

Heritage

We were not prepared for all the noise. Workers shouting at first light. Everything was already in place for the demolition. The stone mansion across the street was to make way for a shopping mall. We watched from our window as the wrecking ball attacked the new brickwork, modern additions built after the war, when the house was converted to rented flats. I heard an echo as the stone work fell. Felt the rolling thud resonate through my feet. Once the whole front had come away, large rooms opened up, one at a time, their intimacies exposed like a doll's house. I recognized the chequered marble on a shattered floor, the high ceilings, an ornate bath, rocking on an edge, a flight of stairs going nowhere, a door swinging over a sheer drop. The dark hallway I once thought so vast as a child, was full of rubble. Clouds of plaster dust filled the air. The hidden alcoves, secret passageways of my imagination now lay open to the air. For a moment I saw the old man with his family in the reception hall, willed them to slide the present away like an unwanted intrusion to their ordered lives. To a time. when Property was handed down for generations. Progress had changed all that. The foundations had shifted. Left us watching our neighbourhood crumble, cleared away on a fleet of trucks.