

VENUS THRASH

Rare

2000 Block of 4th Street NE, Washington, D.C., circa 2009

Kind of Blue wafts from the boom box
on the moss-covered deck into the tepid
breeze of a rare November warmth.

The hip-hopper next door, khaki cargo
pants hanging low as the electrical wires
behind our homes, emphatically bops

his cornrowed head forever stuck to iPod
headphones & sweeps dead leaves
of giant cedars from the concrete patio.

Two rowhouses down, original go-go,
chockfull of congas & cowbells, shakes
the block like beats from the back

of a souped-up '74 Impala, rattling
aged windows & weak slat fences.
Mr. Wright fires up the grill one last time

this year. The smoky aroma of barbecued
chicken & ribs stirs mouths of passersby
to water. He shares the spoils with the Lees

as he has for thirty-six years. They laugh
easily in spite of war, endangered generations
of youth, prisons stuffed dark with skin,

the demise of music they once slow-dragged
or hustled to, & faces changing from
familiar neighbors—grandmothers

rearing grandchildren best they can,
World War II vets who flash tattered photos
of younger selves in uniform, & Granddaddy

Charles who grows cotton in the front yard
because it's pretty—to the newcomers
clinging to cell phones, walking mastiffs,

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rollerblading, cycling, jogging,
who never look their new neighbors
in the eye, never say hello, & ponder

a block that will someday mirror their skin.
The Wrights down beers from the Lees'
icebox & sing to themselves "A change

is gonna come" in mumbled breaths.
Chuck's go-go holler becomes Aretha's
I Ain't Never Loved a Man, Bill's *Ain't No*

Sunshine, James's *Please, Please, Please*,
a rare time in music this whole
block remembers except the children—

hyper on bass-heavy rhythms, wanton
materialism, gross braggadocios,
& stripping down of young women—

who'll never know the art of dancing
close & slow at basement rent parties
under hazy red lights to Chaka Kahn's

Sweet Thing, while all the broke-down
furniture is piled outdoors to make room
for get-down all-night grooving.