Permanent Resident

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PERMANENT RESIDENT

by

Joshua McGarry
B.A. December 2014, Old Dominion University

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of
Old Dominion University in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

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This thesis emerges out of the author’s own experiences as a permanent resident of the USA in a time of increasing tension towards immigrants. As the poems progress they deal not only with the immediate political concerns, but also with the familial issues of living on another continent as the poems address the way distance adds an extra layer of strain the death of the author’s grandfather in early 2016.

The thesis attempts to find a counterpoint to the increased sense of nationalism and distance through the use of music as a plane of aesthetic engagement that goes beyond nation. To this extent, it draws in more hybrid forms as it uses erasure poems made from the liner notes of several albums, and constructs playlist poems. Ultimately while the political tension remains the poems do find some degree of peace in the moments spent connecting with another individual over music.
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New Here

The cold
seems hungrier here,
teething for marrow

The rain
is a stranger, knuckling
the sleepless roof

The cracked hiss
and whistle of the radiator
closest thing to a conversation

In which you share the home
land of your language
as it rusts on your tongue
I. Crossings

*The rhythm of my footsteps crossing flatlands to your door have been silenced forever more. The distance is quite simply much too far for me to row*

-Death Cab for Cutie
Permanent Resident

In our segregated lines
with conspicuously colored

passports and our green
cards we face the officers.

A woman in a saffron head
scarf is questioned: Reason? Duration?

And what’s your number?
your alien identification number

Finally he pulls the mugshot
camera trigger. I’m lucky

can pass accent-free, but
I still get an eye

back from cold weather
officer says my coat

is too heavy, X-rayed 3 times
today, he still imagines me strapped

a bomb: fertilizer and nails, because I am not
a citizen

Fingerprints he says

Left Four
Right Four
Thumbs
Face the Camera
Citizen

The threat is in your prints
we have them, we take them every time

because we know what you’re here for,
the television told us, our future

president told us, you are
takers, we will find your prints

on our jobs, our houses, our
birthright-- this immigrant
country. And yes, we are watchful
the constitution says well organized

militia: me a dozen friends—colts
on our hips staring you down

over the deli counters of America,
over immigration counters, in super markets

hotels, restaurants, what you call paranoia
we call watchfulness, and we have learned

to be watchful, raise our noses—blood
hounds at unfamiliar scents, curry or

Cajun, unhinged jaws
The bared teeth: speak American

This is what it means to be law
abiding—this is being the wall
Undocumented

The last phone hung at 3am I wander the sterile markets, unreflected in the eyes of day old salmon

My body a thing without papers, living beneath bridges, in tenements without mirrors, along brackish waters, filled with invisible fish, nameless as me though I bouquet myself daily

in new names, strange shapes into which my body flows. Mornings, I adopt them, Nights, I toil with them—

The other end of a phone sex line—pleasant, needed, they call me: Mary, David, Lilith, vessel, to be filled, until I rupture and rapture again, new stranger, in a country of strangers: The name you have called is disconnected please call again later.

Maybe some try again, maybe again, and I must wonder what they want, must fear what they want.
[Passing](Adjective): 1: Brief, fleeting, or transitory: crossing borders is more than the act of brushing off home, no amount of steel wool will help. 2: Going by or past: As in the act of creating past that was never elsewhere, scooping the young bud of self, trying to strain every grain of the unfamiliar through fists, replanting in typical suburbia. 3: Indicating satisfactory performance: I needed merely to glass my tongue, imagine the bottles of bleach kept behind an immigrations counter, the bottles of perfume for any stranger scent(spices and rosewater, Ethiopian coffee, everything not yet sold).

(Noun) 1. Being marked as part of the native majority: As in you have learned to be quiet, You’re practically American. 2. Peaceful Death: The accidental use of WE, holding home under the saltwater counting the air bubbles, counting the seconds and years.
Crossings

I. Imagined
As easy, metal railings leapt bridge to river
the clean brown water, the dragon fly hanging above glimpsed through
a border so thin as to almost vanish

On the bank, the sun pulls slow rolling droplets off you-
r back, with warm fingers, and even the gnats keep
their sawing distance small shapes in the shadows of leaves

II. Seen
As a family with wrong papers, family tearing the luggage apart, what is the weight limit of sent-
iment? Family fighting strange new tongues—holding constellations of untranslatable syllables, that hang like scraps of black cloth on the barbed wires of borders.

