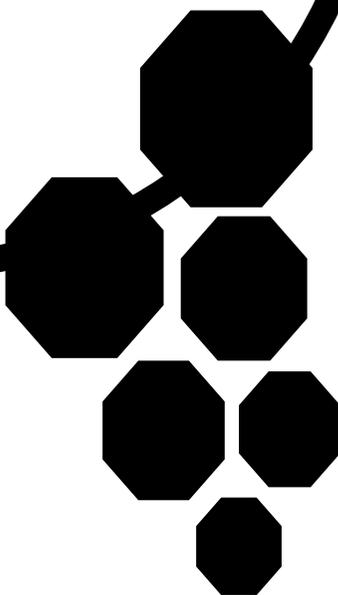


Ipodium
Journal 7

The Literary Arts
Journal for Richmond
Youth



To learn how to write is to be able to communicate with the world around us in the most concrete way possible. When we can transform our thoughts into structured foundations, we are inviting the world to understand. At Podium, we understand that Richmond Public School students have a lot to say, and desire to have their thoughts conveyed to the environment that surrounds them. In addition to the skills students practice, the social aspect of the after-school workshop is a favorite for the youth and mentors of Podium alike. When we gather, we are safe. We are safe to make mistakes, we are safe to be who we truly are, and we are safe to share. We are safe to write.

Our life experiences make us who we are. They shape us, engrain new information and feelings, and make us more complete. When we experience, we cannot help but feel, and we feel, we cannot help but remember. Sometimes the events in our lives bring feelings of triumph, sometimes sorrow. Other times we are just genuinely confused about what to do next. Although times may seem turbulent when we are experiencing them, if we are mindful of the fact that transformation and progression is constant, we can take so much more value from a situation. When time is structured to reflect, and validate our perceptions through writing, we can learn more about ourselves and others than ever before.

To take the shapes in our lives and organize them takes more skill than is usually realized. To look back (or forward) and to craft ideas into formatted words, takes a lifetime of practice. That's part of why Podium exists: we want to live to tell the tale. Whether it's our own story or others', we learn so much about the human condition by documenting feeling, fact, or even fiction. We are not just a literary journal, we are spearheading a thought revolution, a movement driven by literature and writing, to have every single person feel validated and knowledgeable in their world. And to share that world with others, through this journal.

Podium is a collaboration of support from foundations, businesses, community members, partnerships, volunteers, college interns, and the administration and teachers of Richmond Public Schools—all of whom make the experience of being a part of Podium possible. All of these supporters are dedicated to contributing to an impeccable, comprehensive education for the students of Richmond schools, and without them and readers like you, this writing revolution would not be possible.

From all of Podium and Richmond Public Schools, we hope you enjoy the words the brilliant teen authors have formed. May they entertain, inspire, educate and shape you as these stories and poems within have shaped them.

The logo for Podium features a large, bold, red letter 'P' on the left. To its right, the word 'podium' is written in a lowercase, bold, black sans-serif font. The 'P' and 'podium' are connected, forming a single graphic element.

Podium

NEW BEGINNINGS

SHAKIRAH JONES - OPEN

Closing one chapter of a book is like saying goodbye to an old friend. As we turn the page and start anew, it's like running into an old acquaintance. While pondering what comes next, we walk into the light for answers and continually stumble into darkness.

May your journey be the blueprints that dictate your destiny. As the zenith of our lives comes to race the horizon, can we find out what makes sense? Only to be discerning, like owls in our surveillance, we continue to mete out the inconsistencies we find in our self-analysis.

SOFTWARE UPDATE

MONSELL JOHNSON - HUGUENOT

Connecting connected to interface
face the source of my discontent
disconnect this malware that
erases my files and drives me blank
unable to wrap my cpu around one circumference
or its function the algorithm escapes me
update please this virus that plagues me
permission to update system do you accept the terms and conditions
check yes or no



WHERE I AM FROM

OLIVIA CARTER - OPEN

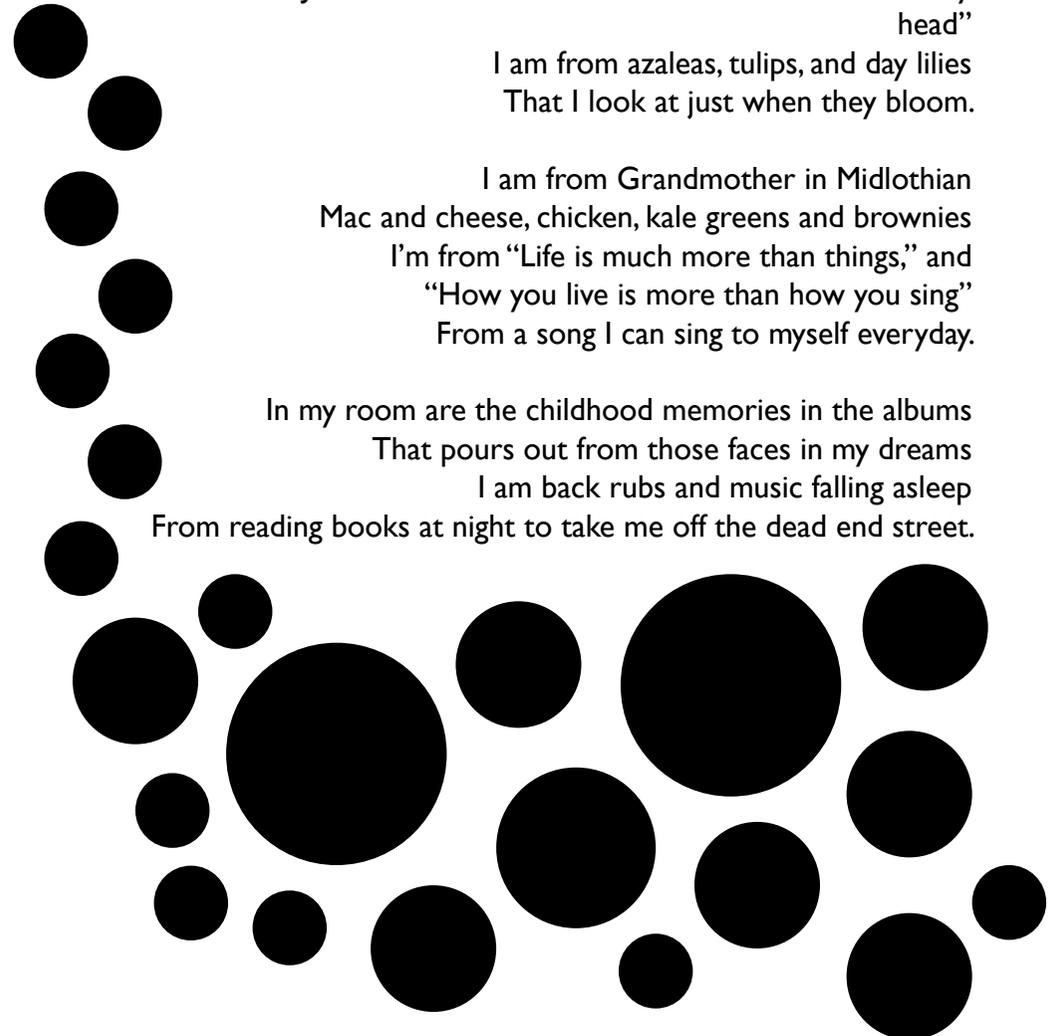
I am from an African woman sculpture.
A seven-headed wood carving and African stool
I am from big oak trees, rocks and rivers
Shrubs and boxwoods that I gaze at when I need a break from school.

I am from Grand-mom and Pop-Pop carter and Virginia
I am from the James River and "I need that like I need a hole in my head"

I am from azaleas, tulips, and day lilies
That I look at just when they bloom.

I am from Grandmother in Midlothian
Mac and cheese, chicken, kale greens and brownies
I'm from "Life is much more than things," and
"How you live is more than how you sing"
From a song I can sing to myself everyday.

In my room are the childhood memories in the albums
That pours out from those faces in my dreams
I am back rubs and music falling asleep
From reading books at night to take me off the dead end street.



STRUGGLES OF A TWIN

JACOB SEXTON - TJ

All these accomplishments,
all these milestones,
all these goals I achieved,
and yet, still compared to my brother.

Yeah, we came from the same mother.
Skin, hair eyes, all of a similar color,
but what you don't see
is the difference between him and me.

Our goal is the same--
to be someone.
Yet, people think we're trying to be
the same one.
If I keep getting compared to him,
I'll be the insane one.

Both rhyme,
but in different kinds of ways,
sometimes in the same place and on the
same day.
But he taps into the music,
while I tap into the inner person,
both trying to teach and employ a lesson.

It's a burden how, at some place, every day,
I get compared to him.
Came from the same highway,
but we're in different lanes.
Some say we look alike,
while some say we have a different face.

It gets annoying having a twin,
while others claim it as a fantasy.
Having a twin can be great, but getting
compared to him all the time
isn't so great.

I'm my own person.
On my birth certificate,
I see my name, not twin and I.
It takes my feet to fit my shoe,
not his.
On my ID, it's my name only.

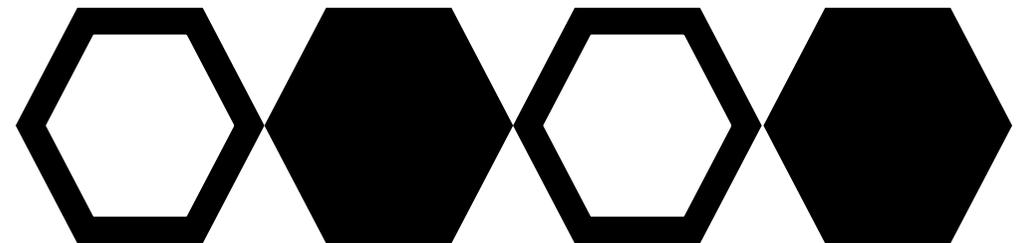
So, all I'm asking is
don't compare me to him.
I'm Jacob, not Justin.

JUST

JAZMINE HARRIS - OPEN

Just a flower that grows alone, not competing with the ones
around it. Caught up in its own world, it never sees life as
a competition. Beautiful in its own way, a little sprout of
sunshine has grown into a graceful conundrum that no one
can destroy. It lives life to the fullest, until the weight of the
earth caves into its vibrant petals, ripping them away limb
by limb. It is now un-pretty.

Wilting away from the life of the sun, the flower turns towards
its death. The earth is now filled with a disguise of what
beauty once was. A mask of tears thrown away by a fading
smile. Ignoring the fact that beauty is unpicked and untamed, the
earth powders itself with filters that are believed to wash away
all impurities. What a promising world the graceful flower has
left behind—to find out it was all just a lie.



DISRESPECT

ZAKARIYA MEREDITH - FRANKLIN

How dare you place your hands on the woman you claim to love?
Then as soon as she wants to leave, you're crying to the Lord above.
Oh, now you want her to stay,
after you hurt her physically and mentally every day.
Only God knows how much she tries,
To keep a smile on your face while you cheat and tell lies.

