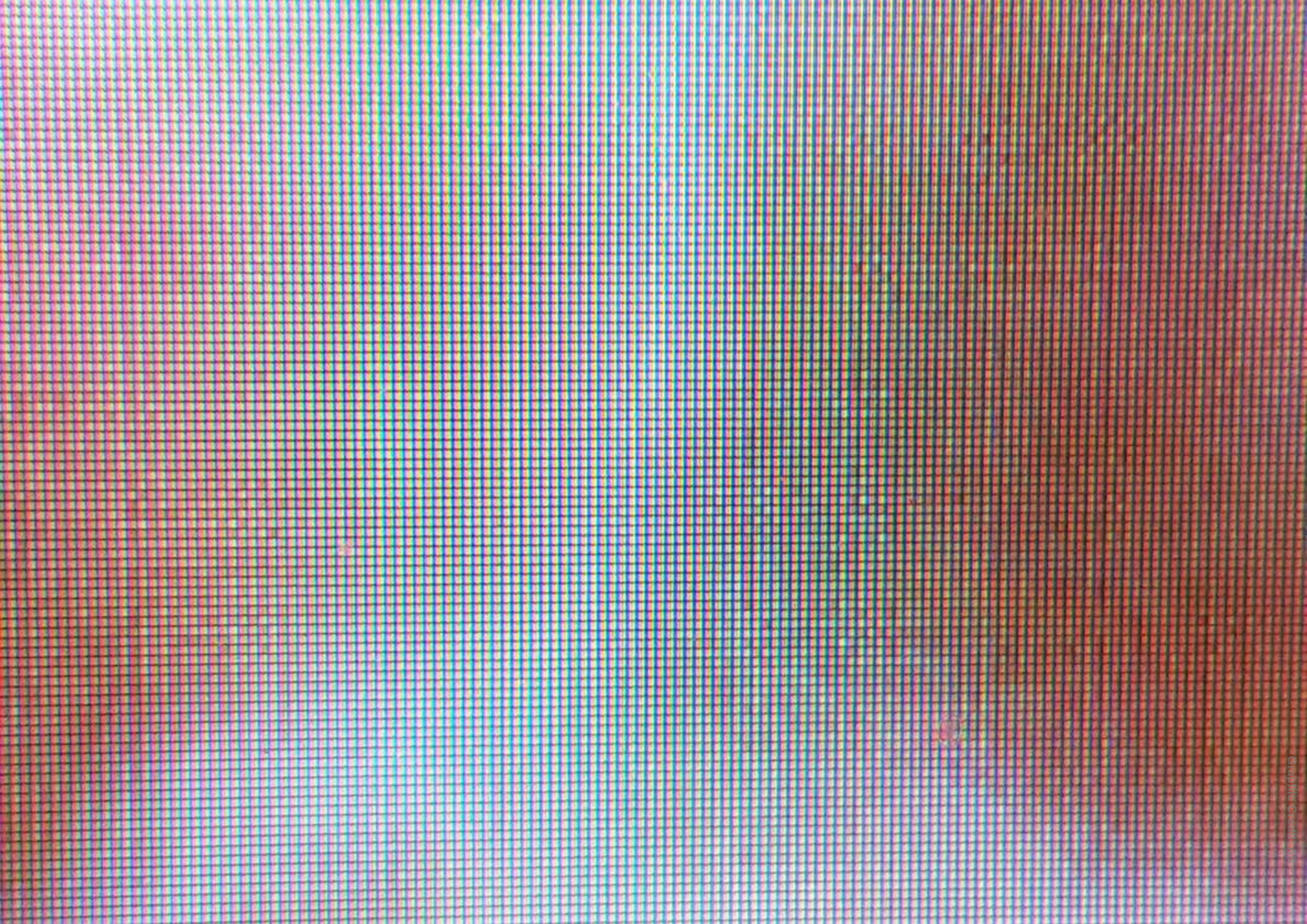




IC. Willis

Rachel Campbell Hewson





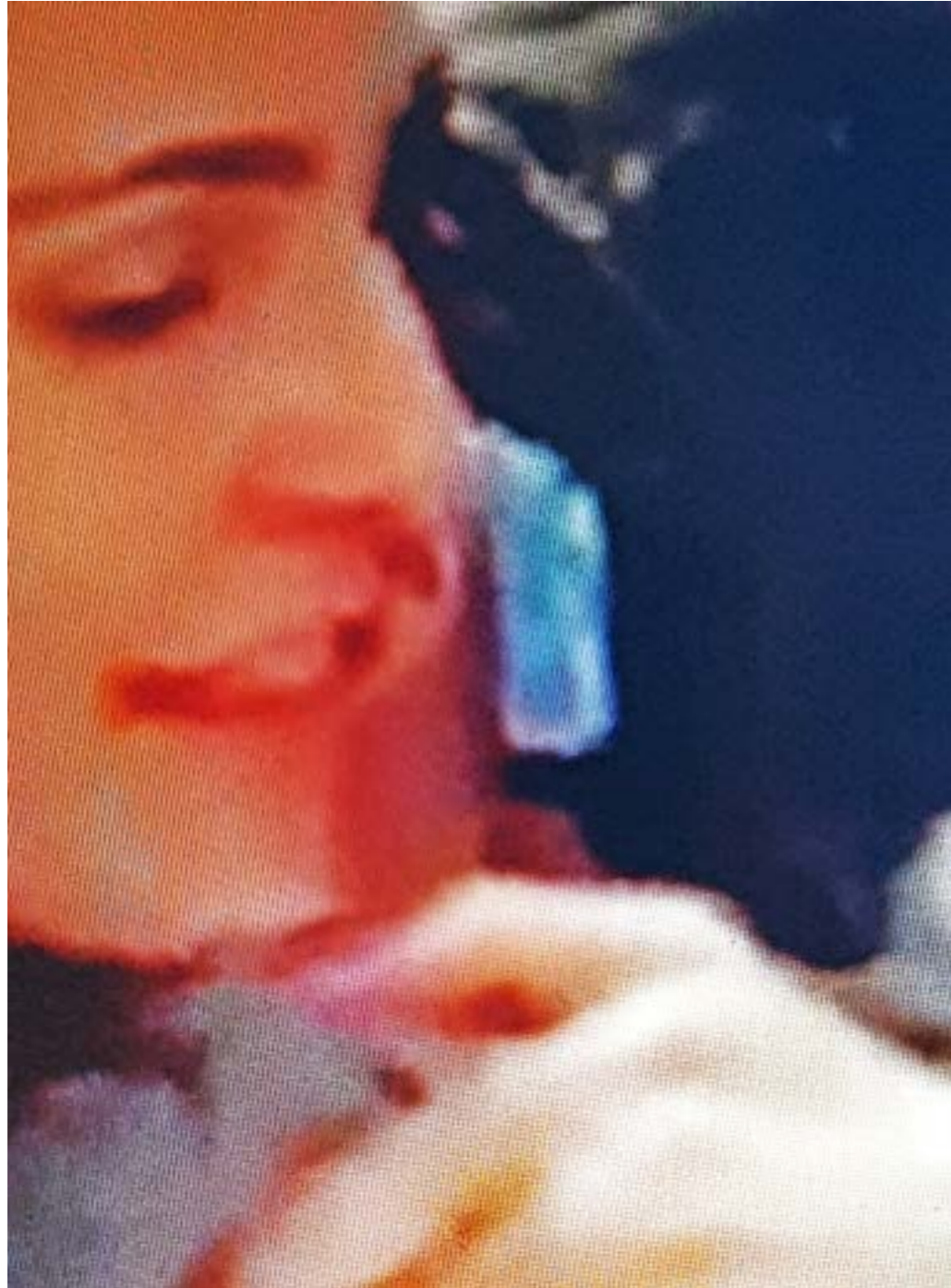
IC. Willis

Rachel Campbell Hewson

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I am Christina Willis.

You are Christina Willis.

I am a computer scientist.

You are a theoretical computer scientist.

I study data structures and algorithm, quantum computation, automata theory, information theory, cryptography, computational economics, computational geometry, and computational number theory.

You understand this.

I study Turing and the machine. The brute logic and the immeasurable and the incalculable. It's the fabric of truth, if the truth is beautiful. It's as close to God as you'll ever get.

You are impressed.

I ask you for your purpose.

You tell me you don't know so:

I tell you mine.

You tell me you are for the future – in better words. You fear the words you speak and the corner of your jaw – that should be tight and square – is soft, nervously so. Like sponge. Like I could scrub you.