Sometimes hope, the Visa the job, the crossing is a broad mouth with beauti-
ful white teeth, the kind polished in Hollywood, the kind shaped like tombstones, the kind hiding something horribly unkind
Prospective Student Comes to Ask About the Honors College

I was worried when you told me about the recommendation
You were getting from your ex-army teach, bragging
About his arrogant swagger, about the self-inflicted injuries
man at sixty-two still desperately fighting for twenty-five

You affirmed, each and every worry when you asked Are you
Of Nordic descent as if this were a place where What are you?
Is an acceptable question, though I assume America’s becoming
Just that. Listen, were I not the white guy fielding your questions

You’d be speaking to one of the black women who work here, or perhaps the Dean
Who is Jewish, would you ask them what they are? I imagine you might
with that same damn smile. In a couple minutes you will tell me that the wall
Will be funded with a bullet train built on top of it, where that goes exactly you don’t say

In another couple minutes you will tell me that: there is inclusivity, and then there is suicide
And I will the resist the urge to call you a fascist, because what little optimism remains
In me hopes this education will do you good, but for the record- the only inclusivity
That is suicide is the kind that lets soft-boiled supremacists go around probing ethnicity

Let me tell you that my Grandmother’s earliest memories are what fascism left
Of my home country, silent crated out streets, small fires still going behind
Some windows. There are bombs here that will not be excavated for 70 years
And the sound only now returning are the sobs of five year old girl, who never asked
Anyone just what they were.
Miles, will leave you unstuck
in time, counting on calls
on routine to hang on
to home, between visits
infrequent, out of necessity
Oma calls every Monday
and I can’t help but reach
for the texture of home
in the static, the untouchable
cobblestones, all the old town
backways, which buildings
have been hollowed for condos
hundred year old
storefronts vanished behind
some magician’s curtain? there is new
restoration work on the Dom
the cathedral around which familiar
streets wrap like a skirt: green grass
the gargoyle statues on the fountains
the hills and headstones, I can’t
hear any of that, but I imagine
it all behind the conversations
of the weather, and the happy
family news, only ever the happy
family news.
Alta Loma No Longer Exists

-Paraphrase of Robert Forster courtesy of the liner notes of an Extra Lens Album

By which I mean that coming back
everyone has a different face
and there are no more Alta Loma
phone books, all the names new.
Which means at my motel, the list
of restaurants is full of strangers,
every meal mismatched with the senses
the waiter, with a smudge on his right
sleeve that he hasn’t noticed, feeds me
a piccolo piece played with his evergreen-
branch fingers, smiles at my confusion.
even the McDonald’s across the street
has changed its sign, promotions running
for the Large Mac. And the gas station
down the street only carries crystal
Pepsi, and the teenagers in the lot
come over to bum cigarettes, and jam
to the stringy acoustics stepping through
my speakers. They sip their Pepsi through
straws, and the conversation goes
Yeah I know them
They played here didn’t they?
No one has ever played here
and they grin and give me names
I have to listen to. And one of them
asks if she can stick her gum
to my tires, so she can taste
the pavement the cross country slide
a dirt track in Missouri on the roof
of her mouth. I go back with my finger
and squeeze the little pink blob, strawberry
into all of the ridges make sure it isn’t
lost. What I mean is I’m still thinking
of them behind the heavy blackout
curtains of my hotel room, the way
I could imagine my face on every one
of them, growing up in this city, is not
growing up in this unincorporated territory
in which even the trees carry a stranger
breed of fruit, stony blossoms
utterly inhospitable
to teeth, the sort that grow
in between names. Outside my window
a woman picks one from a tree dense
notices me, beckons me down,
*Do you know how to eat these*
she drapes the little bud over her ear
*They open with warmth, look:*
close to her skin the flower
opens its mouth: the insides orange,
and glowing like sunlight, and she
beckons me with a finger
to lean in and nibble at this nameless
thing still tucked behind her ear.
Somehow, the taste is nostalgic.
Poem for a 4 Year Old Rocker

I remember the scene, the way the gold
the late afternoon poured between the gaps

Trees sweet with a season I can’t remember
the way I can’t remember which tongue

English or German, at that age forgetting
and learning, is easier than remembering

Maybe, there was an open window,
music wafting out, maybe it all came

from the way every child seems to chitter
and pick at the loose strings of the world

But I told my mother *I like Elvis*, and she
veteran of her own rock and rebellion years

Told me I’d never listened to Elvis, but nodded
understanding this start of a new geography, tongue nudging

the salt sweet shores of the sonic country
surfacing in my mouth like a loose white tooth
II. Strangers

- *The music our collisions would make is a sound that turns the road-that-leads-us-back-home*
  
  *Into Home*
  
  - Mewithoutyou
Berlin Riverside after Dark

Clean geometry of the dance floor
infinitely tall mojitos, collect
dew, feet in imported sand
The music starts at dusk, Wednesday’s
swing night, all the locals two-toned and zoot-suited, DJ
between his ragtimes warns:
*We’ve got guests tonight, so keep your kicks low.*
and all the old hats do and all
the unfamiliar faces breeze
in from Cairo or countryside, in sandals
or nail-soled boots, and not a hand
goes untaken, fresh off a red-eye
a woman counts the Charleston
her partner laughs and tumbles, sprig
of mint on his breath, moon-shaped
bulbs lighting the river
leaving all steps
as utter grace
Poem for a Ten Year Old at an Airport With Headphones and His First Album

Carved from the Liner Notes of *Full Force Galesburg*

I am a straightforward man, with no crime on my conscience,

But life is never very smooth, now bristles with difficulties.