See now that's disrespect!

How dare you call her out of her name,
but want to hold her hand in public despite the shame?
Lord, you cause her so much pain.
Her tears are so heavy, she began to think it's like rain.
Every time she tries to talk to you about it,
you raise your hand, forgetting you're an ex-convict.

Now that's disrespect!

But you can run the streets all day and night,
having her worried about if you're coming back, right?
Gosh, boy, I don't understand how you can DISRESPECT
the mother of your child and talk to her in such a hood dialect.
Hopefully, one day she can forgive you, but I hope she forgets,
'cause the way you treat her...

that's downright disrespect!

A LEGACY

TIONNE FRAIERSON - HUGUENOT

Drip Drip, the sweat from my face
I'll do anything to escape from this place
I have to work fast before I get lynched
Sleeping in a dirty den--can you smell the stench?
I haven't seen my family in years.
My wife probably shed more than a gallon of tears.
Work harder, boy. Yes, Master, I said.
Walk a thousand miles with this cotton on my head.
Stomach rumbling like a beat up truck.
Fingers hurting from the chicken feathers I plucked.
I'm a slave forever. I swear I'm stuck.



Come home from school, I swear I didn't learn sh*t
Walking in the house to my mom getting fixed.
Drugged out, mouth open, with a needle on the floor.
No more food stamps, I have to steal from the store.
Stomach hurts, I haven't ate dinner in months.
I'm still hungry after the government lunch.

No conditioner, no fan, black people go crazy in the heat.
No furniture, no bed, no need to keep my room neat.
No washer, still wearing the same socks for weeks.
Water turned off, thank God, I hate how the faucet leaks.

I'm poor today, tomorrow, forever,
I'd bet money that won't change
Dirty Ghetto Kid--
Come, feel my pain.

As the leaves of fall grow tired and wiry,
Their stems let go of the twig only to sway
In the cool breeze side to side, up and down.
The winds flow, as if guiding the leaves
To a new sanctuary of the world.

The trees are left bare, stripped of their
Children and dead branches. The bellowing
Breeze blows gently upon the tree, whispering
In its ear. It says, "don't be sad tree, for when
Spring is to come, your children will bloom once more."

And as people walk by each other wearing hats
And scarfs and thick coats to keep from shivering,
They all think the same thought. They think to themselves,
"The air is getting colder everyday with each passing
Second. Is this the sign of a season stepping into play?"

They are getting closer to the answer, but you must
Look beyond what is typical to your eyes of
Truth and ideals. If you look closer to new
Changes you can see the forest floor is covered
With both frost and colored leaves.

A deer drinks from the purest lake,
Shimmering with every movement.

If you see the leaves still riding upon the earth's
Breath, follow them to a place where nature grows
Freely. Animals roam about with light in their
Hearts. Follow them to the sanctuary where Autumn
Shall fall and rise by nature's will and might.

RISE OF AUTUMN

STEVEN BEY - JOHN MARSHALL

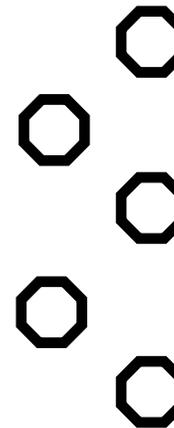
SIX WORD STORY

MEGAN THOMAS - HUGUENOT

Behind locked doors,
silent screams leak.

IDENTITY

TRAVIS TAYLOR - OPEN

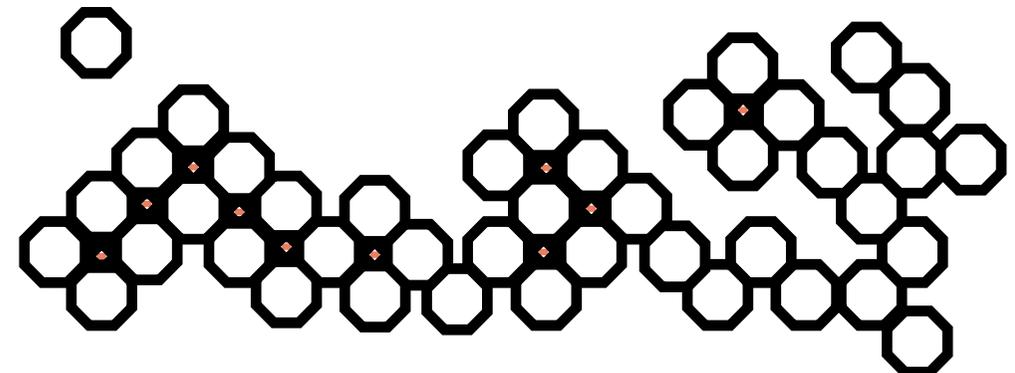


I've always had problems describing who I am;
Defining my character is my biggest struggle.

Expressing myself isn't as easy as it seems;
Narrow-minded people are what I fear the most.

There's so many judgmental people in the world;
I don't want to fall victim to harsh criticism.

Terrified of judgment, I've put myself in a box;
Your character is all you've got – I just wish I wasn't so apprehensive.



FIVE

AJ GOODWIN - ARMSTRONG

Look at me.

Don't leave me.

I have your eyes.

Tears spill from your sight as you pick me up and hug me tight.

I don't want you to leave me.

But I'm too young to understand.

"I love you," you say.

I wrap my tiny arms around your neck. The stuffed animal you bought for me dangling over your shoulder.

I know you're leaving,
but I didn't know why or how long you'd be gone.

Please, don't go.

I'm crying now, you tell me not to.

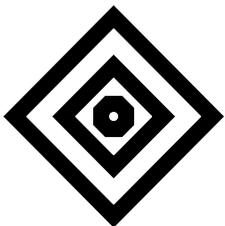
You rock me gently to calm me down, so gently.

I close my eyes.

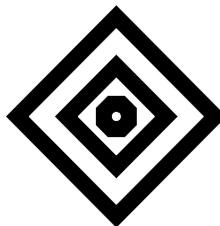
You lay me in my bed, kiss my forehead and whisper softly,
"I love you baby girl. I'll be back soon to get you."

Even now, I stand over ten years later.

I know you'd never lie to me.



I love you, too, Daddy.



BIRDS

IAN MILLS - OPEN

BIRD-MEETING
ALL BIRDS WELCOME
THIS IS YOUR SAFE SPACE

The sign was welcoming. The Griffin was excited, finally, somewhere that would understand. She had read the advertisements posted on the sides of buildings and telephone polls, and while physically she had only waited a week, mentally she'd been waiting her whole life.

After she knocked on the door, a Goose pulled it open and welcomed her. She walked in and heads turned. At first, as her head came through the doorway, the birds smiled, and welcomed her, but as the end of a lion followed behind, they began to avert their eyes.

The Peacock turned away, embarrassed just to be in the presence of the beast.

The Macaw was disgusted, and made no attempt at hiding it.

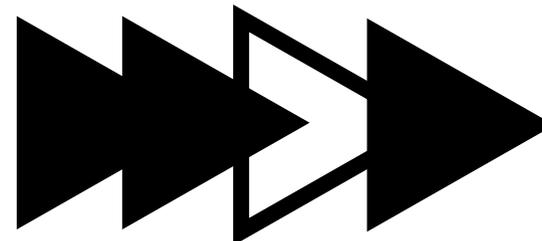
The Chicken attempted to sneak her way out of the room.

The Vulture, who appeared to be overseeing the meeting, slowly crept up to the Griffin.

"What are you doing here?" The Vulture questioned.

"Yeah, you don't really think you're one of us, right?" The Macaw chimed in.

"I don't want anything to do with this!" The Chicken let out, abruptly.



"You aren't wanted!"

DEFINITIONS OF LOVE

RACHELLE WILKINS - HUGUENOT

Some see it as rebelling and running off with your boyfriend that you just told you, "I love you" and cuddling under the light of a thousand stars with him. They see it as the tender embrace of another, as their souls collapse into a fiery passion that fuels an adventure between them for a life time. It's seen as a partnership vowed solely on words and the representation of metal and minerals, combined into a beautiful symbol of the companionship and hardships that lie ahead.

But it's also the relationship between a battered woman and her afternoon glass of wine that turns into a sorrowful night of screaming, drowning in her tears, and blaming herself for him being upset enough to hit her. It's the thought process that she believes he will change, and that maybe if she fixes herself, he would stop beating her senseless; the part where she lays down with him after a boxing match they just had in the living room, pretending like it never happened.

It's the part where the man who lost his wife to cancer picks up the needle and sticks it in his arm, pushing the plunger that fills his veins with the toxins, the burn and itch, but brings relief. Relief from the agonizing pain of the thoughts of missing her, of his empty feelings of loneliness and regret, of not saying his last goodbyes.

It's the part where the heartbroken girl gets up and faces her boyfriend of three years, knowing he is cheating but continues to live in denial. She comes home to find him in bed with another woman and takes the gun that ends her life. It's the beautiful moment of insanity the broken girl has before she ties the noose and hangs herself in the dark. Poor thing no longer has a beating heart.

It's the excitement that dances in a pyromaniac's eyes as he sets his 100th fire, but he has such an addiction that he can't stop. Addiction, confliction, the suicide attempts, the trying to fix yourself, the passion, the madness, the kiss of insanity he laid upon you. Love comes in some form of you, whether you realize it or not.

DECORATED VETERANS

UNITHA CHERRY - TJ

The first blow -

my heart beats erratically in my neck, blurred images reflected in the shattered glass.

