

FLORIDA

by Al Alexandre, Steffon Dixon, Wesly Oviedo

It was a day like all the others.

Convenient stores are like mazes for me. I can lose myself in the candy aisle and find my focus, mouth watering, and tongue-tied between the sweets and sour. And this is my hood here. I feel more at home.

It was late night. I was cruising with my crew. And all that was on our minds were bubble butts, bubble gum and bubble kush. I could feel the treble and bass stampeding out of the stereo. We weren't trying to bother anyone. We were just cracking jokes. I was with my boys. I was just about to text my babysitter to check on my treasure.

She says her chest is fine. There's no need for a movie when I have a little actress at home. She says her heart beats for me - but little did I know mine was about to stop.

Florida is the Sunshine State and I'm always living in the barrel! There is no safety here, and life is getting hard to handle. It's a different kind of heat. Do y'all feel the heat? The NRA still has not spoken out about advising young black boys with hoodies to buy guns and stand their ground! And yeah we are still stuck on Trayvon! because in Florida, it has been a year, and we are still burning.

A million concealed weapon permits, that's over a million pieces of steel on hips, in holsters, in hands. That's over a million Clark Kents - men of steel shooting because they think they're supermen. They're not really bringing justice by banging their hammers. They're not fixing anything. They're hammering the nails to our coffins.

I was just listening to loud music with my homeboys, texting in the movietheater and eating skittles.

It was a day like all the others. Except after this there were no other days.

IN THE SHADOWS OF MIAMI

by Christell Roach

I can smell the bay creeping up over the bridge. Scraps of homelessness lay on the shore like footprints from languages that trailed the sands.

The wind slaps me tasting like a Caribbean cookbook full of uprooted recipes, grilled skin, and ginger beer.

All around me the city is crashing. The ocean tackles the shore. And in the distance I hear head-on collisions when cars attack the stillness.

There are waves in the breaths we take, in the reclining of sunroofs, in the treading of water, and in the rotations of young girls' hips dancing on the shards of burnt cigarettes, letting sweat parasail down the length of their bodies.

Upon arrival the ocean shrugged itself between their shoulders, washing them clean of an identity. For them only the sun is truly bilingual. They were smuggled beneath the buoys, clawed at by the barnacles acting like the water's barbed wire. They had their voyages carved into their skin. Their hope sifted through the sands, and they were tossed into the chaos on Lincoln Road as attractions among the tourists.

Dancing in the heat of secrecy, sweat, and silence their bodies squirm in scraps that reveal the age on their hips, the number and their experience. Their hips rotate in hypnotic form prompting arousal in men three times their age. They cannot stop dancing. They just need to loosen up. They walk the streets suffering in broad daylight, playing the roles of daughters, lovers and friends.

They were brought from the bed of voyages, walked through the sands we all read as a child, recruited in the halls of Miami Dade County Public Schools, picked up on the back streets of our neighborhoods and dragged through our humidity.

In this day we've made it to where even sex is on demand. Pleasure is just one tourist site away. Our boats are like modern day slave ships. The sun runs away every couple of hours because it does not want to witness the sins that we have here. And no one speaks because all the statistics have been washed away on the shores. Little girls beaten into submission reside in the whispers cast away to Homestead, are stowed in the bellies of strip clubs, even brought their talents to South Beach.

Miami, how dare you come back to me with the scent of Russia on your lips? The taste of Cambodia, Thailand and Cuba is still on your tongue. And there are curves from Nigeria and Ethiopia still in your hands!

You invaded my hallways and turned the students to recruiters! Now not only am I part water, part salt, I am part of the girls you ruined, that you tried to hide beneath the dirt in your fingernails.

I am pulled in different tides and waves when I hear of the sins carried on in my city. This city, we're so diverse we even have slaves here. I can finally make sense of all our narrow roads. They're like scratch marks trailing all the way back to the girls broken in the shadows.

I can hear the voices the ocean swallowed.

“When you hit that stage, empty your soul and quiet your doubts. It’s time to give your life to your words.”

STEFFON DIXON

“Every year that I am on this team, I become more fearless. Performing will never be easy for me, but I don’t want it to be. The courage to open my mouth and speak comes from my team. I draw strength from their talent. This applies in every aspect of my life now. The phrases we use before performing, “go in, Ashe, purpose” are the same phrases I use whenever I’m ready to take a risk. I am eternally grateful to my team, my coaches, and Tigertail for installing this fearlessness in me. I will use wherever I go.”

MAYLIN ENAMORADO

“I am so blessed to be a part of this team. There are not enough words to describe how amazing this summer has been both physically and spiritually. As spoken word poets, we step into new realities by allowing ourselves to immerse in the ugly and beauty of this world. We carry the suffering of others so that we can heal what hasn’t been broken yet. Storytelling is more than just spitting on stage. It is an act of compassion and empathy for whom or what we write about.”

MOMO MANALANG R

“All I’ve ever wanted was to move someone with my poetry, and activate their heart with the art I have in me. Tigertail WordSpeak has harvested me so fully that I’m finally able to see it happen. Aside my own supportive and loving family, I learned how to extend the love of my own family to my teammates. We saw each other at our weakest and strongest moments, and proved one by one that we are units of a system beyond us. Tigertail WordSpeak helped developed lifelong friendships that I will forever be thankful for, and connections that can now only be built upon.”

CHRISTELL ROACH

“Tigertail has given me the opportunity to develop new lenses that enable me to understand and view the world in a way I never thought possible. Through Teo’s direction and the team’s dynamics, I am able to have compassion for the experiences I’ve had and the experiences of others. Through writing and performing I am able to heal myself and others and that is a gift given strictly by grace. I am forever grateful to Tigertail.”

CELESTELLE WEBSTER