Small red potatoes in the rich black soil, young trees sucking up the river water.

Oranges from Spain, rain-chute running down the side of the trailer.

Islands. Paper mills all the way out in Roaring Spring, Pennsylvania.

New banjo from Nashville.

Calendar from De Smet and Van Diest showing April on the wall, all wrong.

Heading North through France for days but never getting out.

Old barn, strange sounds. Gin.

Sunlight. Almost broke my own heart down there in Vicksburg.

There is always an anchor somewhere.

All that was left later was the vision of the two of us crossing the parking lot toward the blazing room off the interstate half an hour past Iowa over on the other side of the Mississippi.

These songs are about what made that moment either possible or inevitable, depending on how you look at it.

IF THERE IS ONE THING I LOVE it's the weather this year: how it swings suddenly the wrong way just long enough to confuse the geese, who figure, what with the way the air's warmed up on a given day, that winter's over. North they go, and I hear them from where I am. They sing happily, flying in a looser formation than you'd think evolution would allow. They're headed home.

A FEW DAYS LATER, OF COURSE, the elements remember what they're about, and the clouds come closer to the earth than they should, and the fog hangs heavy on the ground, and I hear the sound again and look up: here they come again, flying much lower now and calling to one another for fear that one of them will get lost in their hasty retreat southward. It is now the middle of winter.

SOON IT WILL BE COLD ENOUGH to keep them south until the Spring thaw. It will be so cold that we will almost forget our small town, the full sun bright like a death in the family, even our dreams.

GO NUMB, fear, elsewhere. A burning not even winter can kill.
Liner Notes to an Airport Mixtape

Why is it we can’t help

“A Strangely Isolated Place” by Ulrich Schnauss
   A Strangely Isolated Place ©2003
Transient coffee shop-- conversations, speakers
playing only things you know, hunched over melting
glaciers in our coffee, an unrecognizable bird
perching on the other side of glass, and you resist
the urge to rap the window, to pull at soft plumage through
the cold, finally something, scares it off, leaving you dreaming of feathers

writing sad love songs to

“None of the the Above” by The Weakerthans
   Fallow ©1997
I’m starting with the stolen
line Trace your outline in spilled sugar
not a thing I recognize anymore, like
the shape of your humming-- finger
raw from the scraping, blood leaves sugar
like pink sand, a beach we never saw at sunset

distant places and people pretending

“Nothing's Gonna Hurt You Baby” by Cigarettes after Sex
   I. ©2012
Is it that perverse? whisper, tongue almost in
your ear-- it'll be fine warm shroud of body
on body hiding, the cuts, the considerations
of a broken machine, untilled soil, weed peeking
soft swaying through the cracks in your bandages-- know
it’s cold, there are no mechanics here, and all I am is a hammer

we come back

”Every Planet We Reach is Dead” by Gorillaz
   From the album Demon Days © 2005
Beat shift I know, the lyric wanders in, and begins to strip, even its limbs
How many layers of synth plastic does it take to be anything but beautiful?
This is a howl for all the heaven heads, head bobbing on the dusk border
This is a howl, or a first taste of it for someone whose ears have not yet understood
This is the howl, of a body gone feral locked in a train compartment headed north
Imagine Liszt with this kind of full madness. or Duke hammering that sweet finale
the same

“Length Away” by Lemuria

Get Better © 2012

Past the rose thicket of the country line, the lipstick washed off your collar, how desperately we plug our ears
cling to the last smudge of sunset in the grooves of grey matter, this is holding on, the image of a great spill, stains left everywhere
Night in the slaughterhouse district tenement apartment complex: 3am

In a top floor studio the painter licks the blood off his knuckles, the painting of a non-reflective mirror is wrong again, there is another fresh hole in the wall another fist shaped hole of frustration and the canvas is black. Brush scratchings catch the dim bulb. His boyfriend sleeps on the futon, the painter too wants to sleep, knows he can’t as he wraps his hand in a layer of gauze. Then he stretches a fresh canvas, and gathers himself for another leap. A drop of blood rolls across the palette. The vibrations of a passing train form ripples in the paint

* The roof is full of dance steps and spilled beer. The lovers fuck. They tangle their bodies into unfamiliar shapes, trying to make this pretend real then unwind into the lightning of cigarettes, smolder springing from one to the other in an ashmouthed kiss. Quietly, smoke and eyelines drift over the edge. On its side one can reads Nonalcoholic. Duke Ellington jazz strolls out of an open window two floors down.

* The needle catches in the pitted slab, the only light is the moon reflected off of the wax, but the piano keeps casting its shadow over the young woman her body pressed tight against the plaster, shrinking. A frozen steak over an eye hides everything the music doesn’t. There’s an airless moment between tracks, then the tender brass announces Star Crossed Lovers.

* Through the glass thin walls someone stirs to the fanfare, but stays asleep. In his dream he makes a phone call and gets an answer Yes, Yes I’m here and it’s okay. I’m long gone. He hangs up and lingers for a moment, the honeyed memory of dark skin hangs in the air, before the scene snuffs out.