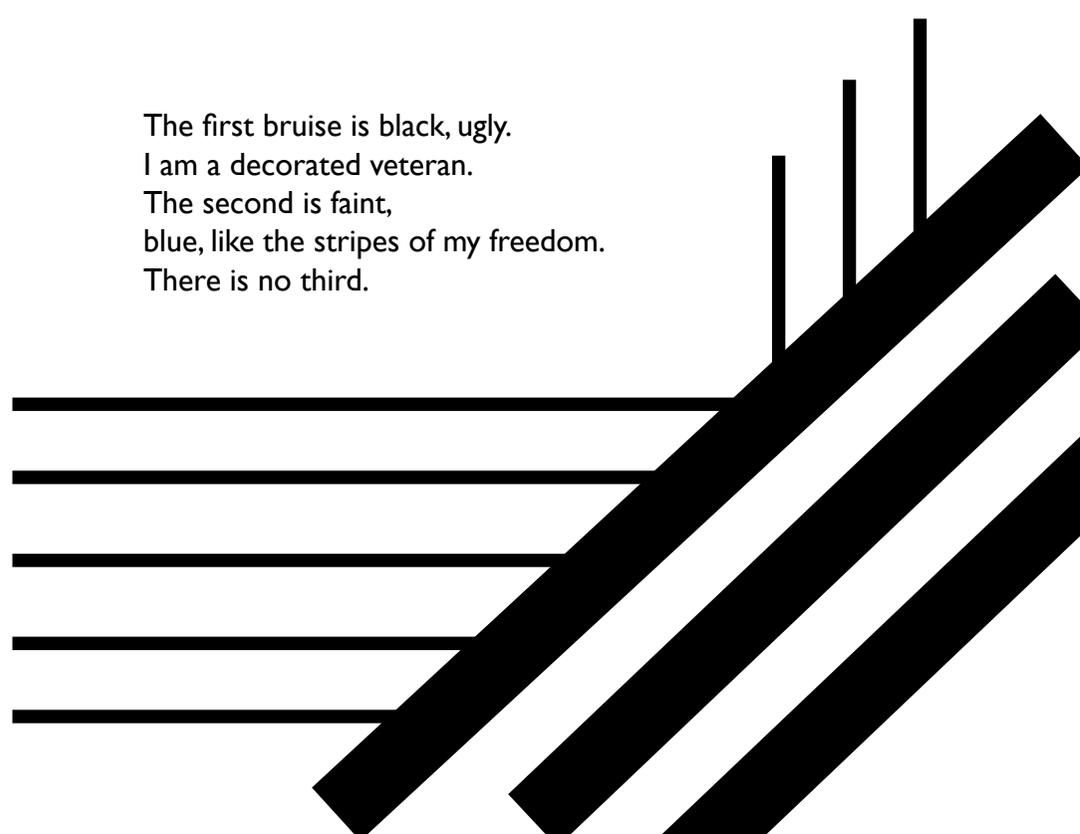
The second blow -

pain radiates in my shoulder, tears flow autonomously, anger runs through my blood, spills onto the carpets, strengthens my resolve.

The third blow -

There is no third blow.
My hand speaks up, says what my mouth cannot,
yells my outrage against his chest.
No longer the kicked puppy; the best in me rises,
stands up to the dog fighter,
barks my freedom.

The first bruise is black, ugly.
I am a decorated veteran.
The second is faint,
blue, like the stripes of my freedom.
There is no third.



PLACE

JULIET GRIFFIN - WYTHE

I have been put in this place many times:
told how to do this and that,
what to say and think,
how to look and behave.
Be the way I'm suppose to be.
Expectations to be met;
I could never be myself, just me.

That place drives me overly insane—
I kept being placed there,
over and over again.
Yet I have no choice but to
be true to myself.
I can't be somebody else's book
placed on a shelf, in a perfect row,
not standing out,
no one knowing what I'm about.

That place doesn't define me.
That place drives me overly crazy.
Yet I still go.
Why not just say, "No!"
No, that's enough.
I will dress how I want.
I will talk how I want.
I will do what I want.

That place undefines me.

I SEE AMERICA DISTRACTED

MIRA DAVIS - OPEN

I hear America cheering, yelling for their favorite teams.
Cheering for the new iPhone, Jordan's, or video game.

I see technology working, humans searching, simple math too
hard for the normal person,
typed into the calculator, answered in less than 3 seconds.

I see kids failing English class because autocorrect spells for us.

I see smartphones, but where are the smart people?

I see the models, the Photoshop, the makeup, and their standards on
TV, magazines, and billboards.

I hear the notify sound; I read the texts. I feel the metal,
but not the emotion—
that hurt, but you would never know.

I see the TV on and Netflix playing; I hear the loud music,
I see their dances.

I see everything but know nothing;

I see nothing but distractions.

AS SHE SEES

JUSTIN JEFFERS - HUGUENOT

There was a young girl
named Katherine, she was a
fearful Hispanic girl who
was made fun of because
of her long hair and accent.

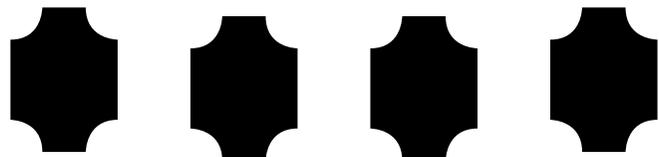
Everyday they would
tell her to speak clearly
or they would cut her
“fake” hair off. She would
come to school everyday,
and wear her shame on her head.

Sit in fear of her classmates,
unprotected, unaccepted,
yet very educated.

One day, she woke up for school,
afraid to ride the bus
so she walked.

She came across this box,
its glistening colors and sparkles
caught her eye.

As she picked up the box, she
had a vision almost, she could
see a strong, beautiful, assertive
woman, greatly respected in the world.



She snapped back, she put
the box in her book bag and
had a smile on her face
throughout the school day.

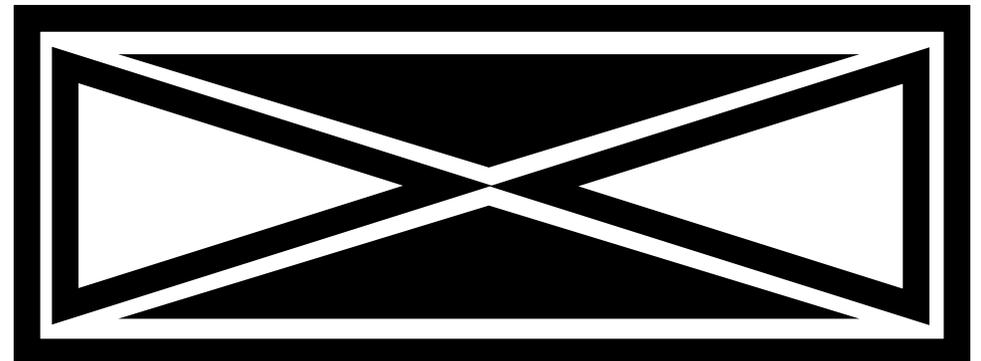
She went home more vibrant,
brought her stressed mother
a feeling of joy, she told
her mother what she had
seen in detail.

She said,
“The Highest Power works on a
strong soul in their weak areas.”

Ever since she had
been willing to accept that
not everybody will treat her good,
yet she was still confused
why they would make fun of her
if she was beautiful.

Her mother said,
“Most people inflict pain if
it has been inflicted, they can
pin-point happiness and try
to bring it down.
Don’t let them.”

She’s destined to be strong.



BULLY

DA'QUON STITH - HUGUENOT

Bully, you are no gender. Your objective always to dismember. You are a scar, and drive that knife into my arm, but I always seem to be strong, no matter the odds or participant you seem to draw I'm always walking tall.

Bully, why do you do what you do? Trying to control my friends like voodoo and take their lives with a combat knife but you don't hold the knife they do... so that's why I say you smell like doodoo and you won't dare put me through the things they've been through. That's cause i'm a strong emo.

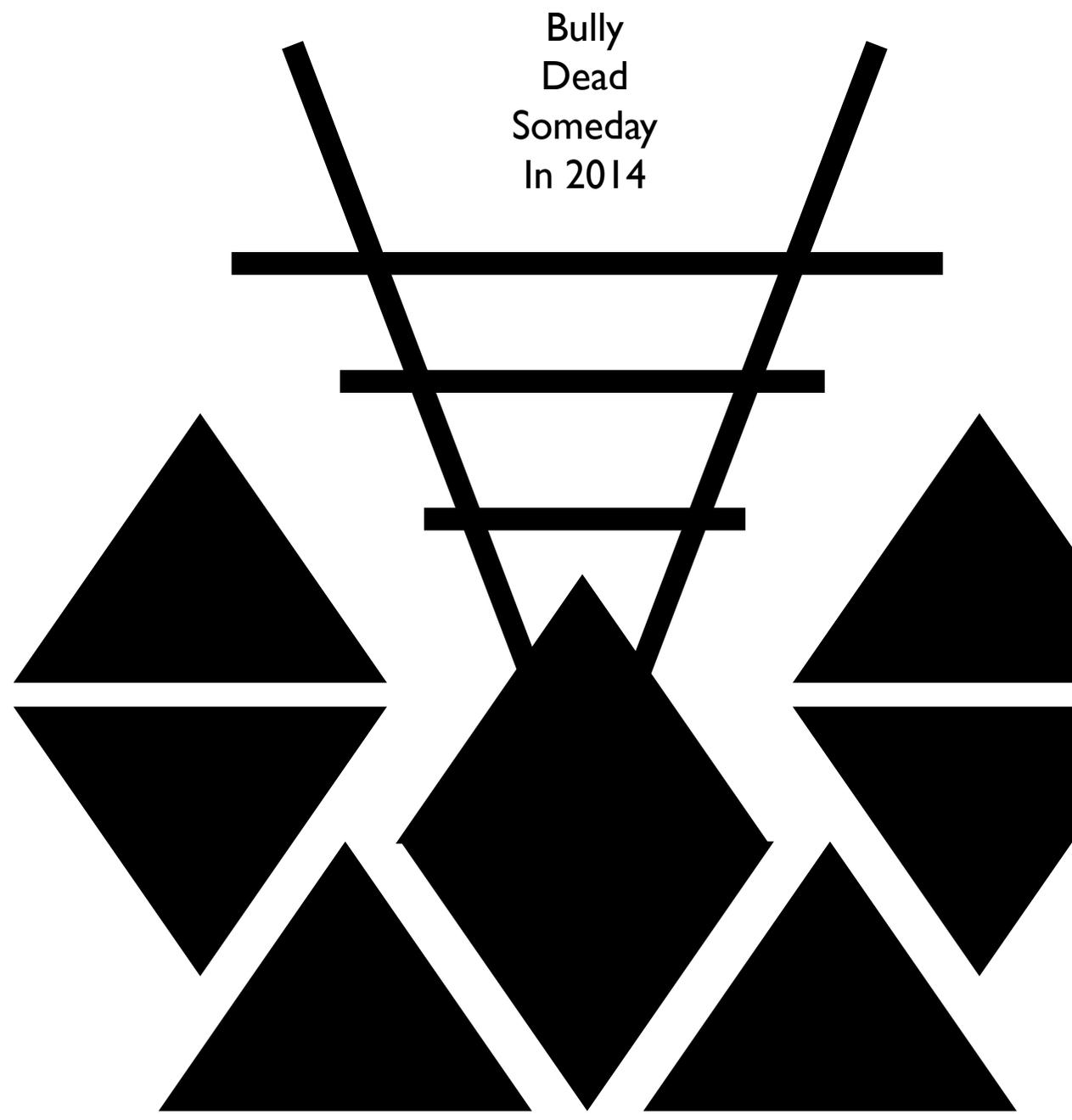
Bully, you label people with names that are sexist, racist, and sometimes full of bull, but you won't ever change because evolve with age. Saying the same things but in a different way, all in all it still hurts the same.

Bully, you try to disguise yourself as a friend in a form of a weak link hurting the group from the inside, giving emo a bad name. And the worst of it all, you hide very well, but you can't buy something that you never sold. Meaning you can't fool me cause I see right through you with your innocent lenses, and your non-muscular figure, you mess with me I'll show you the real wrath of a true ninja. But I'm the censored type so everyone knows what I mean.

