Memory Thieves

The bulldozer rattles up a cloud of dust
Buildings dissolving like ice in water.
Windows, scratched up,
Have seen many weary souls turning corners,
Have watched as men in black suits slipped a spatula
Beneath the city’s foundation
And turned it over,
Weary souls lost in the batter
“Out with the old and in with the new
They have not known the strength
We’ve seen.”
People who’ve known love but not wealth
And people who’ve known neither
They’re gently pushed by hands who
Have only known to take
Their memories lining their pockets.
**Deep Conditioning**

Oil my scalp with
streetlights and “road closed” signs,
keep it hydrated with traffic, but
do not jam my pores.

They will take too long to rebuild,
too long to transform the projects into a project, so

Whitewash their murals
and paint on the clean slate of redistricted lines.
Choose which color to dye my parted roots:
ashen clay of old cigar factories,
or the bright brick of houses we used to see on the interstate.

Walk with me by the river,
Hands cradling the heads of homes lost,
and make sure they’re washed for the new generation.

Let them dry in a fresh building,
overlooking the new land
worth more than its history.
Home

Change.
The one thing we need,
The only thing that can help.
But is it good?

We are played like a game,
And molded to fit the puzzle.
Construct and made to be bright.
Even if the future is dim.

We are the windows to our soul,
The foundation of our home.
The color to the house,
And the beginning of a neighborhood.

Change is needed.
New plans are made.
What's a world
Without a vision.
Opulence

Every night a plethora of plated tears
plummet from my water line,
greet my sheets briefly
and hit the floor as solid gold.

They manipulate at my marble,
weathering with my worth
crushing the cold canvas
until there are canyons instead of cracks
and they're trailing around my queen size
chipping away at every corner
counting the seconds until I collapse.

But at least I'm wealthy, right?

All you see is my abundance
and with abundance you give me apathy.
You've convinced yourself of my contentment
and conjured up my greed

While I lie here unclothed waiting for my marble floor to slip from under me.
Divided We Stand

Welcome to a world where “equal” means nothing
When we’re two sides of the same coin
But it won’t be acknowledged
Because
This is how it has been
How it will be and how it should be
But no problem is as simple as black or white
We forget about the shades of grey in between
Try to destroy us
Demolish and terrorize
Take us apart piece by piece
Separate and bleach us
Own us
Enslave us
Ruin our reputations
Break our hearts and our bones
Tear down our communities
Kick us out
Tell us off
Whatever
Just for once
Let us make a decision
About our choice
High off Hate
I see his eyes are ruby red
With anger
Fixing his lips to
Speak words
That divide and conquer
A nation in distress.

My people find themselves
Singled out, and on their backs
Are bullseyes.

All for the love of confederacy,
Their malice does not go unnoticed as
His feet stumble.

swastika on chest
pitchfork in hand
torch in the other.
They were under the influence.
His influence.

We cannot peacefully protest

But the blood thirsty
Alt right
Are practicing their freedom of speech.

Rabid and oozing at the mouth
They heave with hate,
Side effects
include but are not limited to
• misogyny
• sexism
• racism
• idiocy
havoc
Enveloping the streets
This drug spreads quicker
Than most.

Our leader is the drug lord
Mass producing
This killer
His advocacy is pushing for
Displacement
My sober soul pleads for peace
while they are high off of hate.
Inner City Burial Grounds

Gentrification
Echoes through the ribs of inner cities
where ramifications cut like a knife
Collecting the scraps America gave them
That they built into homes
To sanctuaries
To be ripped from their backs
Stripped down to the sediment
Slipped into another’s pockets for profit
Left with rocketing rent
And eviction letters
Until it’s flipped
To the tip of the market
Where natives are left bare handed
And explorers strike gold
Communities torn apart for mini marts.
Father set north, mother due south
Where the child doesn’t have enough
for a round trip on the city bus
landmarks dismantled in the name of renovation
culture left under a city of ruins
Though concrete might crumble
bones bearing history never stay buried
Because you can’t take the inner city out the kid
So when the reaper lays creeping in the background
To sew the damage done
They will rebuild and reunite
fragmented projects whole again
"Not a Single Dime"

She sleeps sound on a dead rose bed
Sinking past petals to meet thorns,
Thorns that bite and puncture her skin,
Bringing her to tears and forlorn.

She walks barefoot on diamond roads
Streets tearing up her calloused feet
Her crimson blood tainting riches
They drinking her blood with wild greed.