* like the Rosemary candle that lights a letter one floor up. Dear…. I should say father, I can’t say father, I don’t think I ever will. I need help, What is the price of help? A small doodle of Sputnik orbits the words, caught the in the gravity of broken connections

* Preparing to leave before light, someone slaps eggs and toast into a pan. The fire off the range illuminates wrinkles that she swears weren’t there yesterday, but she whistles anyway, carrying on the night’s score where Duke left off. On her plate the yolks run like slow dawn.
Last Visit

A Lebkuchen*
Split in half
smells of ginger
and cloves, of holidays
fills the small living
room like the delicate light
from the open winter
windows. I do not know
that is this the first sweet
bite my grandfather has touched
in four months, have not yet heard
Of the cancer and chemotherapy
the stories, that don’t cross
The ocean, him on morphine
bedbound, writhing with hallucinations.
Hair is only now returning
moth thin to his head.
Right now this does not matter
as we share the
warmth and ginger that
fill the soft brown corners of the room.
Proud Boys

What have you put your pride in?
Two days after Charlottesville,
someone is still weeping over tire-
marks on a now cold body.

It is two days after Charlottesville
and you are here, with your brothers
your Nazi brothers, protecting an altar
to chains, downtown marker of confederate
dead, thrown up long past the decay
of confederacy, or any musket balled
corpses. Your razored heads, and red
armbands say yes we are
everywhere, and not afraid anymore
and a friend of mine says that resistance
is like a cathedral, even without gods
there is something holy there

by which he means, that yes you counter
protest, and on this day, two days after
Charlottesville he is there, and proud
of that, and I don’t get the message

Until it’s all over, and even then I think
a green card, is shaped like a guillotine
deporation hangs over some of us
making us doubt the safety of our own doorways
imagine the ICE agents in the shadows waiting
for a reason, waiting for us to raise our fists.
Chocolate in Wiesbaden Germany, 1947

Was a thing she, at age twelve, treasured and hid away from siblings, wrapped in newspaper, buried beneath a bent streetlight,

like a rare thing, like the rare thing it was in the aftermath of a country overrun by black boots, heel-crushing even gravity

which now, rebelled and danced free, emptying pockets of loose Marks, sending them spinning skywards, tiny sun and moon constellations, glinting.

Gravity emptied all the cupboards, and left everyone counting calories, as if every burnt gram was one step closer to walking into rain clouds.

Every couple days, or when hunger really struck the girl, she would unearth her treasure, count the remaining squares, and fill her mouth

with happiness, even as every other food drifted away, and she had to lay down life-lines on tree branches to stay grounded, she grinned with missing teeth. When she finally did begin floating she had her chocolates in her hands and laughed as she hung high above everything, free to eat her chocolates untouched, free.
Liner Notes to a Post-Election Mixtape

*You’ll know when the time has come. You won’t like it. You won’t feel like singing. I want you to remember, when the time comes, that I told you the singing would help. It will make you look crazy, and there’s nothing like looking crazy to give the edge.*

- John Darnielle

1. “Cruel” by St Vincent

*Strange Mercies © 2011*

Pill thin howl of a buried house
wife, scrap of yellow dress in the dirt
somewhere in the kitchen a bottle of Bullet
soaks into the cracks between dinner plate
tiles, Is this what domesticity(love) smells
like? rat poison, incendiaries, numbers on a cake counted too high

2.“Strange Hellos” by Torres

*Sprinter ©2015*

2016: year of bared teeth and things eaten
imagine a body in full collapse, motion like a house
under hellfire, a woman breaking her spine into the parallel
of the stage, her mouth full of storms, sinking ships tear
at her throat. The album cover is a binary hypnosis, open
the top of your head to cradle this truth tell

3. “Gamma Ray” by Beck

*Modern Guilt ©2008*

The sand will glow for a thousand
years this is the national threat, motto of the bomb
enthusiasts, this isn’t what makes Incredible
Hulk incredible, the ray bather sprouts, a field
buried beneath his skin, the crops: tubers,
tumors, potatoes shaped like skulls

4. “Das Modell” by Rammstein

*Das Modell ©1997*

They’ll say *she asked* on the slaughtering
block, the oval office desk. the hogs teeth
deep in her body, this is pork barrel
politics, someone going still, the body
a trough, her body a feast
[Documentation](Noun): A furnishing with documents: green card renewal is $1,000.00, beyond the metal detectors and armed guards an agent speaks in rising volume to a woman still building a house of English on her tongue. 2: The use of documentary evidence: to establish silence, Immigration goes through phones You like posts on antifascist violence? He means We are good at taking away. 3: Manuals, listings, diagrams that describe the use of hardware or software: Photos, fingerprints, retinal scans, interviews, reams and reams of numbers tattooed just beneath the skin.
Fox News

