



The story of an eerie
post-Trump dystopia.

When forced to live under horrible circumstances, we fight back in whatever ways we can. We do what we need to do to survive. But the most desperate acts of self-preservation, bear dreadful consequences.

A very scary time, indeed.



Fences

The sunlight fought to seep through the dense curtains, only a sliver reaching across the bed, then onto the dresser, where my belongings sat, unwelcomed. The pocket-sized leather journal falling apart at the seams. My brother's old shoelace tied at the ends, barely managing to form a hair tie. The frayed old toothbrush begging to be replaced. My shallow attempt at unpacking was bolstered by the fact that no amount of . . . would make this my home.

I extended my hand across the firm comforter, only to be welcomed with the stain of absence in the cool, untouched parts of the mattress. There was lack of warmth here, the air thick with the remnants of what once used to be. I sat up, waded across the room to the curtains which masked a wall full of windows. For a moment I hesitated, then proceeded to let in the demanding light of the Wednesday afternoon.

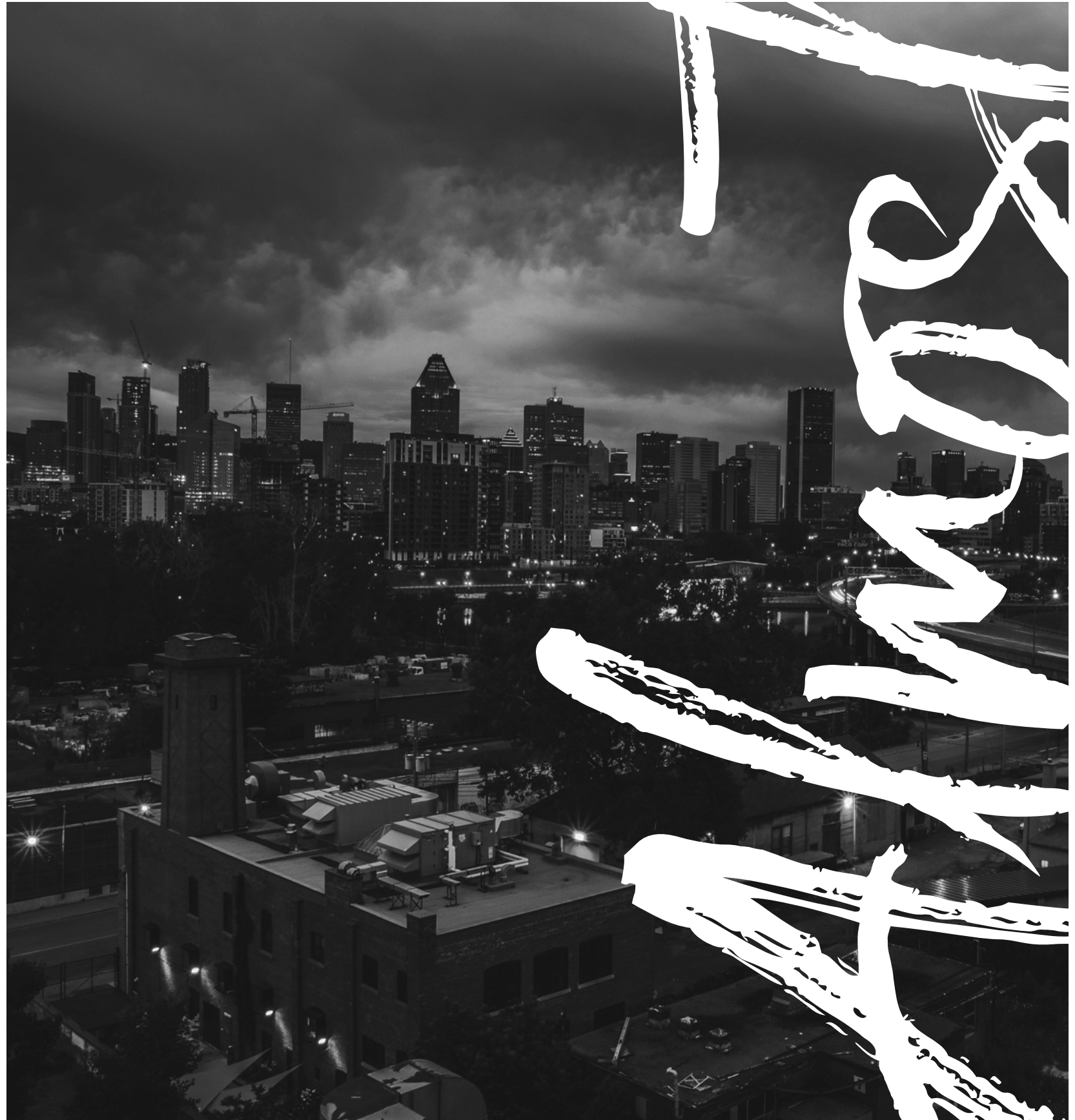
The house sat on the utmost peak of the hill, which overlooked the water, almost managing to escape the bustle of the city.

