cuadrado
Andrew DeLeonardis
Napoleon Felipe
Tahara Lilly
Abu Tahiru Sillah

Design and Illustrations

Carin Goldberg
Carin Goldberg Design

Design Assistants

Jeena Hyunjin Kim
Prudence Dudan

With Great Appreciation

South Bronx Neighborhood Opportunity Network (NeON) Team
New York City Department of Probation (DOP)
Young Men's Initiative (YMI)

Special Thanks

New York City Department of Design and Construction (DDC)
New York City Department of Citywide Administrative Services (DCAS)

Praise

Biber Architects: James Biber, Suzanne Holt, Emaan Farhoud,
Kennedy Howe; Carin Goldberg Design; James Victore Design;
Office of Paul Sahre; David Weeks Studio; Jon Burgerman; plus
The Painter's Union, DC9; Lutron; FLOR; Kamco; Solid Color;
Armstrong Flooring; Nontraditional Employment for Woman (NEW);
and Brooklyn Woods – all without whom a waiting room would be
just another waiting room.

Kindness

Cristy Baptiste
New Museum
Poet's House
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum
Teachers & Writers Collaborative

Applause

New York City Center for Economic Opportunity (CEO) for their
generous support to make Free Verse, free.

For more information about Free Verse writing workshops, public readings, and
open mic programs, e-mail freeversepoems@gmail.com.

Free Verse and re-inventing the Department of Probation waiting rooms are projects
of See ChangeNYC – an initiative of the Department of Design and Construction –
dedicated to creating places and experiences that empower at-risk citizens to take
charge of their lives.

© 2013 The City of New York. All rights reserved.
© 2013 Illustration and photography,
Carin Goldberg Design. All rights reserved.

Printer: Linco Printing