Bully, this is just a repeated verse but I'ma let you know that I am a strong emo, you will never enter nor hurt me though. and will never pull another razor against the arms of the weak and blind. 'Cause as long as I am alive I will always come back for the dead and the ones who have survived to stand against everything that you pride.

Bully, you are losing victims by the day and not because they are dead but because they're getting strong like me. So pretty soon we will win the fight in society and finally gain equality like the great Martin Luther King always wanted.

Bully
Dead
Someday
In 2014



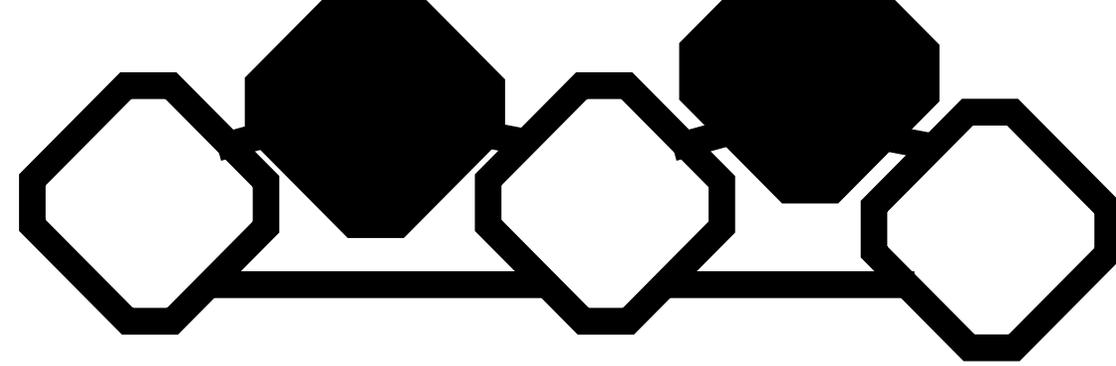
MY FATHER

BILLY BURRIS - OPEN

The last memory I have of my father is his body burning on a stone slab in Tanzania. Only recently did my uncle tell me it was a mistake, that neither my brother nor I was supposed to see his cremation.

I wish I could have a happier memory like my brother's—walking with my father through an alley. I wish I could remember what it is to talk, touch, and play with my father. If only I could reap more memories of this great man, a man I loved. I am here because that body still burns in my mind.

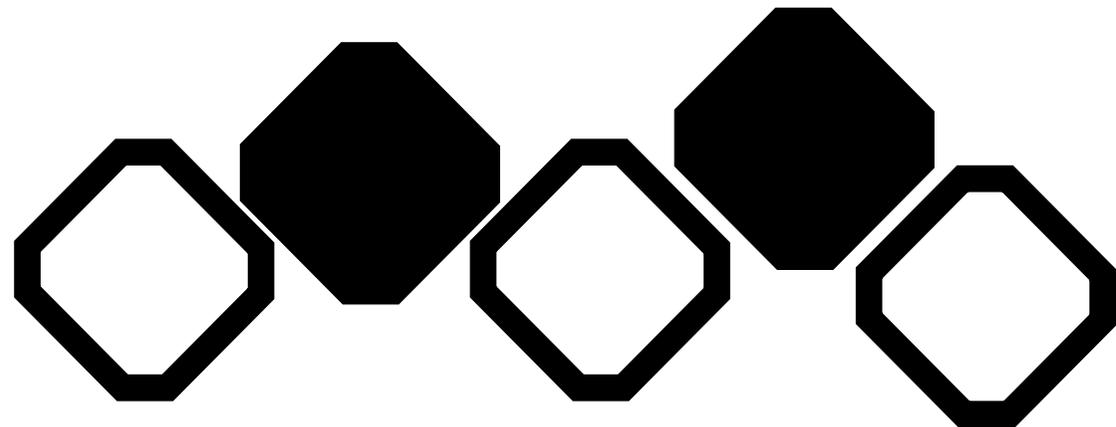
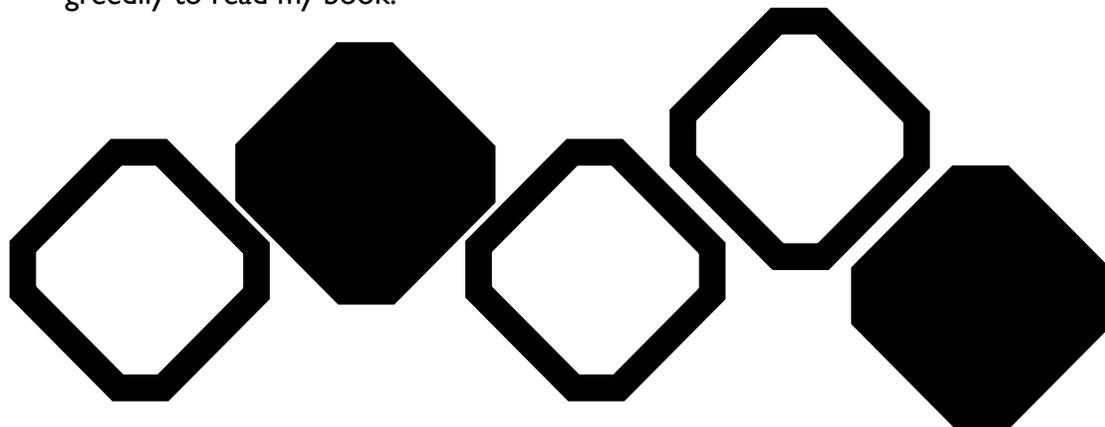
After my father's death, my 25 year old mother, two 4 year old twins in tow, moved to a land thousands of miles away— not knowing the language, the customs, or the people, but knowing somehow that her children would have more opportunity in this land than if she stayed in Tanzania. She worked hard for low pay, due to her lack of education. She would come home exhausted, complain about her back, take some medicine, but still check to see if my brother and I had finished our homework. She would buy us books and Legos, encouraging us to build things and learn so we could have an easier life than she did. I remember straining my eyes in the green light of my tiny bedroom, in my bottom bunk, trying greedily to read my book.



I came to love learning; not just for its utility, but for the sheer amount of interesting information there was. Everything was connected, and I loved finding those connections. I have many memories of teachers puzzled and amused at my inquisitiveness. I remember my teacher scolding me in the 4th grade for asking too many strange questions about World War II. My religion teacher in 6th grade threatened to give me a demerit if I asked one more question about demons. My vice principal in middle school would watch with amusement at the debates I would have at the lunch table with other students.

Now older, my passions have expanded and matured. I love questions: What is good? What comes after death? Why do people die? Which is better, Star Trek or Star Wars? Is there a woman, who's single, somewhere in this world who's like Jane from Jane Eyre? What if we taught Native American languages in schools? I love to lose myself in the actualities and possibilities this world has to offer.

The burning body, the hardworking mother, the countless books and questions, and annoyed teachers are why I'm here. I'm here because my mother worked her hardest to raise my brother and me. I'm here because my father died.



WHAT IS REAL

CLARISSA PETERS - OPEN

I am a real teen.

I take the days as they come.
I am spontaneous and creative.
I strive to be heard.
I hunger for diversity.
I search for the road not taken.
I insist that I know what life is without experience.
I crave to be taken seriously but do not take the necessary actions.
I say what's on my mind without any reservation.
I disregard and disrespect my elders.
I am rebellious and intelligent.

I am a real adult.

I pay bills.
I help create the next generation.
I work all day and night thinking of all the mouths I have to feed.
I remind my children that they have a bill to pay, that what I have done for them is not free.
I consciously or unconsciously remind them what I have sacrificed for them.
I am the provider and protector.
I feel guilty about not being able to give you the opportunities you deserve.
I can't tell you no.
I deal with the stereotype that I do not support my children or love them.
I am falsely accused and apologetic.

I am the real world.

I push and pull at relationships.
I ignore the good and advertise the bad.
I give everyone the opportunity to pass or fail the test.
I am hoping that you fail.
I hope you focus on your limitations and issues so you can't see a way out.
I am hoping that the battle of age will never end.
I am the beginning and the end.

AN IMAGE

ONEISHA GREEN - HUGUENOT

I can feel the heat brushing against my skin
like a paint brush gliding over its canvas,
raising up artwork only done by a mad man
as he tries to carve his image of Heaven.

Every cut in my back heals
as he feels
an uncontrollable rage,
for his image would not stay.
For sin can not paint true beauty.



RUSH

SHAUNTE HARRIS - HUGUENOT

On your mark,
get set,

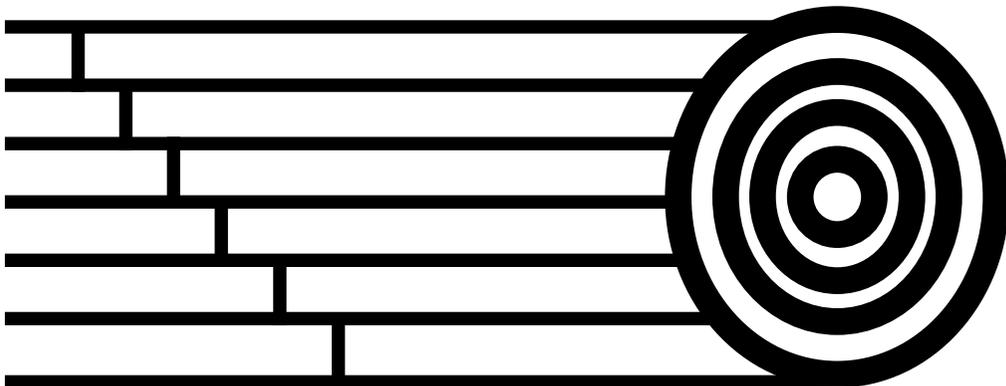
Go.

That rush-
I dash-
I run

run away from life
away from fear,
my struggles.

The meet: feet pit and pat on that 400 meter track
That means my problems are 400,000,000 miles away

I feel safe.



TOO YOUNG

NIKAH CRITCHLOW - TJ

The parents do not yet know
they will soon be the youngest
grandparents on the block.

Walking through the store, everyone
stares, but no one says a thing.

The girl tries to control her secret, but this eight
months will not allow her that simple pleasure.

She is alone now. Her mother is by her side, but that is not enough.
Her child has no father.

Her stomach turns, nervous at the thought that someday a daughter
will ask why she has no daddy; why she made him leave.

At school, her friends smile. They buy her cute things, trying to act like
they accept her problems, but they don't.
They never accepted her to begin with.

She could see right through their smiling faces, so cold she shivered.
Or was it a shiver of fear?
She knows she's too young.

Getting out of the car, another
contraction hits. "Breathe,"
her mother tells her, "Breathe."

It is over now but she stays there in her mother's arms rocking, pacified.

Thinking, wishing, knowing that she's too young.
Twelve hours later, holding a new life in her arms--her new life--
she cries.

With tears running down her face,
she thinks of nothing but this precious life.

Not her parents, her classmates, the strangers at the store, or the
child's father, just the beautiful baby girl giving her life
a whole new meaning.