Almost.

I walked out onto the balcony, stepping out into the breeze that accompanied the piercing teal sky, nearly free of clouds, that deepened into the busy horizon. The sharp edges of the cold metallic buildings cut the atmosphere unforgivingly, the humble dwellings of the inland bowing in its wake.

The woman in the home next to this one stood on the balcony, a small raise in the slick floor seemed to be the only thing separating us. She relaxed her arms over the edge, gazing at the view. Her long black hair, tan skin and silk robe glistening in the warmth, as she smugly parts her lips to draw out the smoke from the cigar.

Cuban. I recognize them from the colorful yellow black label wrapped around its circumference. Jason used to smoke Cubans, always dissenting in protest of the embargo.





THEY WERE GOING TO BUILD A WALL
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“Electric fence,” she muttered, ironically.

Expecting to be stopped by some invisible force, she proceeds to extend her hand across the invisible barrier and onto my side of the balcony, fluttering with a tinge of embarrassment.

I smiled politely. Technology grew to be so wasteful anyways.

“Weird, isn’t it,” she says. I started to get the feeling she wasn’t talking about the fence.

“I guess it just takes some getting used to. This whole... lifestyle.”

You look pretty comfortable to me.

“I used to live just under the hill over there,” she lifts her cigar to point at across the horizon, looking at me.

“My parents used to tailor the lawns on this block, actually. They were working to get documentation before the Trade. My brother and I used to race our bikes up and down this street as kids,” she paused, lowering her gaze.

“The same ones that once kept us out are now dying to get in. Weird, huh,” she shrugs. “Never in a million years would I think things would be this way,” she pauses, lost in thought for a moment. “Anyways, you have any family?”

I used to. “No,” I stated reluctantly, “not since the Trade.” The truth is I hadn’t spoken my family since long before the Trade was brought about. And the one person I did consider family was long gone.

“I should get going,” I muttered, Unease crept up my throat.

“Clara,” she said with a cheerful grin. “Nice meeting you.”

“Maya,” I spit back, managing to plaster a smile on my face as I turned to go inside.

P A

N T

H E

R

“Dinner’s ready!” my mom yells, signalling for our presence in the kitchen as she puts the garnishes on our family meal. I’d usually stall, entranced in some ridiculous trend on the internet like virtually anything on President Trump’s twitter, or even silently protesting of outdated tradition of family dinner altogether. But not today. Today she cooked my favorite meal. Honey-glazed salmon, yellow rice, and potatoes. I could recognize that sweet-savory smell with a tinge of spice from a mile away. She must be trying to sit me down for another one of those talks about my future. Great. But my judgement would have to take a back seat today. Dinner’s ready.

My dad walks in the room from his home office, watching me intently as he takes his seat at the head of the table. I start setting the table, as I always do, each ding from the embroidered plate and polished silverware hitting the placemat accompanied by the sound of the wood floor creaking under the weight of my feet screamed structured middle-class household. On the inside I screamed

too. Suffocated. But today was a good day. Salmon day.

My mom places the food in the serving pans on the table and instinctively I dig in. There’s a tension in the room, a bit thicker than the usual. I proceed to ignore it as I eat my food. Nothing can ruin something this damned good.

“Iman, darling,” my mom says, breaking the silence. I nod in response, cheeks full of food.

“Your father and I have news,” she says, motioning for my dad to continue.

“As you know,” my dad says, his deep voice commanding the room, “I’ve been taking time off to travel for work a lot lately, and I know it’s already taken a toll on you and your mother.”

My mom looks down at her lap in bashful agreement.

“I’m afraid I haven’t been completely honest with you,” he stutters. My father’s rarely nervous. “There are going to be a lot of changes happening very soon, so I want to be outright with you. I want to give you time to adjust.”