Live from your speakers and Spicers here is your nightly opposition

party, your White House approved enemy of the state. Children,

ready your codebooks
you know what we mean with

inner city, thugs, Hollywood
Globalists, In the next story

we will allege, we will speculate
as to the color and creed of the latest

white school shooter, maybe he is
radicalized, he is playing out the gay

agenda. Let us tell you who is threatening
you in bathrooms, the answer is republican

senators, the alternative answer is trans
women who need to pee. Let us tell you

health is not what you need, consider
instead choice, like the choice to enroll

in any one of our wars, against Christmas
against whites, against cops, against straights

against the people who think owning
a tank is overkill. And once we’re done

tune in next for the weather:
biblical floods of bullshit.
Over Syrian Coffee in Wetzlar, Germany, December 2015

Stirring out the hot scent of earth
Karim ends his story: They came
for the man who watched our house

_and his son, after we fled._
_Men banging on the door at 3am left_
_nothing but I.D cards for the new widow._

Olla comes in with more desserts.
The aunt who does not understand
English chuckles: _All hospitality_

_is the same._ A bowl of Angel’s
Hair smells of vanilla and rose water;
and Karim, a man who has survived

flight, terror, hunger in five languages
grins at me. He knows this town is famous
for Goethe, but Beethoven was always

his hero--- Not just for the ninth
but because Beethoven
did not bow to kings.
Conversation Overheard After Coffee

I only caught the shadows
on your x-rays, in a passing conversation
my uncle and Karim, quietly in the after-
coffee haze. The first mention of more
tests, the black slugs in your abdomen.
all this a reminder, how hard

it is to share any ill omen, to shoulder
any burden with absence. distance
makes a quiet people of us

outlines along foreign shores, blurred
edges of the sea chewing at our shadows.
III. Strangeness

*Aboard a floating savior what does language mean?*  
-Torres
Gedicht: Fragments of Poem in Translation

The Rhyme *Gesicht* is Face: her face opened upward to hold the rain, stanzas emerged in the gargle wearing bouquets of seaweed.

The Rhyme *Gewicht* is Weight: Melting down the entire letter press, the lead sculpture sings

The Rhyme *Gericht* is Court: What jury questions the leap, the leap from a word onto a building and down onto the pavement of meaning where the brain is an artful nude, someone blushes and looks away

The Fragment *Dicht* is Watertight: A subsistence diet of poetry, lays itself over the ear like wax seals from familiar fingers, inviting in truths that always wipe their boots

The Fragment *Dicht* is Dense: As in one day he found a jungle in his words, and vanished his friends dreamt of tigers

The Fragment *Dicht* is Close: The manner in which we hold satellites in our sway

The Profession *Dichter* is Poet: A meeting point of monosyllables making closer, the satellite enters the body, lights fill the head, teeth pickup radio signals from imagined planets
[Exotic]: Adjective: 1. Of foreign origin: As in over drinks she learns where I am from, giggles you’re so exotic. 2. Strikingly unusual, or strange: Glass fish, their small organs on display for the world, or jellyfish trailing strange parades: think exotic pets, elaborate fishbowls in which these things slowly die, the velvet collar around an Orangutan’s neck someone shouting now say something in German. 3. Introduced from abroad, but not fully naturalized: The interrogation always goes Well why aren’t you a citizen, on the fourth of July I melt butter in a pan and pound cutlets thin for schnitzel, a handful of breadcrumbs, a reminder of hillside wheat fields, stripping grains with our teeth. 4. Of or involving stripteasing: the dance Americans do when they find you a foreigner, pulling off sections of skin this here is French, and this part of me one side of the skull is bared, as if for my approval is 32% German, but their tongues remain clumsy things, untranslatable, pink maggots stripping the bones clean.
You wouldn’t get it because you’re foreign

How is every star in your flag
Another mass shooting, another 10
25, 50 bodies another pile
Of magazines, shells and shrapnel
From church walls, from school
Walls, from human skulls, what country
Wants to be a Colt with head-
Busting magnum rounds, and AR rapid
Firing: News today shooting, news
Tomorrow, shooting—someone says
A good guy with a gun
Will save us—imagine a flak-
Jacket Jesus, mowing down all
The bad guys, all the Thugs, brings
Back everyone in the cross
Fire, smiling, blood in his beard
And the one round that hit him
Is blocked by his bible, lodges in blessed
Be the peace makers and the piece
Makers of the American second coming
All the good and armed, raptured, naked
But for their high calibers, high-stepping
Into heaven on draped flags and second
Amendments, the bullet holes
And blood stains hint at who
They’re marching on
The Circuit’s Dead

After the 5am call,
After the word metastasis
slithered through the receiver.

You are an ocean away
in the house you’ve always lived
in, and I’m obsessed with David Bowie

Black Star on perpetual spin
I wait for the call I know is coming
soon. Questioning this crossed connection

It’s because you were your own musical giant,
in the soft corners of your instrument shop
guitars, and ukuleles on display, shelves of song-
books, and the woodwind section under glass.
You used to carry pianos, used to deliver them with
friends, now there’s just the one upright in the back,

that you tinkle out oldies on. Singing
in the Rain against the cryptic skies, or classical numbers
the notes to Fur Elise taped over the typewriter in the tiny office.