This is a man whose life was nothing but a shame, to himself, his family, and society. He walks the streets alone looking for a way out of his miserable life. He walks roads of sorrow and tranquility. These witted roads are covered in filth. Filth that can only be cleansed with tears of happiness that is never found. He is in his loneliest hour just before the breaking of day.

There's a way out of this place
Happiness has come to fade
All is possible, but too far away
Now it seems I'm forced to stay

Before the night turns to day
End my horrific and ruthless ways

Find me innocent, set me stray
Render my thoughts of ghostly prey
End this sorrow
End this pain

I'm on the edge of regret
This is all I have left
Sorry for the things that can't be kept

What is the key to this?
I've given up too much to quit
Let me be free
Let me be free

To the people I have hurt
Hallowed be thy name, I'm the
crook
All I can do is cry
This is not the way to die

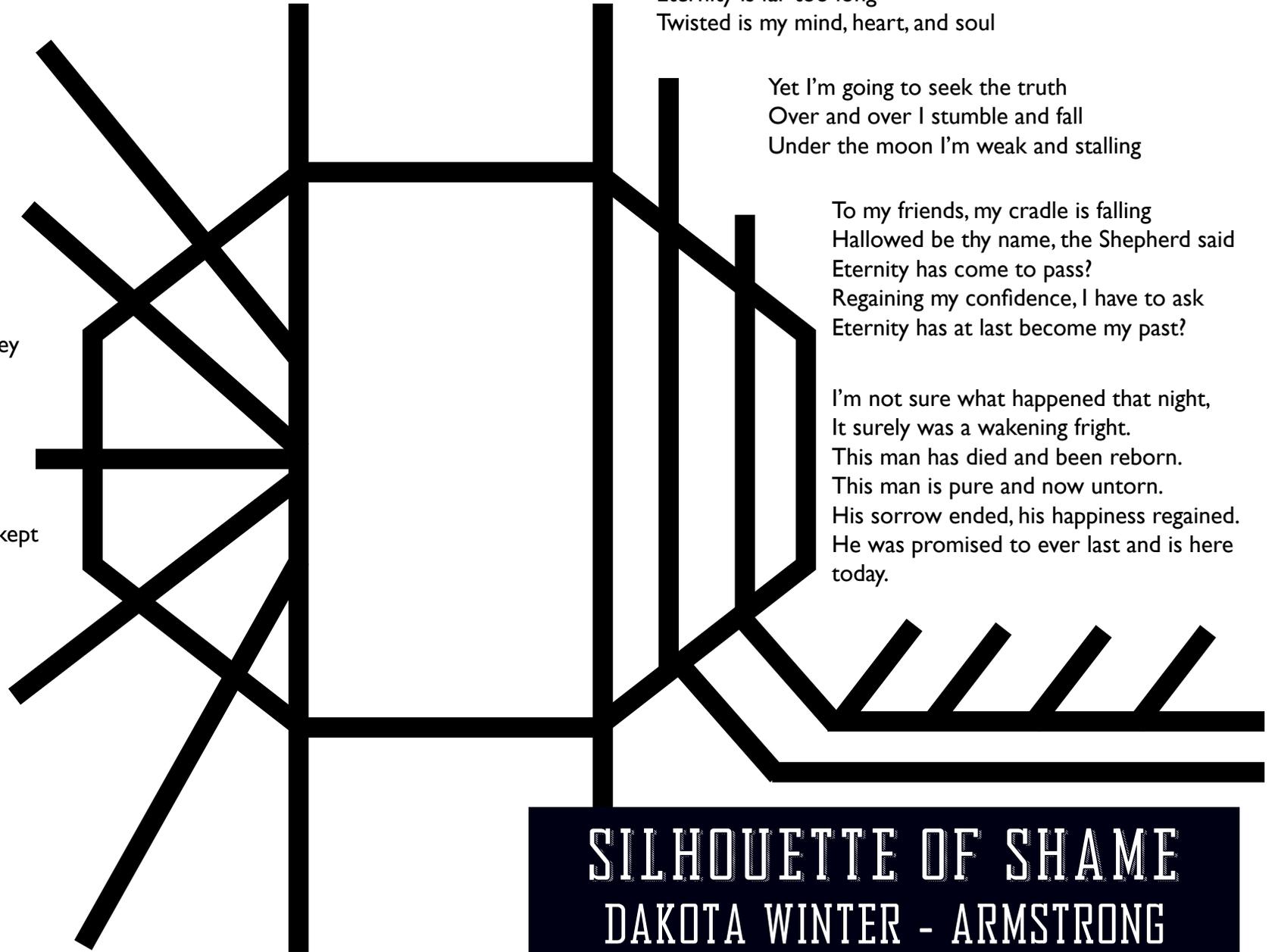
Call for help I need to change
A person can never be the same
Now I'm stuck, and I'm to blame

Go, I must run to save someone
Eternity is far too long
Twisted is my mind, heart, and soul

Yet I'm going to seek the truth
Over and over I stumble and fall
Under the moon I'm weak and stalling

To my friends, my cradle is falling
Hallowed be thy name, the Shepherd said
Eternity has come to pass?
Regaining my confidence, I have to ask
Eternity has at last become my past?

I'm not sure what happened that night,
It surely was a waking fright.
This man has died and been reborn.
This man is pure and now untorn.
His sorrow ended, his happiness regained.
He was promised to ever last and is here
today.



SILHOUETTE OF SHAME
DAKOTA WINTER - ARMSTRONG

BEAUTIFUL MESS

REBECCA ROGERS - HUGUENOT

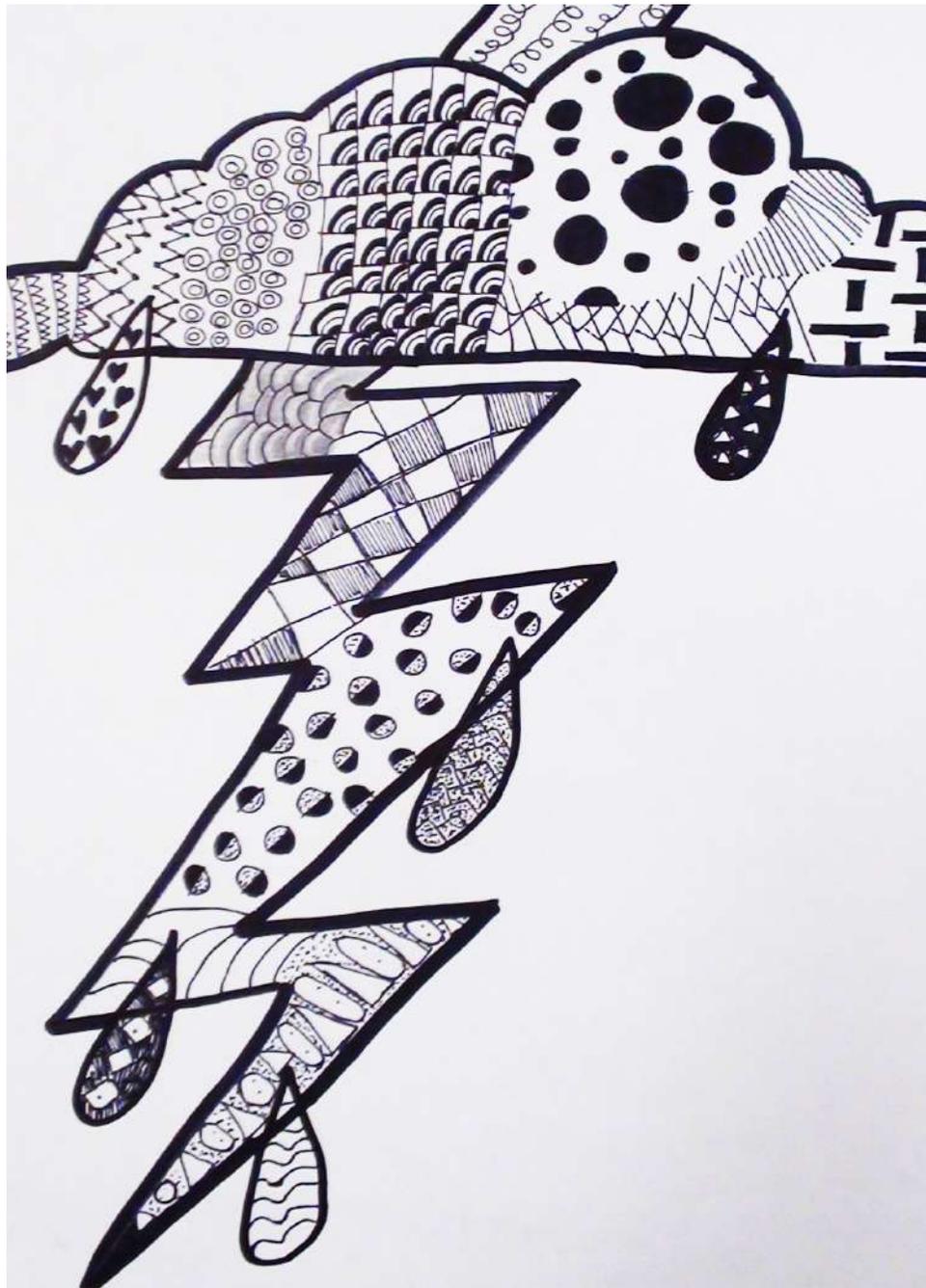
As her beauty combined with the sun,
Blue tulips started to dance, and
Cars stopped to watch,
Developing the sense of mind
Ever, never-ending.
Forgetting the love she once had,
Gracefully letting the music release it.
Hoping she'll forget that night
In the depths of her heart, a memory
Just waiting for her to relive it.
Killing her through it all,
Loving him as she thought she did.
Money, Greed, Envy of his green eyes.
Nobody knows what he did to her,
Opposing what she thought he was,
Positive of him, a true lover.
Quit her love for him, never.
Regret, yes, that night.
Stop, she said.
Thanks to him she knows what love isn't.
Universe hated her, she thought,
Very unloving, hating and never forgiving.
Wanting to forget that night made her cold hearted.
X-raying her heart she wrote this poem.

You will never know what you did to her.
Zero guys will understand.

