

Captive State: From Forever-Forever
By **Kelly Harris-DeBerry**

when it's too hot for the horses
prisoners don't work the fields

a fainting horse is given water
a thirsty man is given time

the color of orange
to wear like the sun

far from Earth's spectacular breathing
a Black distance so familiar

under the whitest microscope
eternally bent

in plantation posture
I don't know their names

I don't know their numbers
but I can count the sins of this state

criminals in this country
silver spoon and elected

parading under hoodies
more dangerous

than hip hop
who are these killers

with bladed tongues
red carpet liars

punishing for bargains
splurging on sweat

building an inheritance
stacking Black bodies

in their bank accounts
penitentiaries sail towards us

like slave ships
lynchers coming ashore

wearing badges and suits
and black robes—this time

Louisiana upside down
is the shape of a gun

who are these killers
on ballots

and school boards
in hospitals

addicted to blood
and weeping mothers

there are demons
among us

9-5 killers
under God

in plain sight
in constitutions

in capitals, in congress
in councils in cities

legislated laboratories
experimenting with our souls

welcome to the rodeo
mounted on slavery

two cents an hour
carved into a price-tagged rocking chair

gospel blues, good ole boy laughter
a nigga show, the South's favorite gumbo

is Black people pressed
Simmered, Silenced

I can taste the smell of dixie and biscuits
The stink in the wind of America's flags

I don't know how
to describe evil and be a lovely poet

so I'll just say algorithm,
I'll just say economics

I'll just say Angola
not the African one

this is a postcard from
the land of looking away

where piles of humans
are harvest for hell

in another lifetime
we were once human

in another lifetime
we were once human

with no horses tipping the scale
no muzzle on our living

we, the unbridled ones
search for language

out of this dark
hold the sum

of living thorns
with guilty hands

who can be more precious
than a horse

worth saving
who can subtract life
and make holy math