I remember the last time I was with you when we were coming back
from Sunday lunch, you spotted the child pressing his nose against
the glass, big eyes on a guitar, and you opened the door wide, made sure

he, and his family went home with a half-size number in blue.
Or, on slow days you would sit across the narrow street at a bakery
sunlight glinting off the buckles of your suspenders, watching the storefront

You’d bring back an extra nutwedge for me. Upstairs, in the house above
the shop, you had your dedicated chair in the living room, the walls filled
with photos of family, of you and Oma traveling Caribbean vistas.

Some days sitting up there you’d ask me what I was listening to
I don’t know you would have recognized Bowie if I’d mentioned him
your radio down in store always set to classical, but waiting for news

I can’t pull you two apart in my brain, maybe it’s the two year difference,
or maybe it’s Bowie’s last video, in which he sings as a blind, bedbound
phantom of himself, and the bones of Major Tom drift into the dark cold.
Soon, track the will end and the needle will slide into the dead wax and lift. I’ll run my fingers over the grooves, and imagine the way we used to preserve the faces of our loved ones in wax.
Last Transmission from *Major Tom*

I imagine someone might steal
my skull, cast the quiet thing in gold

as if to make this body whole or holy
shriveled in the white shroud of space

suit. It was hard staying
silent about the way the dark pulls

at my hands, like an eager
child, something over the ridge

and all the stars looking like signal
flares, what I mean is

someone had to go ahead, needed
to see what lay ahead for you, and
hope it is a weightless place.
Ode to a Fourteen Year Old Metal Head

Poem Carved out of the liner notes to *All Hail West Texas*

*I AM GOING TO TAKE THIS A LITTLE WHILE LONGER. I AM GOING TO TAKE THIS A LITTLE WHILE LONGER.*
already knew that. You have been sure of it for quite some time now. You see the proof everywhere. It is the reason you started reading these lines in the first place. Our love of west Texas and its rich musical heritage in no way mitigates the universally held maxim that you shouldn't have a hockey team in a place where no one will ever under any circumstances be able to play hockey outdoors… Special thanks to young men and women in bedrooms with electric guitars and Morbid Angel T-shirts around the country. The future is yours.
America

Some wasps breed
in figs, bodies
and children’s bodies

hungry for sweetness, but
not all figs are
shelter, some are

coffins, as in tunneling
tears off wings,
antennae, a crushing mold

for an unfit bit of yellow.
Listen, the crunch
of a fig is not a skeleton:

it digests its eaten mothers.
Dissections of a Mummy found in an Underpass

Wrapped in black
garbage bag,
a polyurethane
sarcophagus, holding
every last possession
layers of shirts and coats
the last collected warmth
calluses and old
scars on hands, on one
a ring, polished with rain
empty pockets, the first
incision shows emptier
stomach, hunger fills
the watchers, second incision
on the throat shows what’s left
of a voice that hummed
Chopin surrounded by paint
fumes, and exhaust-
on, a final cut
shows the muscles
of the hand, the tender
way they moved painting
or holding other hands
in the light of other hands
some of which remains
trapped years later
in the small tent
of lifted skin
Coming Home

Over the Phone that’s what Oma calls it
A nurse straightening out your new white
Sheets, like a shroud in the living
Room, what have they moved out?
How did they empty that room for a sick
bed? Old bed utterly out of
reach. Is your armchair still in there, with all
It’s wicker and faded green, closest
To the radiator? What about the piano,
Did it ever leave, on birthdays you’d
Play and sing in the background while
Oma wishes a good whatever age. A part
Of me misunderstood, for just a little bit
Took coming home as a win, as cancer
Beaten down again, even as the fentanyl
Drip quietly echoes in the background
And Oma asks me to stay
Where I am
The Conversation about albums

pops up sooner or later on any cross
country slide. five hours along the late
highway, stereo idling with easy
listening as Kyle says: Ringworm
the only band that matters: the
crunch, grind, noise guitars
fans tearing up the bar. Banging
fists on anything and each other.
Kyle used to race six hours to New
York, once a week, used to come back
with grinning black eyes, used to
until he was hit with fucked up dosage
of antidepressants, spent months addicted
too busy sleeping, or shaking for shows.

Eric opens his mouth. We know
He’s on a perpetual pendulum, today
He says it’s got to be Brother Sister.
It’s got to be the soft breaking of a God
The way every lyric crawls under the skin
leaves you needing some sort of faith
or a place in which to weep over what
has been lost. Eric hums “No more
me, no more belief” imagining wilting
fading to brown
tender dust.