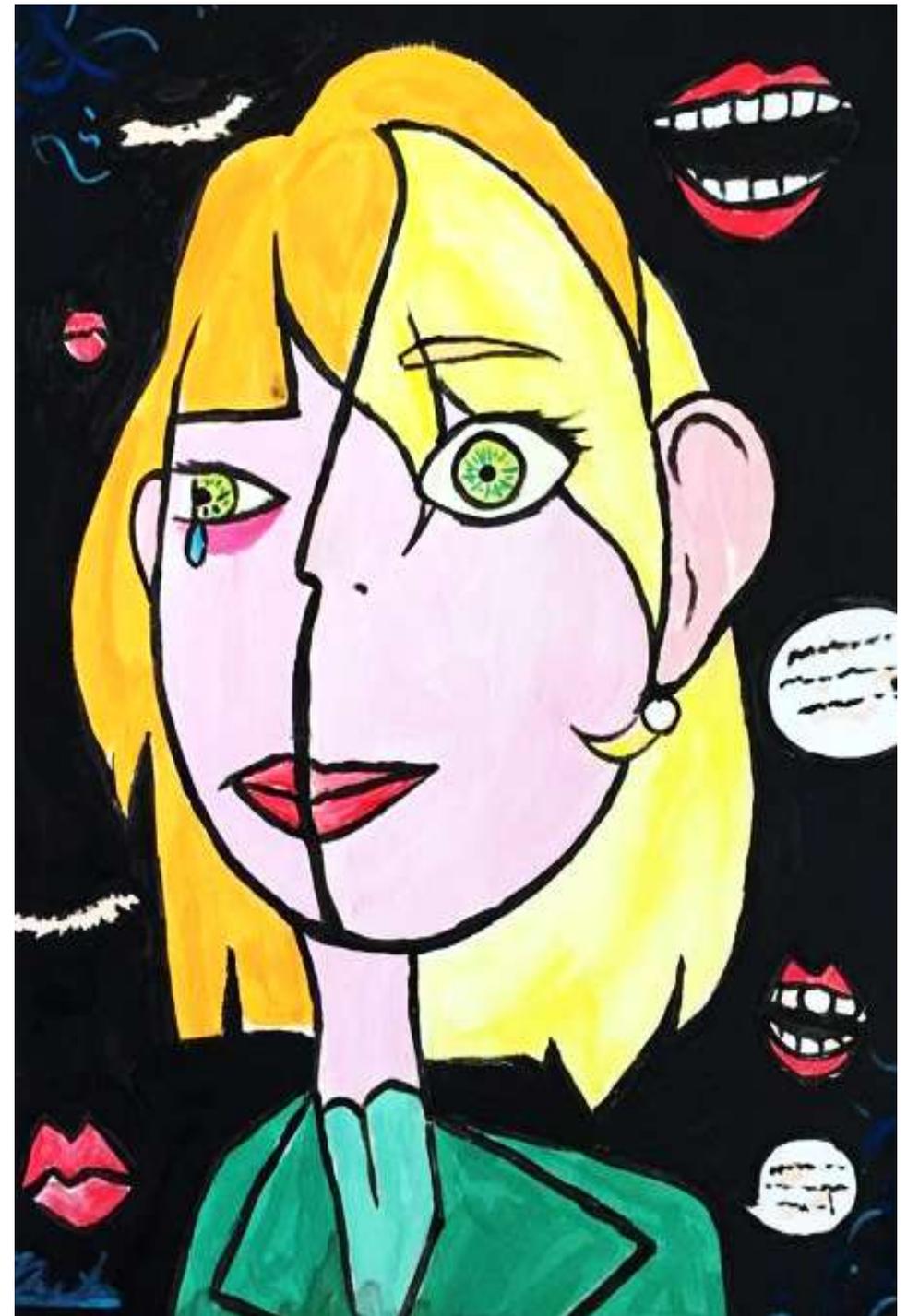
I'm complicated.
I struggle with myself.
I have trouble enjoying human emotions,
being truly close to somebody.
I can't pursue a strong relationship
because I don't allow myself to.
I don't trust
in people,
in their intentions. Just logic and statistics.
I trust in words and a sheet of paper more
than a living, breathing person.
But I am so generous to the very people I can't
bear to be close to,
sacrificing my very being for their happiness.
Maybe, just maybe, their happiness will give
me happiness, and mend my torn blanket
of cold affection.

A MILE OF SPACE

NIYOMBI MARSHALL - HUGUENOT



JAZMINE LYONS
JOHN MARSHALL



MADELINE MARSH - FRANKLIN



MORGAN STUBBS - OPEN

OVERDOSE VAZYA HERMAN - JOHN MARSHALL

I don't want to save you, fix you, or touch you.
That ritual is too familiar and habitual.
Habitual like drug use.

And I am a drug that almost promises symptoms like:
Slowly watching your soul fade away,
Looking into the mirror and barely recognizing your own
face because of how much you've changed,
Enduring the pain of your blood constantly boiling
in your veins,
The fear of losing someone who won't even miss you,
And late nights accompanied by a box of Kleenex tissue.
All of that comes in my orange cylinder bottle,
And strengthens your heart full of issues every time
you swallow.

I've poisoned a plethora of hearts and souls in my lifetime.
I'm the reason they don't smile the same and why
they rip themselves apart at nighttime.
I'll make you lose yourself and your right mind...

But for once I wanted to give it a try,
Look love right in the eyes and face it.

Actually get to know you and connect rather than
your broken heart being an addition to the collection
in my basement.

But you don't know your worth and can't stop
choking on your own self-hatred long enough to.

OUR GENERATION DAQUAN WHITE - FRANKLIN

Our generation is like a yin and yang.

But it's out of balance.

People focus on the things that don't matter.

Trying to boast up on anyone who's out of the ordinary.
Trying to downgrade those who are actually intellectual.

Making materialistic things worth more than affection.
Making technology seem worth more than interacting physically with friends.

But no one's stupid either, just afraid of being themselves.

Afraid of being singled out.

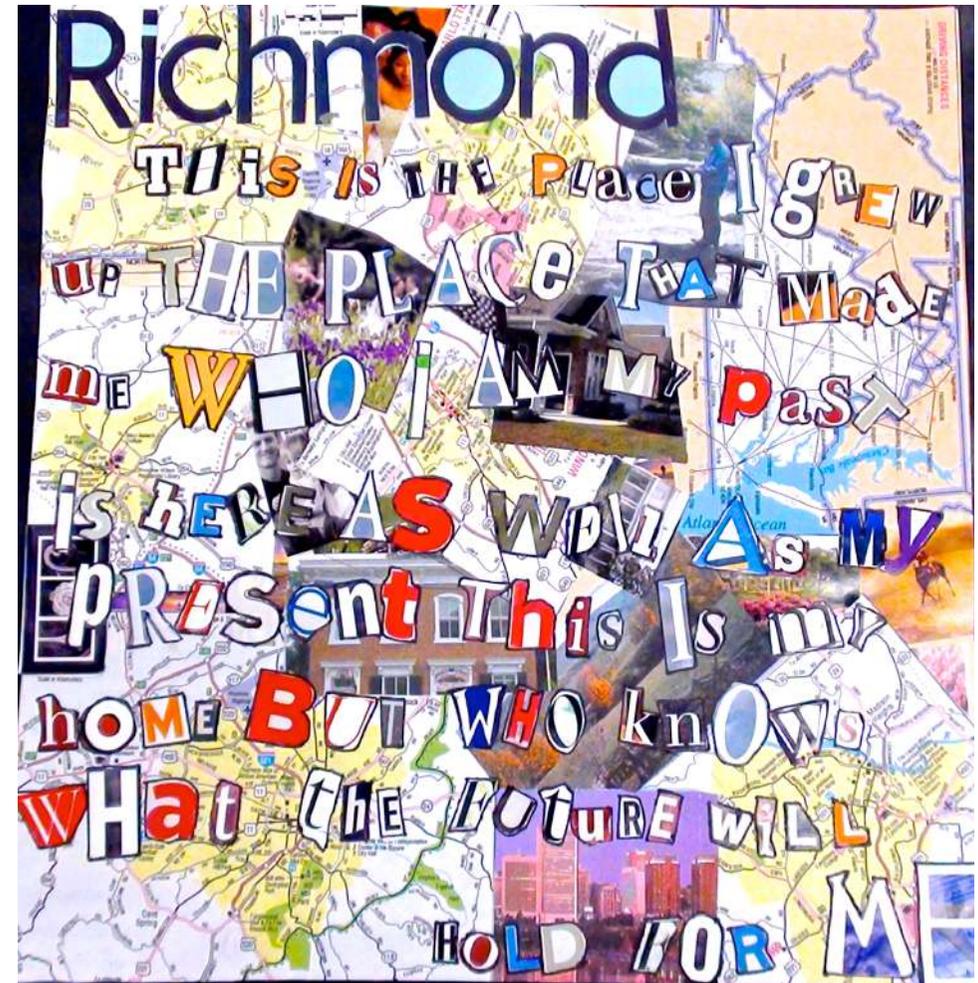
But what's being
cohesive when you're not yourself?

FOREVER ALONE DAKOTA WINTER - ARMSTRONG

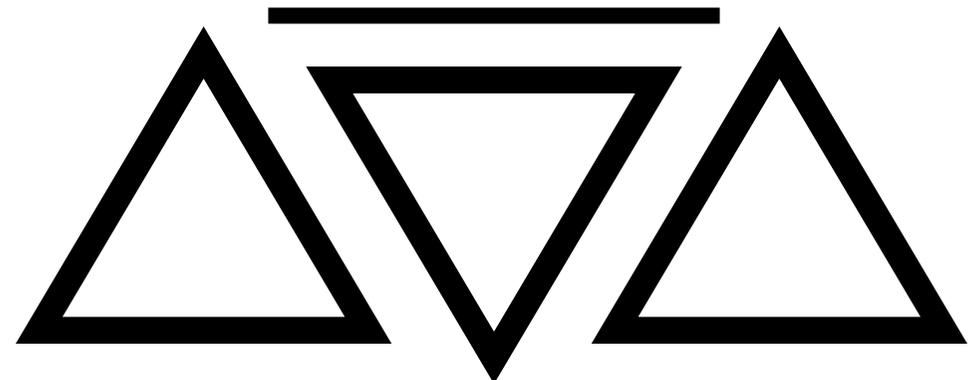
Here I am, sitting in my shadow watching as life goes on. It's cold; the pain of stupidity and sorrow is excruciating.

Watching from the isolated world of silence, I can't understand how people live with the habitual ways of their lives, the pain of not being able to change understanding and reality is a burden. My immunity is based on soul love; family, friends.

My last chance of sanity is in prayer. The humble trust from myself to my God is all I have left in my heart. It's time for a new way of security. In my world there are only two; myself, and God.