She sinks into seas of shaved gold
Shining mounds swallowing her whole,
Suffocating all that she is
And burying what may survive.

Now, gaze into her eyes and tell
How she can be surrounded by,
Such glory and nobility
And why she doesn’t have a dime.
Enredado y lengua atada

I am a misconception
A never would’ve guessed
Far from media projection
I am a misconception
Never been fluent
My R’s sometimes stumbles
Spanglish is a blanket I take comfort in
Yet I still follow the hips of mi familia
As bachata plays my feet taking me home to Home I’ve never seen
I still call it mi casa
Our culture so colorful
Our language taste like sofrito
While our lips are sweet like mango
I am that Boricua princesa
That Afro Latina, that blood running through my veins
The one that screams “Wepa”
A language that gets stuck in my coils
An island I’ve never seen
A Home I’ve never gone to
Yet I still call it mi casa
And I still tell it te amo
The Test of Time

Between rising metal and glass
Shadows casted down over peeling paint
And overgrown grass
Weeds tying itself around
Broken white railings that used to keep me safe
Now a safety hazard
Is painted across the front of this house
My house
I can remember the days in summer heats
When kids would run down streets
We’d play until stars shimmered in the sky
Until clouds turned pink—almost blushing with mischief
And we’d scream with joy
Now a memory, those houses torn away
My own house a soldier, standing tall
As apartments rise against it
I want to go back to those days
Tell myself I will become great
That this dying house
Does not mean I too
Am dying
Welcome Home

Moving from place to place because
my skin color doesn’t quite fit the area.
Leaving the only place I call home because
my religion unsettles the neighbors.
I have been turned away from many homes because
my parents are gay.
Home is where the heart is
but when there is no heart, where is home?
Looked down upon because
The African Americans. The Native Americans
The Hispanics. The Haitians. The fill in the blanks…
will be the neighborhood blight
and begin the predictable white flight
“They can’t live anywhere nice.”
If home is not a place but a feeling
then why am I so COLD?
Coming home is the sweetest
thing but when there is no
welcome mat…
There is no joy.
Casa de la Familia

I belong on the front porch of my Abuela’s childhood home

On Columbus drive, in Ybor, 1965.

When the streets and their brick bodies
sang of Havana with every step
And the factory lectors read tellenovellas en Español

I belong on the front porch of my Abuela’s childhood home

on Columbus drive, Ybor, 1965

Values rolled into me by Cuban women like tobacco in a cigar

Lessons on how to be a proper lady, paired with jingles like

“Pa-mi, Pa-ti,” for you, for me, “Pa-mi, Pa-ti”

I belong on the front porch of my Abuela’s home

Watching the neighborhood with my family

In Ybor, 1963

Sharing stories from the safety of rocking chairs

Singing “Pa-mi, Pa-ti,” for you, for me,

For you, for me, “Pa-mi, Pa-ti.”
Obstructed View

As I look out the classroom window,
A line of rosy pink houses
Stacked atop one another
Is all I see.

A garden of homes,
A different story captured
Behind each shuttered window.

Tomorrow I will look at the houses
To see cranes and men in orange vests
Picking lives apart.

Crumbling history in their gloves hands,
Piling it into mounds
On the side of the road.

Next week,
Those homes will be nothing
But a frame
Stripped of its title,
Its history,
Its life.

Next month,
The lot will be barren.
Those families scattered
PERSPECTIVE
There is a fine line between
A house and a home.
A house is a building: four walls, some rooms, maybe a closet and pantry,
A bathroom here and there.
A home is a warm and cozy – a family on the
Black leather couch watching television,
The white linens glowing from the guest bedroom.
A home is the patterned kitchen dishes – the one plate you
Decorated in elementary school.
A neighborhood is a divided area for living.
Your house is twenty feet from his,
His is twenty feet from hers.
Each house is similar – structure and style identical; same bland painted walls.
A community is one person connecting with another; one family helping another.
It’s showing support and care – passion and friendship.

We can live in a
Neighborhood, but not be involved
In a community.
We can live in a house
But not be home.
E. 56th St

The city pulses with color;
Black and brown crowded into the Pepto-Bismol pink house
at the end of the block—
you know, the one next to the nail salon
that Maria’s brother spray painted last March.
On the porch, the old swing is full of nieces and nephews and neighbors
And they are full of laughter and memories
and the overcooked burgers Jay’s dad tossed on the grill.
At about 11 o’clock, they wander into their own worn beds,
But when they wake
Their home is painted white.
The Fall of the Old Empire

Naeemah Weathers, Grade 10

Maybe if the empire state grew legs, and walked in tandem,

with the street lights, and the old cigar shops

and smoke stacks ran, stretching their limbs and

racing along the city streets, would the crooked fences strapped with rubber

zip tie braces finally speak their minds.