Shit. Don't tell me we're moving. That would be the worst thing he could possibly tell me right now. “What’s going on?” I say, pretending to still be distracted by my plate for a moment, then meet my dad’s apprehensive gaze.

“For the past few months I’ve been working as a leader of the Panther group¹, and what we’re planning is going to change everything.”

Just last night the news was filled with reports. After the announcement of the new Immigration Act, they blew up the old ICE facility². And my dad was a part of them?

“It’s going to put a stop to all of the atrocities the Trump administration has put us through,” he continues. “But unfortunately, it won’t be easy on anybody, especially for you. It would be easier if you just read this.”

He handed me a envelope enclosed by black thick seal wbuttoith a panther on it⁸. It was addressed

to me. I started reading. Not even two sentences in, and I was in utter shock. My stomach dropped. Not even my favorite food could cure the horrible taste in my mouth. How could my dad ever be a part of this? “You think this is right?” I interrogated, fighting tears. My father fell silent. “How could you be a part something like this? How could you be a part of something so destructive? And Jason? I knew you guys always hated the idea of me dating a white guy.”

“Iman!” my mom cried, eager to diffuse. I slammed the envelope on the table, escaping up the stairs before either of my parents had the chance to say anything else.

Tears rushing down my face I made a failed effort at wiping them away. They were coming too fast. With my blurry vision, I grabbed my emergency bag, stuffing it with a few other essentials I needed to be on my way.

Jason. I picked up my phone and called my boyfriend. No answer. Fuck. I had to get out of this house. It was hard enough as is living in such restriction, but now I couldn’t stay. Not after this.

“Iman!” my mom cried from the bottom of the stairwell, journeying up to join me in my room.

I had to make a run for it. Seizing this last moment, I darted down the back stairway and out into the dark of the night, running too fast to hear any last cries from my parents. There’s no looking back. I crossed the back lawn, running as fast as I could down the block with the chill of the summer nights wind in my hair. And just as I cleared the , my phone started buzzing.

Out of breath I answer.

“Jason,” I say under my short breaths, “come get me. It’s an emergency.”

He barks back instantly, “I’m on my way. Where

are you? Is everything alright?

“I’m two blocks east of my house, close to the lakefront,” I say, still running. “I’m safe, I just need a place to stay for a little while. I can’t be at home. I’ll tell you when you get here.”

I realize too late that I’ve been running full speed with a duffle bag on my shoulder for close four blocks now, as my throat starts to close up. Asthma. I stop and put my hands on my knees so I catch my breath as I hear Jason’s anxiously calling my name over the phone slowly fade into silence. I slowly regained the unfamiliar sense of peace as the twilight of the skyline reflected so beautifully into the lake faded to nothingness.



Sunnyside

I squinted out of habit as I walked outside and down the steps onto the pavement bridging across the freshly manicured lawn to the freshly-tarred road leading to the metro uphill. Much like the rest of the town it seemed to look brand new and untouched, the blades of grass razor sharp.