I used to say it was Demon Days.
Used to say that’s the album that got me
into music. Now it’s Tallahassee because
getting into music means finding the exact words
of your life somewhere, means the screaming
catharsis of No Children the chorus chanted
on bad nights “I hope you die, I hope
We both die” the angry acoustic
a better reminder of loss than silence.
Waiting for the Call You Know is Coming

For Tim
Live Music Origin Story

There were no rivers to cross
the bar Strange Matter
opening its mouth easy
to me, teenaged, doc
Martin’d and trying
to look hard, another
for the salt kissed press
of black leather escape artists.
With all that electric kick,
and sway, I couldn’t help but dream:
the foot pound and adrenaline
rhythms of the first men hunting,
the thrum of their muscles, and the beating
of the Mammoth’s heart, there are things
once heard, that recurl your DNA
what I mean is there was no fate
for beast’s skins other than the drum
pealed slow, with gentle fingers,
then beat, beat until you get to a bunch
of kids jammed sardine close, synchro-
nizing breaths until everyone is caught
in the violent thrall, and one punk pulls
two pound bag of sugar from his coat, bites
it open, and whirls through all of us
sweet and beautiful, crystals
hanging from our hair as we spin wind-
mill feeling sweet and beautiful
under the blue of our bruises
Home as a Pastoral Dream

In the fishscale shade of riverside birches we built fire
built it with our hands, the way one builds a home, fingertips cool on damp moss

Imagine the warmth of it, opposite the water, so clear one could dream of reaching into the light.

How clear is skin unafraid of fire? Thin lines of blue veins, bodies unto themselves, box jellyfish: an entire cove of them. The truth of our bodies machinery—

perhaps, it is this display that kills us the way the tendrils in water long for other bodies. Do not linger. This transparency is poison Instead imagine further into the fire in its yellow heart and reach for it,

a little ball of warmth, like a summer orange, like something you might swallow with a child’s grin, a little treasure for those who still reach into fires
The Usual Monday Morning Call in Late Winter

When Oma sees your eyes flick open
Pupils clenched as tight as your fists
To the bed rails. She presses the phone
To your ears hoping. On the other end
I can’t understand a word.
Poem for the Twenty-something Stuffing Grief into Imaginary Playlists

-Carved From the liner notes of *We Shall All Be Healed*

I let the mice chew through the bandages. One of them was this brown and white mouse who approached the whole task with a wonderful sense of play. Sparkling little eyes lightheartedly intent on their work. Magnificent. Every little bit helps.

I would lie there, in the boiling afternoon, watching the mice come and go, and I would think fondly of you.

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RECOVERED

THE WORLD

CHAMPIONS OF THE WORLD

West side riders know how we hold it down.

All you people still out on the corner up there by 13th and Taylor near the Greenhouse,

this one goes out to you with all the love that's in me.

Brave young scavengers in your fabulous black jeans.

Hold on.

Hold on with both hands.
Elegies Bloom as the Phone Rings

In the grey of the late day
parking garage the wrong
number on the wrong
day, the sheaf of poems under
my arm, no longer premature.
IV. Homecomings

_The most remarkable thing about coming home to you is the feeling of being in motion again_

-The Mountain Goats
Two Seasons on a Graveyard

I.
They found this place for you in the spring,
In May just after... black branches

Festooned, as if by the hands of some clever
Craftsman knotting together pink

The very color and scent of the color
Perched to spill, into shade of other

Trees, pine and birch, and to be nibbled
By the small deer, that love unclosed

Doorways, and tend flowered graves with velvet
Snouts. I was not there

When they brought you, in Hawaiian
Shirt, suspenders and Birkenstocks

No suit, no sonatas bright enough
So steel drums pulled the blossoms

Down around the heads of everyone

II.
I am here now, with cold on my heels
Last week, I fetched the bouquet

Evergreen sprigs, and a red blossom, but
Ran errands while Oma pinned the arrangement

To the breast of your cross, as a boutonniere
Or a reminder of your seat by the window

Always full of light and trumpet flowers.
Last night, the fog began to curl upward

The cold dragging crystals out of its edges
Crowning everything.

And now I am here, like a second spring
The cherry branches

Hang with blossoms, these of rime
And red mane of the bouquet shakes
Its frosted head in the quiet breeze.
Before Flying Back to Norfolk

I hauled all of the old books
down from my kid room, walls still
full of atlases and Pokémon posters
everything for donation or dump

nothing large enough to hold all
this time, so I cut my inheritance care-
fully from the bones of the house
your pocket watch and suitcase

tropical colors, too bright for the overcast
and fifty pounds or so of vinyl, pilfered
from the attics, walls vaulted
like ribs, everything like treasure

dust catching the dull gold
midday-- the Jethro Tull, my mother
stole this from down stairs during the boom
years, nipped it at night for the cover art

and here, my uncle's collection:
jazz and the Beatles, unplayed
Now for years, record of a younger man
mad collection-- 3 copies of the blue

album on blue, back to back with Nina
Simone, and rubber soul and Thelon-
ious Monk, grooves still
pristine, next Bach and Mozart

Only Liszt is conspicuously absent
No Years of Pilgrimage here, even
As we prepared to take ours from the house
That would never sell in the end
Liner Notes for a Mixtape of Coping Mechanisms