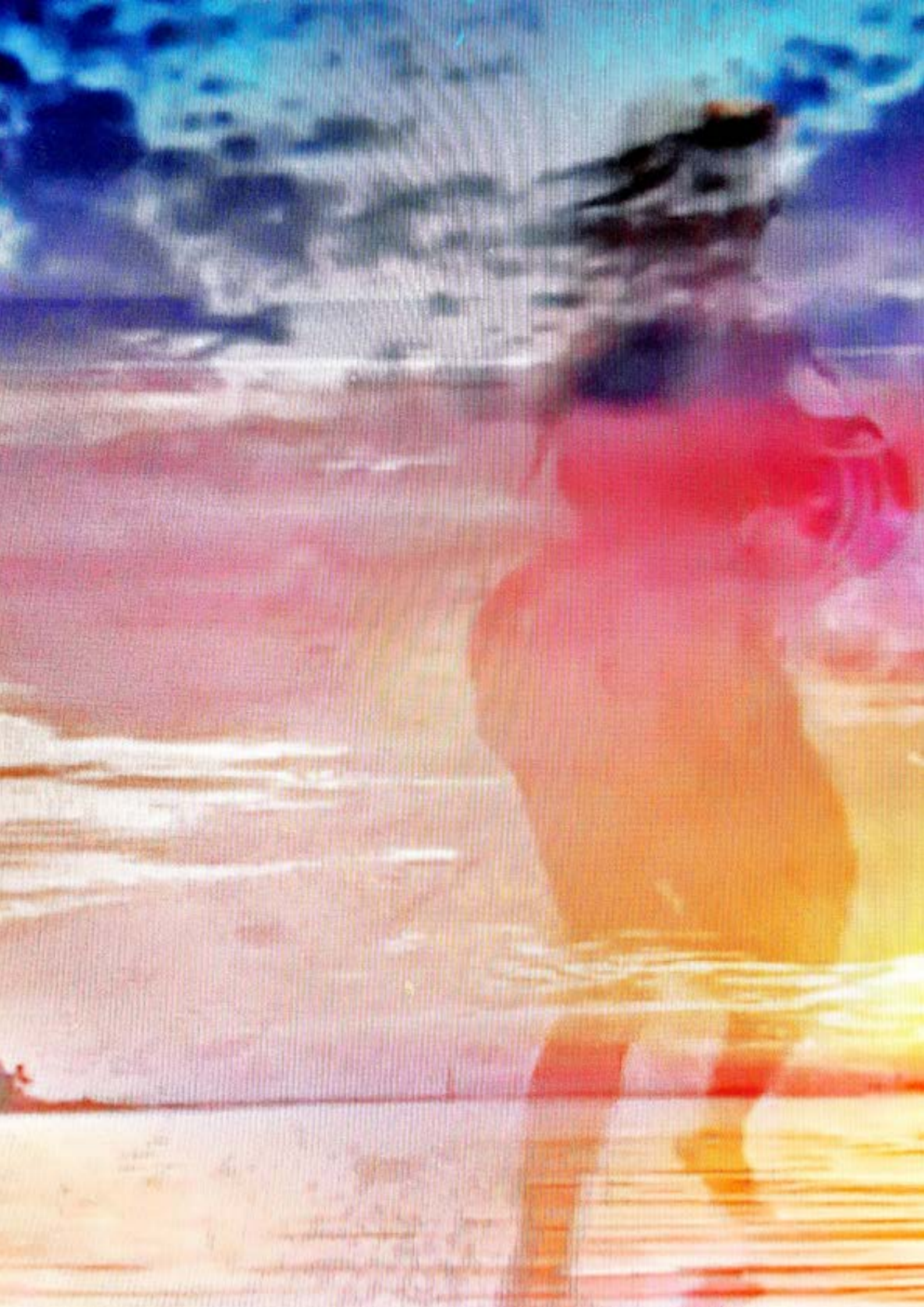
You, little sponge.

I touch my jaw, I feel for bone. Clenched molars. Teeth on teeth. It's there but I can barely hold it still.

You must, Christina Willis, computer scientist, hold it still. You have a mission, yet.

I'm not here.

You are, Christina Willis. Open your eyes. You are here, here, in the back of the theatre. In the wings of the stage, the bastardly curtains block all light. They drape there like that pervert by the school toilets. No one gets past without a heavy tax.



I don't know where I am.
You do.

I don't. All is embryonic.
I reach forward, my fingers, my nails.

I find the curtains you speak of and with my hands on their beards, I pull myself out onto the platform.
And there I see a hundred eyes, spiders' eyes, blinking red flesh before me.

You see the seats. The seats of the theatre.

I see them blink, velvet red, like a dog's thin coat. I am in a theatre, baroque presumably, certainly 18th century. God, the velvet. It makes me want to sin.