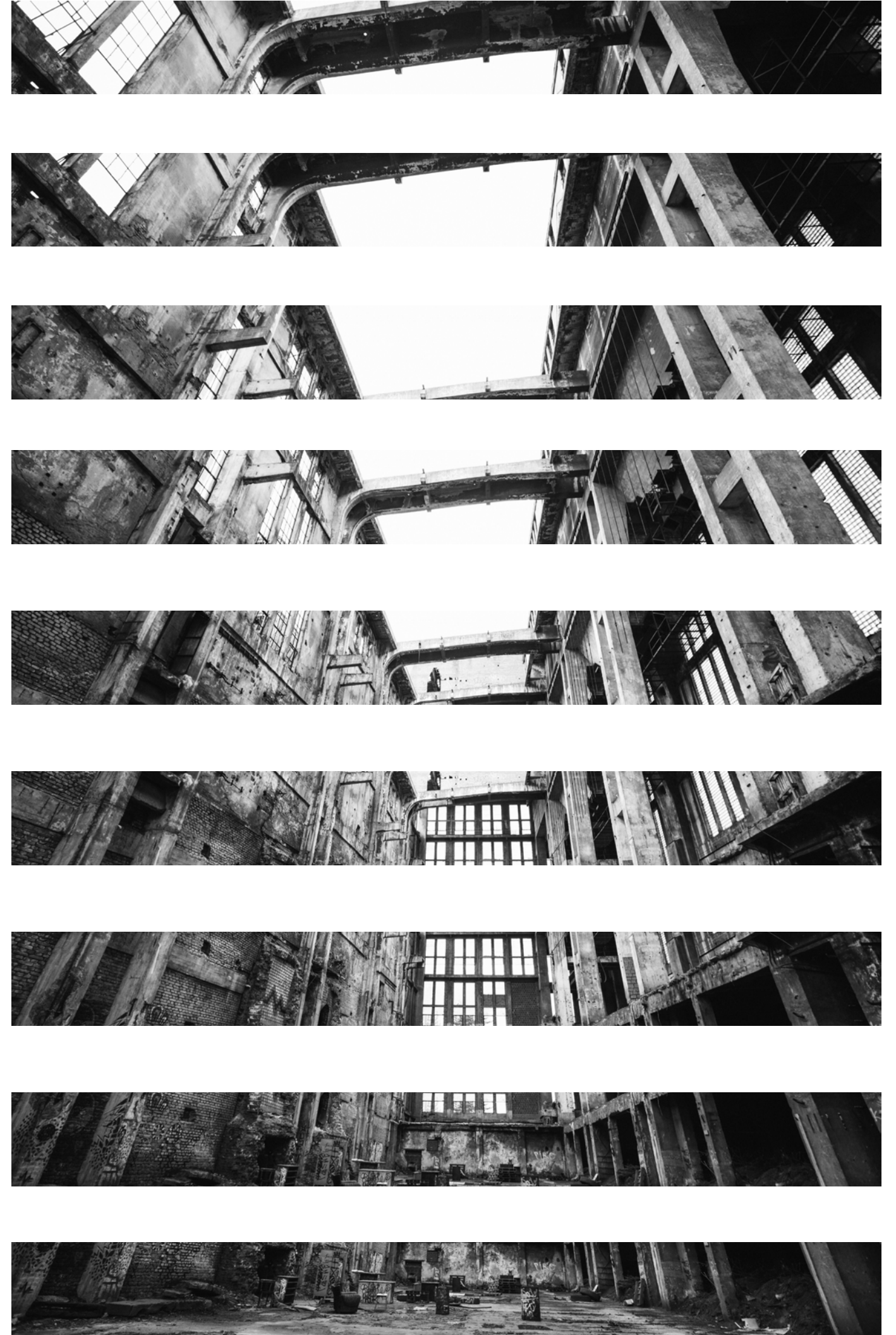
I stepped off the property to continue my walk down the block. That's what I'm supposed to do, right? Fill up my newfound freetime with nearly mindless activities. But then again, I'd do anything to get out of that house.

As I somberly stroll down the block, I'm greeted not with head nods of acknowledgement from charming neighbors as I would have been if I were on this street only a year ago, but with never ending hollow homes with closed blinds and boarded up doors. There are a lot less of us, so naturally occupying this neighborhood means there are big shoes. But I can't help but feel remorse as I walk past the line empty houses that used to be homes.

All effort it must have taken to make this neighborhood into an American man's dream, and the suffering

undoubtedly that resulted from it, seems, wasted.

Is retribution worth sacrificing the very dream people were suffering for? The black children that endured the lack of enrichment from the schools in the hood, the undocumented kids that watched their high school days come to a close, never even choice to apply to college, the families that worked their entire lives for a better home only to be restricted from moving into neighborhoods because they were anything other than white,





all marginalized in an attempt to protect the treasured middle-class white lifestyle-- the American dream. And the only thing left of it was the shell of doctors and lawyers and businessmen that lived here, that were either dead or in some run down building in the ghettos build across town.

So when I moved to Sunnyside, I knew I wasn't actually moving to Sunnyside. I was moving to a shell of a place that looked nothing of the sorts. No neighborhood mom drama. No dinner parties with the nice china. No white privilege. Privilege was far from white anymore. No half-hearted smile plastered on the face the uncomfortable white woman convincing herself that racism has ended so that she can live with lack of will do what's right. No national pride that resonated in the hearts of soldiers and bigots alike. That all died with America. The only thing that remained was us, the forgotten few that were left out of the melting pot, living in a dream that used to be.