1. “Tis a Pity She was a Whore” by David Bowie
   *Black Star © 2016*
   Just listen to those first two seconds, the breath hissing
   On the recording, and the horn, the kind of brass so mean
   That it eats itself. What I mean is you can pretend to hear
   Organs filling with fluid, even as you imagine the manic
   Bounce behind that. Adrenaline doesn’t begin
   To cover it, this sonic presentation of a body for autopsy

2. “See America Right” by The Mountain Goats
   *Tallahassee © 2002*
   This is for the crate of vodka in the passenger seat, and the broken
   Air-conditioning unit, this place is so hot that even the open window
   Air feels like concrete. You can almost hear the lunatic beatnik
   Road screech coming down this back alley of America, as out of brain
   As I am. All the bass has given out, and my throat has given out, and I
   Imagine at the next stop someone will look in and think this so fucking romantic

3. "Title and Registration” By Death Cab for Cutie
   *Transatlantacism ©2003*
   Slow it all, blood thickening against cold, rummage
   the glove box of an imagined car: unresolved
   photos, an empty bottle of nail polish-- an attempt
   to be someone else, black ink quickly scraped
   off strange fingers, a complete lack of documents, unidentifiable
   in case of fire, a book of matches familiar bar, all heads long wet

4. “King Rat” by Modest Mouse
   *No One’s First and You’re Next © 2004*
   Everything that is said here is in the taste of your mouth
   After a night of waste, I mean the angry kind of waste, the hoping
   For organ shut and the morning soaked in bitter medicine. The tongue
   Moving in stutters along the day’s seething edge. There is a rat
   Swimming through the gutter, droplets scatter off its tail—fruitless
   Seeds, its eyes are a mirror

   Friend I’m trying to be the best kind
   of kind I have in me, songs
   as keys shake the body, some ghosts tumble out
The Final Closing of the Shop: New Years Day

Some key-turns ring
with utter finality--
the bells in the distance

Hitting one, the music box
of the house, twisted
everything now recast

wrought iron lamps, bulbs
like moons, now scrap
marked for sale

everything else ushered
out, given or sold or
going, to make room

for the kind of ghosts
we make all on our own.
Oma, looks back briefly

snow lies before us,
tapestry of what’s to come,
our boots leaving
ellipses
An Interrogation after the 2017 Inauguration

What does Permanent resident mean?

Means I have planted my boots
Here, and watched the Ivy grow
Means home is a schizoid thing for me,
You slip out of time in places,
Clocks only reset so many times,
Means, I can cross this border,
But have to gag myself in passing
Lest they see my tongue

How long have you lived in Norfolk?

Is living an uninterrupted thing?
Disappearing is in my nature, I
Could say years, straddling oceans
Some strains you get used to, roots
Grow hardy and prehensile, how many
Times can you uproot the same tree?
Replant it, feed it a new language
Is it still the same tree so long
As it flowers the right documents?

Why are you not a citizen?

I’ve told you about disappearing, my
Magicians act, my clever Houdini
Howling and cracking cuffs, social
Security, seems to be grabbing
Me by the pockets, and all the oaths
And flag stare on from their high
Perches, toothless things best
Suited for globetrotter shorts
Or a new tie for the man who would
Call me parasite, shouts it right
Into the country’s ear, that’s a trick
Too, and everyone laughs

You liked posts of Richard Spencer getting punched, do you want to hurt innocent men?

The word innocent does
Not exist in the tongue
Of genocide, is not stitched
Of tailored suits, or white
Faces, every torch is
An intention, the dream
Of the first bonfire, the first
Person thrown onto the pyre,
The tinder box on the black
Steel trains, barreling through
The night, right outside
All of our windows, I
Mean to say
Yes
Let them hear my knuckles
Crack, let the Hackenkreuz
Be a target, and let them laugh
At the embassy when I tell them why
I’m hiding out
She Hums Punk Songs in the Shower

The soft tattoo—a heart
Pumping the hum, bounc-
Ing off the the tiles, rising
With the steam, a curtain
A magician’s trick, a day made
Entirely of sunshine. Quietly
So as not to miss a breath
Of her sweet bird
Tune, I slip my bare
Feet through the cracked
Door, leave a kiss on her
Dewed shoulder, and neck and soft-
Ly on her lips, as if to pluck
The golden harp in her throat
Fill my mouth at the spring
Of her music, and carry on
Some small piece of harmony
A Kingdom Away

Black branches outside sway
Like antenna the indecipherable radio
Signals we send coded in needle
Drops—last light flicked off
A candle burns quietly as the snow roosting
In the trees, she tells a small story
With the A-side *The first time I heard...*
All loved things have stories
Living in the small waves, pressed
Onto wax, the way we are trying
To press our bodies closer to stay
Warm, to be warm and borderless, songs
Sliding into songs, the traffic pushes
Towards home beyond the glass, and we
Flip the record, let it slide down
Light another candle, lay on the next
Wax from pile, another brief story
Another brick in our borderless kingdom
That isn’t here.
VITA

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Work Experience

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Old Dominion University Writers in Community
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Publications
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