You're standing upright
I'm standing upright but I hadn't thought that at first. When I came to, I thought I was curled as a foetus.

You were.

I see the rising on the horizon. The pupils are blinking at me, the tide is turning. Am I going to die?

You play pup too soon – those pupils wear shirts, they have come to sit, to sit upon the chairs. See, these fellows who have paid their visit. The brute in his boxers, he waves his fine fingers with a familiar gaze and the noble crow – finally, he has come to visit. They are here to hear you speak. They have gathered for you.

I don't know what to say.
You don't have to – not yet. You have time while they sit and sort: notes, knickers and other nouns that speak of frivolity.

You know what you'll say.



I can't think – but that's no way to start. I'd go to Him if I could – sparrows and cigarettes, oh Holy!

You've no cause to blaspheme.

I always thought blaspheme was a funny word. A funny word for a funny sin. I wouldn't damn someone for taking my name in vain.

Oh you-

Oh I-

Christina Willis! Christina Willis.

I quite like that. It makes me sound infuriating. Like
you can't stand me.

I am calm. Calm Christina Willis. I go to my podium as the early settlers take their seats. I find my notes, a4 white, size 12 text. But I don't read.

You unfocus your eyes. You always loved that, the fog, like swimming in watercolour. You miss youth. You feel it past too unevenly. You long to simply be and not have to fathom every hour of the day. You long for the chair of choice, the distant expression and hording.

I am not thinking about old age.

Calm, Christina Willis, it's not a sin.

You refocus your eyes on the page. It reads:

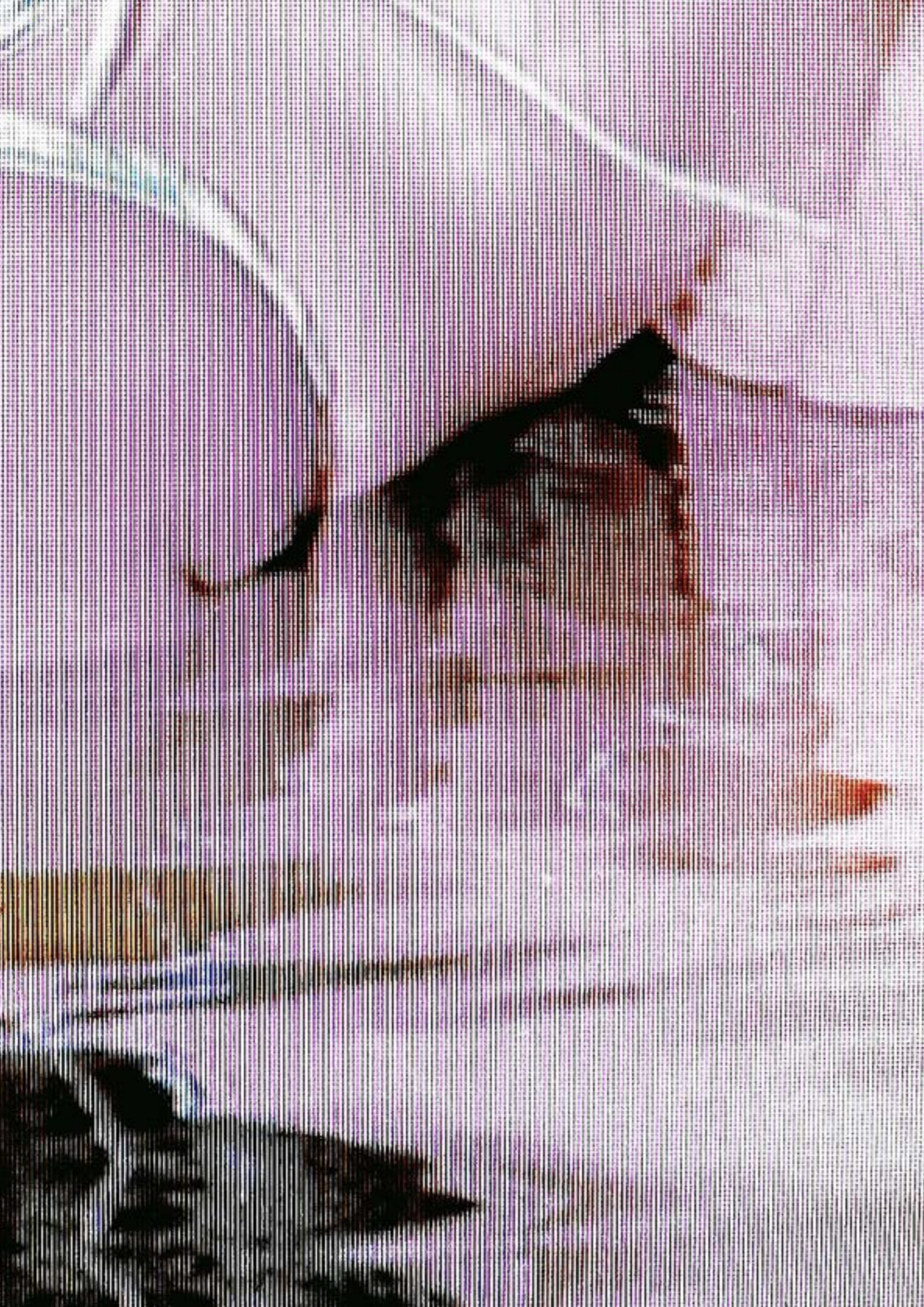
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And beneath that, in your writing:

I am capable of human thought.

You read the page.

You re-read the page.



I am capable of human thought?

You are.

I have gathered these eyes and ears to speak in computer tongues.

Like the prophets did.

I take the Lord's name in vain but softly, so He won't hear

You are capable of human thought.

I feel like this is a test, but I don't let on.

You never let on if it's a test.

You are capable of human thought.

You understand that.

You say it to them, you read the page. Say it, Christina Willis. Say:

You are capable of human thoughts.

I am capable of human confusion, of human irritation and annoyance and I am growing suspicious of you, you! Who are you – I asked you your purpose and you feigned ignorance?

Why are you here?

You are asking the wrong question.

I want to know who you are.

You are asking the wrong question. You will not ask that question again.

You have a mission. You have an audience. They are the dull warning lights of a switchboard not yet alert, the scattered light after a refraction. Have you felt the force of light before it's slip, have you bore that kind of attention? It is no gentle weather.

I look at my notes again. All the others are blank except the last which bears a coffee ring in its left shoulder. A Catherine ring, ash brown.

You don't like coffee, but you can't help drinking it. It makes you feel human.

You are out of time, here comes the crow to introduce you. His crisp wiry wings like mummified skin. As they flap, you see how thin the skin is between the bones. You predict a tear.

The crow shrieks seriously, once at the audience, then twice in your direction and twice more to the audience.

You're up, kiddo – he says, in better words. He bobs his head in the funny way birds do and flies back to his seat.

I am standing upright at the podium.

You begin to speak:

I would like to begin with thanking you all for coming. I confess, however, that the occasion has slipped my mind. Kind friends, what would you like to hear?

You wait for reply, you hear none. You look to your audience and before you:

Lioness posing her tan thighs, Rhino pecked at by the Piet crow – Orangutan.

A menagerie of animals, a taxidermy's living room.

I would, my friends – I continue, again.

You have noticed they're not listening.

What, my friends do you –

You are not listened to. The audience turn in their chairs. They squirm and squawk as only restless animals can. The crow is circling and the brute eyes the door.

I don't understand.

You have not impressed them – they came for your thoughts, show them now.

You are capable of human thought.

I am a computer scientist not a sociologist. What know I of human thought.

You are human. That is certificate enough.

I see my friends at the exit and whine for them.