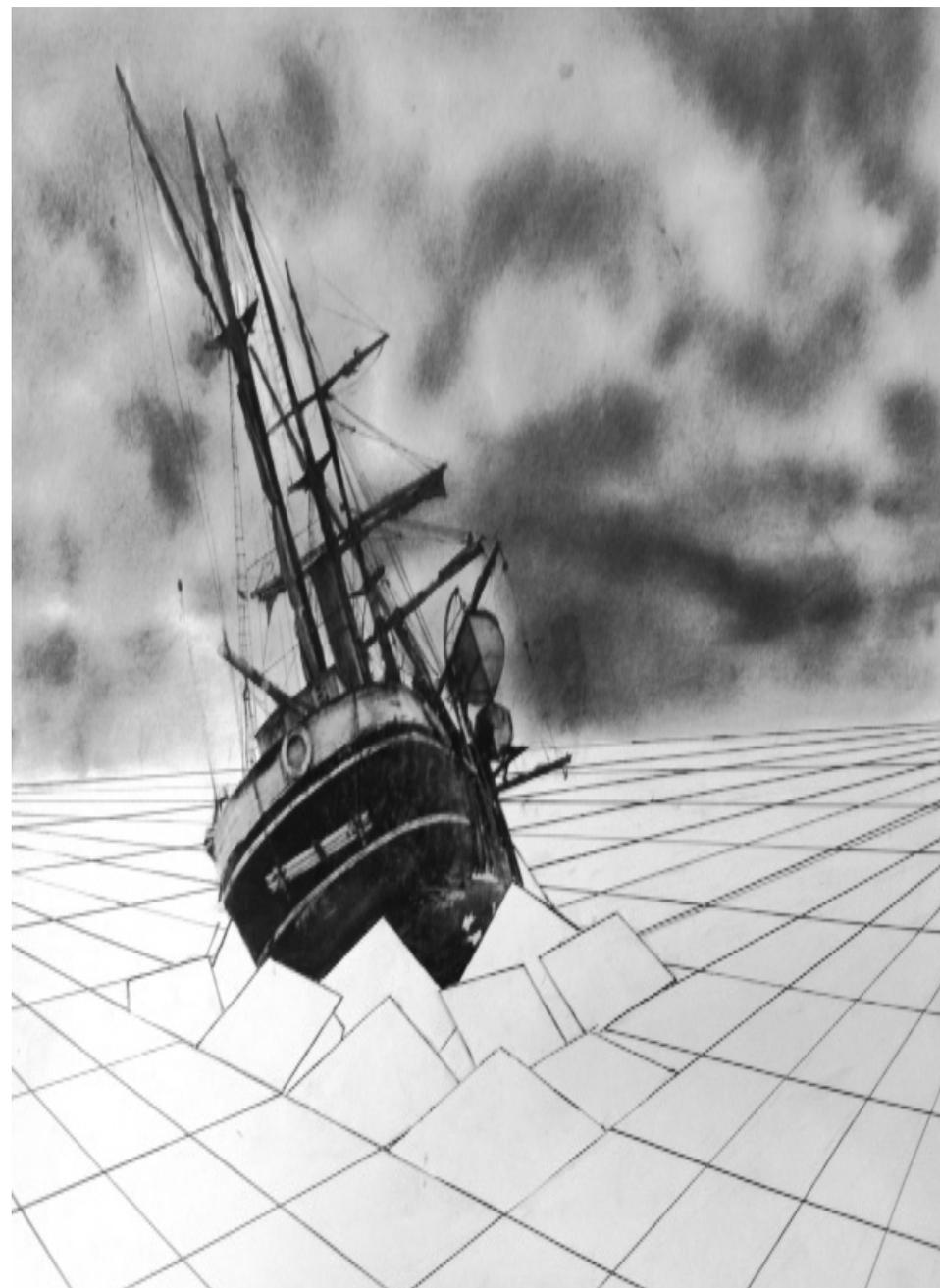
JANNISHA PITTS - WYTHE





JUSTICE PERKINS - ARMSTRONG

RODES GARDNER - OPEN



FISHING REPORT

DESTINY BROWN - TJ

I'm sorry I didn't have time for you
I'm sorry I didn't make time for you
I always knew that one day
I would go out fishing with you
I would cast out my line with an earthworm
I'd picked from my yard
I'd reel in a fish the size of my 7 year old head

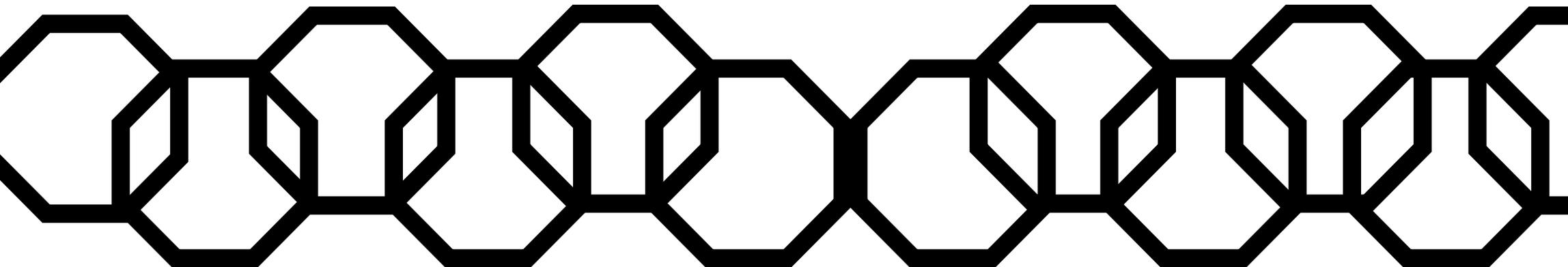
It was one of those things that had to happen

I waited
I never had urgency to actually go
I should have

Now, I sit beside your rocking chair
reading you the fishing report from the paper
because you can no longer read it for yourself

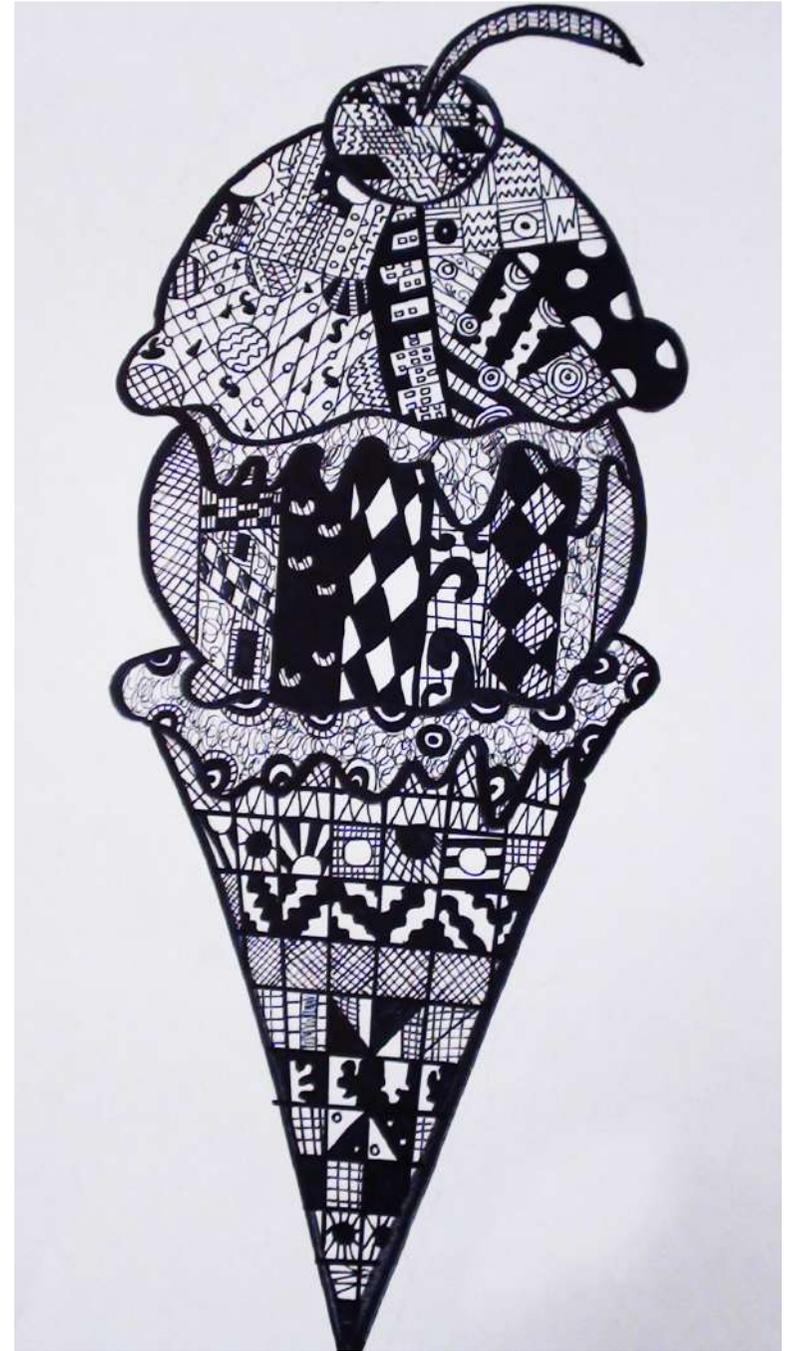


JUSTIN SEXTON - TJ





JACOB VOSSE - OPEN



DARYLNISHA DEPRIEST
JOHN MARSHALL



MONIQUE BROWN - OPEN



SENELLE POWELL - ARMSTRONG



TRACEY ROMERO - WYTHE

DADDY HANNA MATINAZ - HUGUENOT

My daddy,
my twin,
my worst enemy.

My reason for crying.
Sometimes the feeling I get when I think of him,
too much to say, so I keep it within.
So long ago since the last time I saw you,
yet I want you around like any child wants
a father,
like any child wants a mentor,
someone to guide them and help them do right.
Sometimes I think you care,
and I feel unwanted.
My eyes become blurry,
but I tell them it's nothing.
It becomes a routine.
Every night, same thing.
Every day,
the same thing.

But I got better things to do than wait on a call
I know I'm not getting at all.
Still wanna hear your voice,
wanna know what you're like,
wanna see you someday,
so you can hold me tight.

You can tell me those stories 'bout when you was in jail,
pull out those letters we sent in the mail.
Fifteen minutes, I could hardly hear you,
but I would run to the phone when ma would say
it was you.
Made so many promises,
you would do this and fix that
you gon' buy me this and give me that.

WHY FATIMA DOTSON - HUGUENOT

Why be bullied about the way they dress?
Why be bullied about the way they view?
Is it because they don't fit the new "norm?"
So you bully because they have the choice,
The choice to be themselves, not anyone else.