If the children that ran circles around those very same fences,

and sung lullabies as the streetlights flickered, and the mothers

who stood on their doorsteps allowed their throats

to open wide, and a call of cease to stumble from

their tongues, would bulldozers and street plows

rumble to a stop, kissing the old, sparking lampposts and

neighborhood trees instead of carving at their faces, and ripping at their hair.

So the plows run, bullying the trees to the ground,

and the jackhammers curl around the crumbling concrete, because

“this would be a wonderful piece of property, what I could do

could transform this neighborhood into something of profit”

because empire state buildings never grow legs,

and old smoke stacks are too old to ever run again
The July Café

July, 1945

The smell of Cuban bread
Was enlightening
I was surrounded by brick
Red, new in perfect shape
By day my dad makes fresh
café con leche for the friends
In white collars
Cuban sandwiches for the lovers
that sat in the same corner every day for lunch
And espresso for the white collars, back again
in the afternoon

July, 2017

The Café stands tall but empty
Owners pass, years pass,
The Pasetti family has lived in the bricks
breathed in the cigar smoke and never left the café
Now as the paint peels, the bricks crumble
my abuelo is not forgotten
my abuelo has molded with change
and will always have the fourth of July
Brick House

I did not own these bricks
Those my family slept near
cooked by
lived in

I did not own the bricks
my mother came home to

My grandfather told me
never to worry
no one on these tired streets owned much
certainly not bricks

I did not own the bricks
marking my height
from the day my father
carried me through the front door

No one here owned these bricks
it wasn’t until they were bulldozed
into the dirt
that I found out who did
ENFIN, CHEZ-SOI: (finally, home)

I. Past
   i live here;
   in the in-between of rags and riches,
   a border between come home when its dark
   and come home when you’re ready,
   i live where the sidewalk cracks hold more than
   gravel and dust,
   but a hope and trust that one day
   we’ll walk over to the other side-

II. Present
   i moved here;
   past the in-between of rags and riches
   where i come home when i’m ready,
   and the sidewalk cracks have flowers
   tucked beneath the gravel
   and dust,
   it is nice here and i want you to come, too,
   i moved here with the hope and trust
   for the-

III. Future
   i see it here.
   the disintegration of rags vs riches
   and the integration you and
   me, house and home,
   i see us walking past dark
   with flowers in our hands
   and living in the understanding
   that there is more here.
Out Past Dark

I’ve been doing this for such a short amount of time but it feels like centuries

Trudging feet that aren’t my own

Convincing myself and others that it’ll be work it in the long run

But we are too tired to even walk and the path is far too long

Carrying the weight of burdens we’re all too familiar with

And troubles we’ll quickly come to know

Haven’t even reached a quarter of a century

We’re not ready

Not ready to pick up our history’s mistakes as we’re struggling to carry our own

Not ready to make amends with a tortured Mother Earth

Not ready to make that leap so our children can be out past dark like it was generations ago

We’re petrified and not capable of dealing with loads of tainted boxes full of tainted information

Wishing I could just stay home and hope it works out on its own

But I can’t

Even though it doesn’t seem so bad right now, I’m not content

We are not content

So we will pick up our feet and handle it

Somehow become more educated than politicians with stitched mouths

Find new needles and thread to somehow weave burned cloth back together

We are not ready and that is not our fault

We will deal with it anyway
Beauti(gentri)fication

Watch them flock to the areas they once referred to as "the bad parts"

Hear them call it a beautification project

As they push people out of their homes for the sake of aesthetics

The Riverwalk cost twelve million dollars but I know kids who can’t afford school lunch

I’ve seen communities relocated

Housing torn down

They said it made the city ugly

They said they didn’t want people to think Tampa was poor

So they shooed the people away

Slowly but not-so-discretely

Said the city looked better now

Healthier now

Said the sun shines brighter on these parts now

It looks like the kind of city people want to move to

The kind of city people want to spend money in

The kind with a healthy economy

But the people here can’t afford it anymore

And the sun doesn’t shine as bright on them.