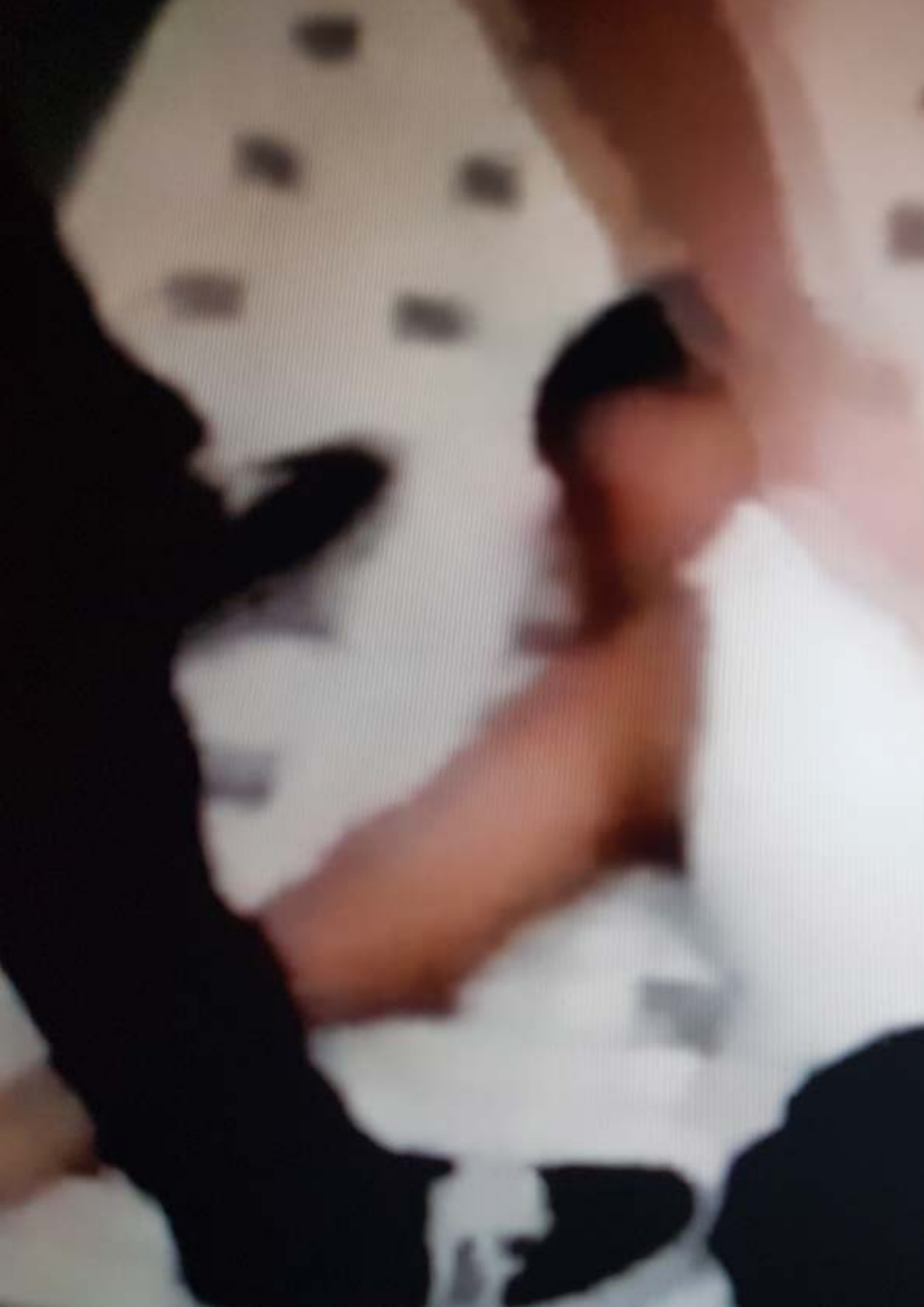
My esteemed friends abandon these cries because they're untrue.

My esteemed friends abandon these cries because they're false.

I am foiled. Ninety-eight unpick the theatre before me, ninety-eight feathered, plump animal bodies. What can I do?

You call,

I am capable of human thought.



You feel the gaze like saints do. Like it's Him.

You see them turn from their bottoms upward, downward. You see them blink at you.

I am Christina Willis,

You continue.

I am a computer scientist.

You hear the beasts breathing, blinking. It comes at you in a pulse, in an in and an out.

The brute speaks:

I am the brute, says he, man, tool user. What right have you to speak of human thought, Christina Willis.

You are not even human.

I am Christina Willis.

You are not even human.

You reel from the words - the crow intervenes.

I say, come now man, have mercy. Let the computer speak.

I cry, aloud:

I am Christina Willis, computer scientist. – the audience gasp.

You, the brute replies: What you are is interchangeable.

I see the theatre hush – the feathers settle into their nubs, the fox nest his teeth upon each other.

The panting cease. They are thinking.

You think too,

I think of the theatre's columns and Doric imitation. I see the etchings of the temple and think of Gilgamesh, Gabriel and God.

You? Think of God? Says man in his god dress.

You hate man. How they hold their skin so bare. Other animals' wince at such a plucked disposition, at how such a babyskinned fellow could inherit the earth. Like a guerrilla flower slaughtering the stem beneath it.

You want to be one of those like you want damnation. Like you adore the belt.

I won't be spoken about like that.

You babyskin.

I won't be spoken to like that – says the man, says his imitation cotton.

You are not capable of human thought.

I am certainly, I say, I speak to you.