*Privilege was
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anymore*

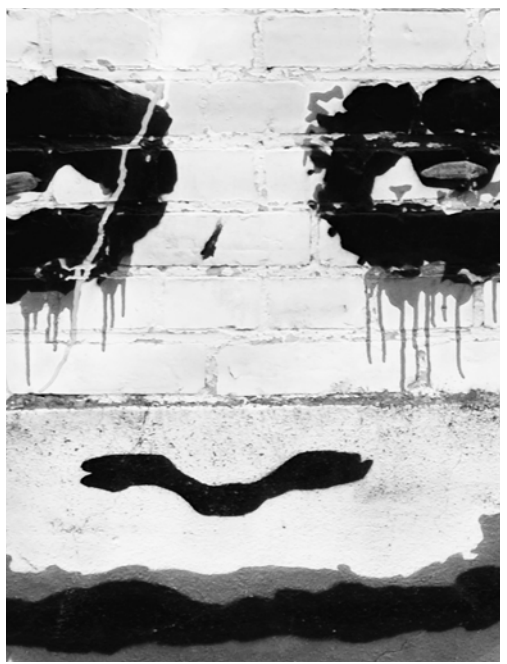
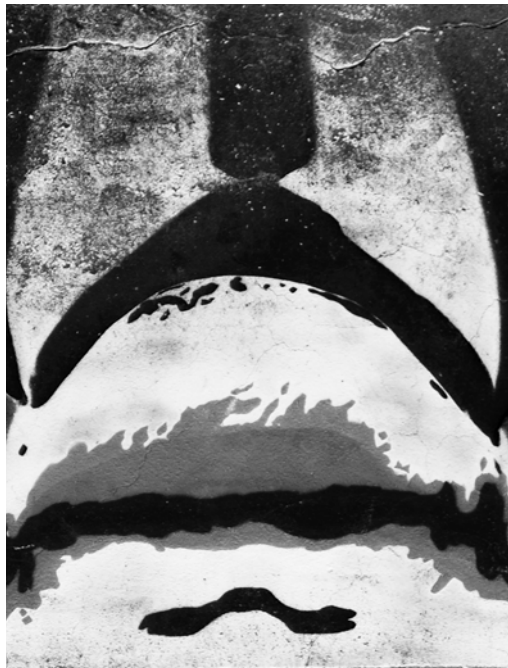
Scraper





The boarded up homes marked by the untamed lawns grew into cold sharp structures that cut into the sky as I ventured further into the Metro. The tallest of which marked the last place of refuge for white supremacy groups before they were eradicated, the Trump Tower. Now littered with graffiti, destruction and propaganda from the Trade, Trump Tower was no longer the tall, glistening, symbol of hegemony it once was, but instead, a symbol. But there are still whispers that the few Trump supporters left meet in the underground garage at night to plan the return of their glory days. I still get the chills whenever I walk by this place. Donald Trump didn't become a pompous ass overnight. The very essence of this building attempts to compete with highly-regarded historical skyscrapers like the Willis

Tower and Hancock, permanently etching Trump's name at the forefront of Chicago's architectural history. Standing a whopping 98 stories tall, Trump Tower was supposed to outrank the tallest skyscrapers the city was known for, becoming the tallest building in the city and selfishly projecting its shadow over the poverty and gun violence that trashed the city's reputation.



The building always wreaked with the stench of unwelcomed birthright, arrogance and power. And when the Trump administration took office, tension heightened and the tower grew to symbolize so much more. Tax cuts swept money right from under the noses of the federally funded benefit programs and gifted it to the one percent⁶. Yachts that crowded on the dock of the tower in the river got bigger, soirees on the rooftop grew more extravagant, and one by one wealthy elite from all over country settled in their penthouse apartments overlooking a view of the skyline that almost effortlessly omits the struggling minority dwelling in its shadows. On the other side of town, debt weighted down on the shoulders of blue-collar employees as their bosses shallow promises of post-tax cut raises fell through, food insecurity spread like a plague, families fell through the widening cracks of a failing system and below the poverty line, police violence and racial profiling grew hanness and unchecked, d, and young men targeted for non-violent crimes populated the jail cells.

As the current administration fractured any progress this country made towards racial equality, Trump Tower transformed into unmistakable symbol for bigotry and white supremacy. The one percent were comforted in the political power their increased wealth afforded them to keep this pattern going with the support of the blue-collar zealots that were happy to see a president that heard their rallying cries. Racism was more powerful than ever, and any hope for a world that wasn't afflicted with it was lost.

So we thought.