The choice not to discourage one thing
Because they're not encouraging one thing.
Why be bullied about the currency?
There's no require to acquire it.
Why give praise to the ones who get new J's

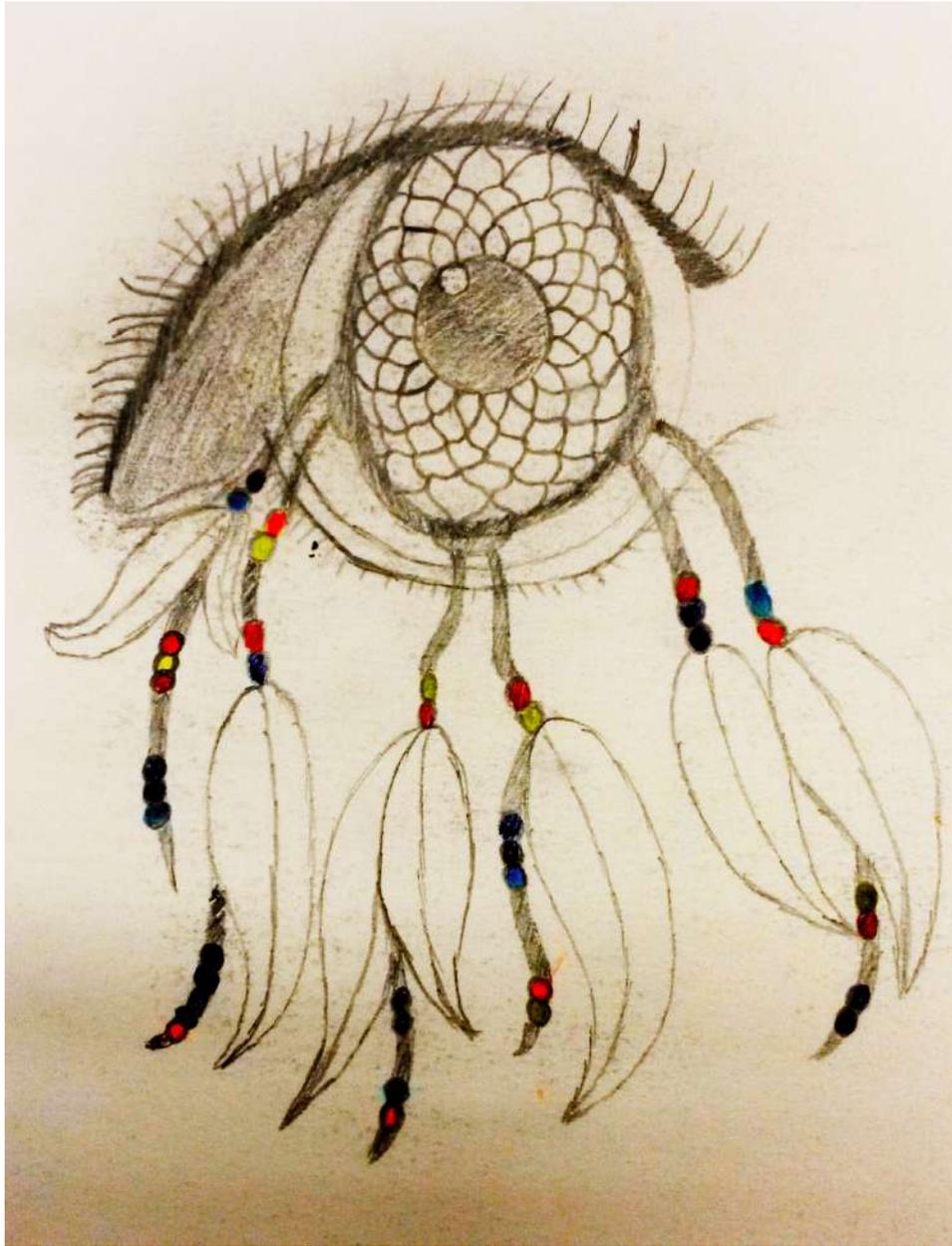
And give knock to ones who get good grades?

Why does it matter who does this?
Why does it matter who does that?
Why does it matter who gets what?

Because everyone wants to be a norm.



SHANELLA WEATHERLESS
ARMSTRONG



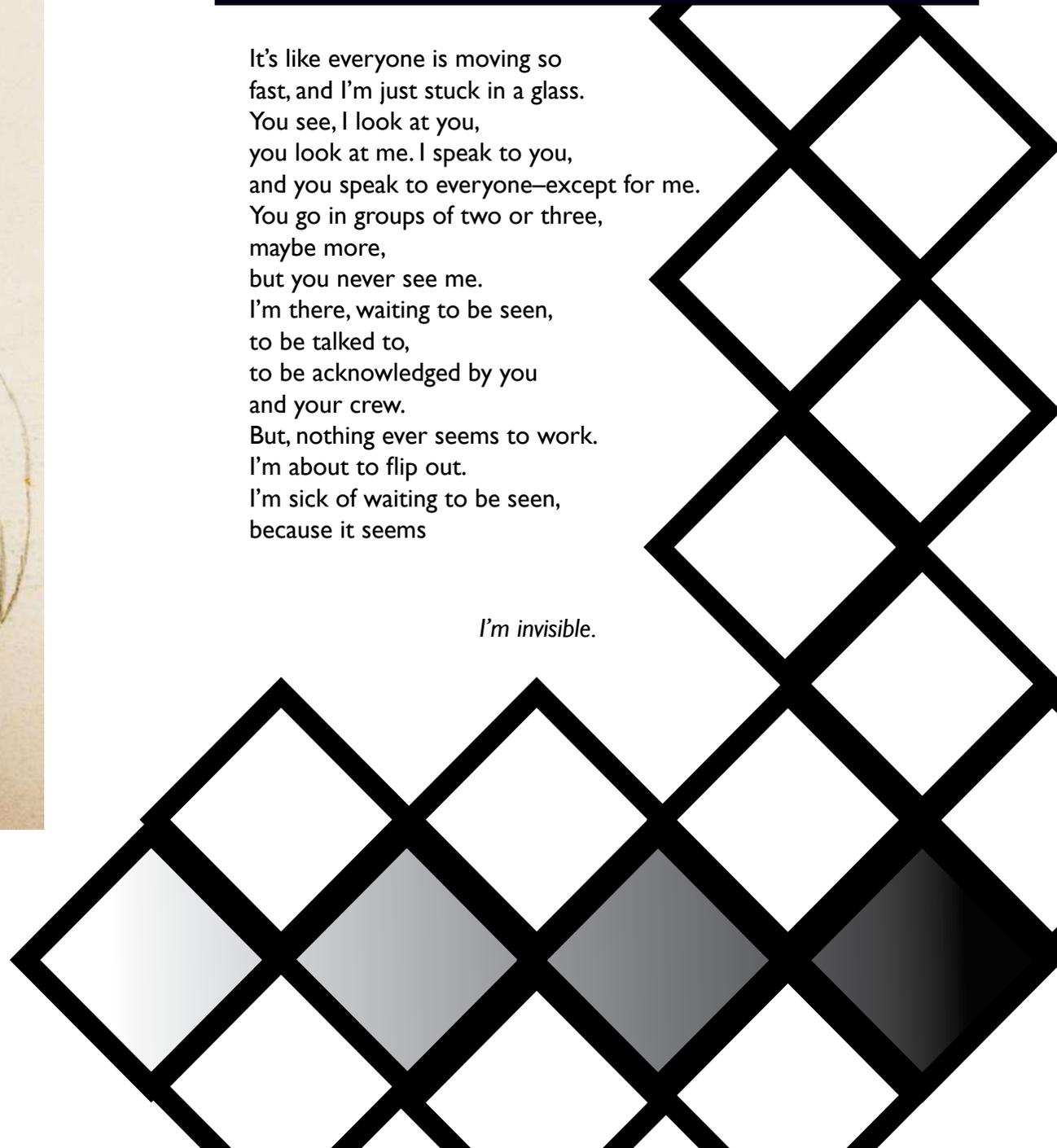
CASHMERE JOHNSON - TJ

INVISIBLE

ALYSSIA HENDERSON - WYTHE

It's like everyone is moving so fast, and I'm just stuck in a glass.
You see, I look at you,
you look at me. I speak to you,
and you speak to everyone—except for me.
You go in groups of two or three,
maybe more,
but you never see me.
I'm there, waiting to be seen,
to be talked to,
to be acknowledged by you
and your crew.
But, nothing ever seems to work.
I'm about to flip out.
I'm sick of waiting to be seen,
because it seems

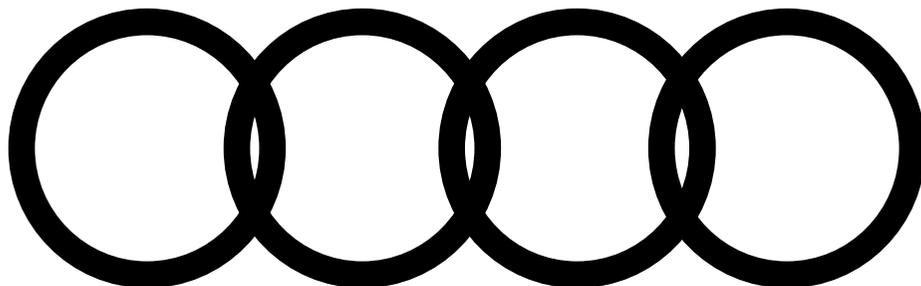
I'm invisible.



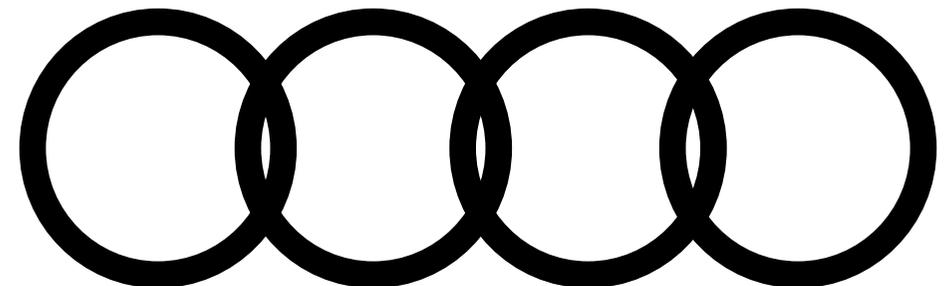
SHE A THOT

MONET PIERRE-LOUIS - HUGUENOT

Thot
T.H.O.T.
That hoe over there
Do you even know what you saying?
When you say she a thot,
What do you mean?
She a that hoe over there?
Or can you even fathom
That words cut deep?
They pierce the soul internally.
What if you were put in her position?
Treated like a stereotype for no apparent reason.
Yet they really don't know you,
But they assume
Because of your God given womanly curves
You put out in any coming season.
What is a hoe, thot, slut, or tramp,
But a title men give out like treason
Because they can't express their emotions without reason.
And we just fall into the darkness of these very words.
Females need to take their power back,
Deeply understanding the ignorance of this common language
We as she need to be able to see
You and me, who are we
But the mirrored vision of a man?
It is now our time and we as females need to take a stand.



ALMESHAKLARK
JOHN MARSHALL



JASMINE CARTER JOHN MARSHALL



LETTERS MARAVILHA NDOMBASI - WYTHE

Amazing, another story of us.
But why can't I move on?
Can't analyze the things you do,
Don't comprehend everything.
Everyone says I'm too attached.
Frankly, I just think I can't
Get my thoughts together.
However, I don't know.
I can't deal anymore.
Just look how far I've come!
Knowing that you've moved on,
Loving you seems like a mistake.
Moving on seems impossible—
Not loving you is unreal.
Over time I've tried.
Persistence is becoming worse—
Questioning my emotions,
Remembering all our moments.
Sadly, I don't know why
Thinking of you is sad.
Uncertain about what to do,
Vulnerable about where we stand,
Wondering if you even miss me,
Expecting something different.
Yet I always get the same results.
Zapping you out of my memory is the only
place that makes sense to me.



ALEXANDER LEWIS - TJ

HALEY CANNADY - OPEN



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