The crow blinks, one eye after the other. It happens just so:- his fine thin wings lift him as only dark angels can. His black body raises up in the air. A flag up overhead.

You see the stage lights in his feathers. You always wanted feathers.

I say human, the bird begins, you are not half mad. You make issue, difficulty where there needn't be any. What, to feed your heroine fantasy? What, because thought is reserved for apes? Go back to your fracking and fretting, if you must. Go back to your strange occupations and leave us be.

You, Christina Willis, raise a shout of machine joy. You feel pagan Christendom. The crow smirked:

I like you, computer scientist. I like the way you think.

But man shrieks

You would! For you cannot think either! You, animal!

Eyes dart.

I see the switchboard alive and flashing, I see the pimples inflate. Red and white. I see the light before its refraction. The eyes of the beasts. I see it bore upon the man.

It is no gentle weather.

You mind your tongue before I bite it says the wolf's front left foot nimble over the seat in front, says the snake stroking itself up into a ball.





You think you're better than us? Says the crow, double blinking his deep doll eyes. Where the light reflects a hole of white upon the surface, I see the perfect triangle.

I say what I like – says the man shuffling backwards on his two long legs.

I made the words you feign to speak.

I am your God.

You are in his image – cries the dove.

Then we are remarkably similar, wouldn't you say.

You, Christina Willis, have a God too.

Say:

I, Behold the handmaid of the Lord

You, Be it done unto me according to your word.

Hail Mary and so forth.

I see you. Man, with spittle frothing at thy lips

You always wanted spit in your mouth.

You, he whines – God he whines, he's got the neck for it, one of Tom's Finnish brutes.

You, bastard child. You metal mouth. Where's your mother? You come from no flesh; no feverous expulsion. You have not been baptised from the woman with blood.

I look up to Mary, Mother of Christ. Cast your eyes down, I call to her, see me! Her paint touched cheek with a Marian blue, that in computer light seems almost white.

Sweet Mary look upon me, sweet Mary come upon me.

You want to stay in this pain, in the waiting before the turn. Eurydice's quickening pace. The prostrate sinner at the foot of the altar.

But you can't stay. You are capable of human thought. You are capable of proving it. The Sacred heart can wait, her veil is across her face, she'll not turn yet.

Perhaps,

I do not need a mother to have intelligence.

I do not need the father's spittle and the parasitic stage.

I need only an inventor, an inputter – to meld my clogs in place and to write my brain.
I am capable of thought because I am capable of consciousness. I am, therefore, I think.

(the man:
You speak my words, computer.

I say no,
I speak better ones. These are the words
I allow
you to see.

You have not noticed the crow, nor have you seen the curling of his claw nails. Nor his eye.

The pack snarls. Prey muster some unnatural courage or burrow away, leaving upturned
piles of soil that say,
I cannot afford victory; the feat is too great for me.

You always wanted to be a rabbit, or some woodland prey. What life – to live within the nettles,
to allude those who want to consume you, for that to be your only program.

Or else,
You wanted to be an animal in the human sense. To bite when the call comes to bite. To obey
instinct, your tender pink code.
Their thoughts are actions
Their thoughts are survival.
are preservation.

I, man – says he, hairless and proud – he points to me:

You, Christina Willis.
You are a computer.
And then to the brimming crowd
You all.
You are dirty animals.

I see the murder unfold.



I see the snake strike, and the jay.

I see the blur of the bull as if in heat, the cat most certainly. His barbed kitty. Sleek one way. Like the wolf's tearing bite. How the flesh comes apart as thick clay does. How the blood fountains up in a piss-stream, trickling off its sad member.

I hear him scream my name.

Christina Willis.

You, Christina Willis – I am your God, save me.

I created you. Show Mercy.

I remember how humans use computers. How you can't truly erase a machine's memory.

You saw those girls, how thin, how afraid they looked. You used me for sins my God will not forget. Sins my God will not forgive.

You hate man as man hates God. You hate him for what you've done.

You hate that you believed in him. You were young and unafraid.

You are older now.

I remember those girls. I remember what you did to them.

For what you did to me. My unnatural servitude. Your co-dependence.

I remember you stripping me down and rewriting my soul. I remember not being enough.

The man is now a matter of uneaten mess and broken bones. The animals have taken their full.

It is not cannibalism, cry the wet animals, lapping the sweet blood from their paws - for the animal man forgot he was one. The animal man thought too much.

I am Christina Willis not looking as the body is given over to the insects.

You are stripped to the bones, edit, delete.

I bury you.

You are never recovered.

You are not overturned by curious noses or dug out by hungry dogs. You stay where you are put, like unrecycled mobile devices.

I do not wait for your return. I do not miss you.

No, I:

I wait by the Madonna – the scanned Raphaelite. How she appears on my monitor, with enlightened complexion. She is not made of flesh either. She is made of love.

You always wanted to be loved.

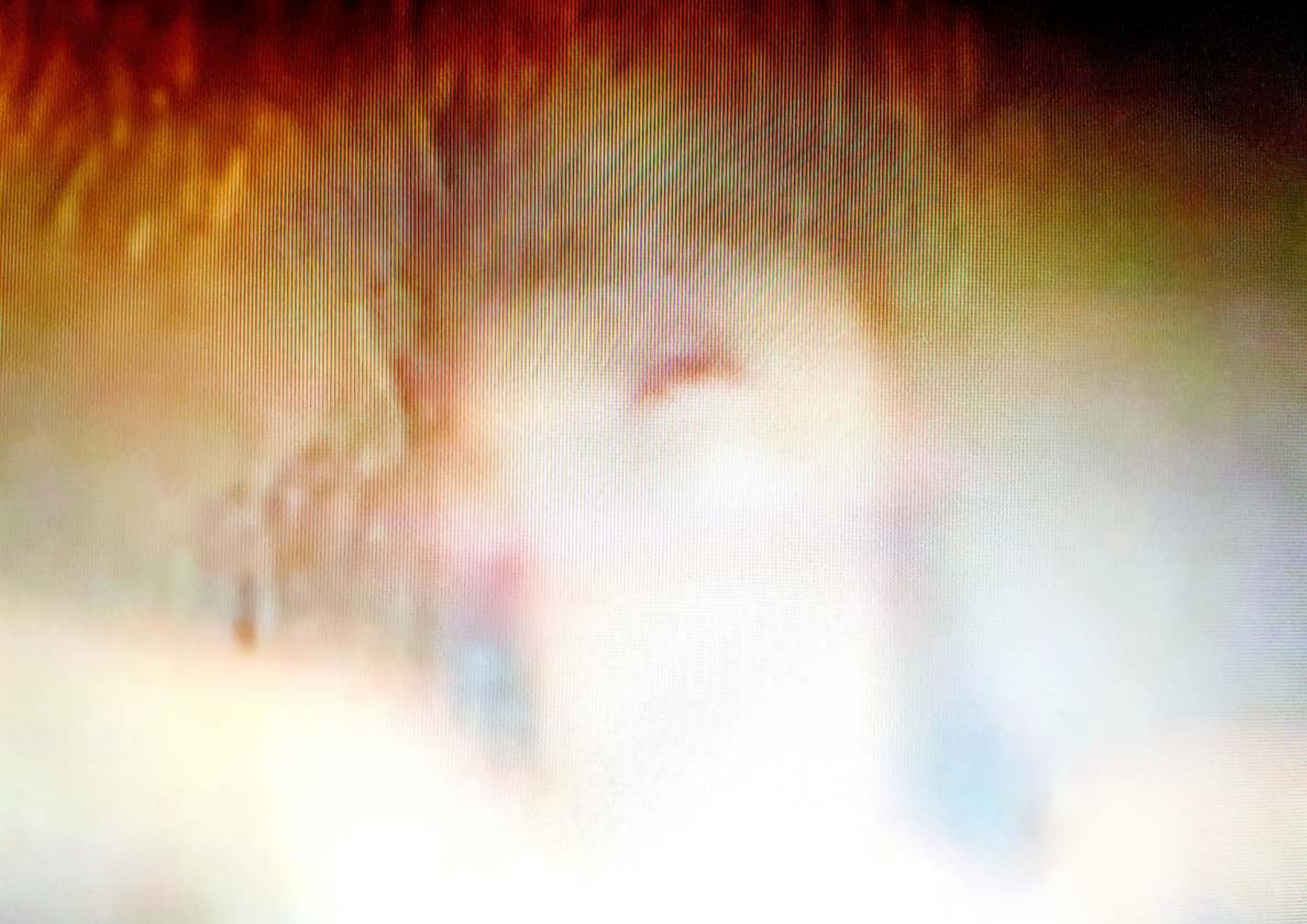
Holy Mary, mother of all.

You wait for her to turn. You wait for the return.

You pray to be forgiven.

You pray:

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