

excerpts from *For That Return Passage – a Valentine for the United States of America*

**Preface: an invitation to stay**

There is the choosing of a country and the choosing of a person. The falling in love, the making of promises, the seeing and the looking away. There is the not being sure, the staying or not staying, the choosing again. There is the searching for the one – the person and the place. There is the desire to be chosen and the thrill of the chase.

I courted a country. Five years of batting my eyelashes on paper. Five years of unrequited, of loving enough for the both of us.

February 14, 2006. A proposal arrives. “Welcome to the United States of America.” “This is to notify you that your application for permanent residence status has been approved.”

Five years of playing hard to get.

It is possible to fall into geography, as it is possible to fall in love. Falling in and falling out.

Every question I ask of the United States is a question of love. New York will always be New York and it is possible to love it twice or not at all, and in that sense it is no different from Colorado. My beloved is a figment. Geography being a person and not a person. A person being a landscape. And how it changes, the person and the landscape. Like weather, like a forecast.

I am unsure. All the same questions. I love you. Do I love you enough? You are not who I thought you were. I love you still.

Are you the one?

## **Sonnet for borders**

this is where I draw the line  
across your body  
this sand  
and mine  
this ache of ashes  
this memory  
where you were  
where I am  
no longer  
a question  
between holding  
and not holding  
between breath  
and want

## **Sonnet for the Republic**

I am trying to give an account  
a record of my folly  
the confusion of tongues  
how things become

this is a love letter  
a Valentine  
my never till death  
do we part

this cleaving  
this gathering of keys  
impossible alphabets  
of marriage

I do not wish to turn your head  
quietly, I cannot pledge

## Sonnet for commitment

I do  
I do  
I pledge  
I take  
I Lisa Birman  
take you  
I do  
in sickness  
and I Lisa Birman  
do swear  
to honour  
and obey

I do.  
I swear.

## **The Key**

This is a true story. When I returned, he gave me a key to the United States. It is a simple uncut key that looks just like the American flag. I have not yet used it to open a door. It has been used to open conversations with strangers. I do not and have not referred to it as Old Glory. It is not so much the Stars and Stripes. It is my key to you. My means of understanding. You should hand them out at the border. You should send them overseas.

## **US-VISIT: How It Works**

In many cases, US-VISIT begins overseas, at the US consular offices issuing visas, where visitors' biometrics (digital fingerscans and photographs) are collected and checked against a database of known criminals and suspected terrorists. When the visitor arrives at the port of entry, we use the same biometrics – digital fingerscans – to verify the person at our port is the same person who received the visa.

What can I expect when I arrive in the US?

Once at the port of entry you will find that many of the procedures remain unchanged and are familiar to you. For example, a US Customs and Border Protection Officer still reviews your travel documents, such as a visa and passport. The officer still asks you questions about your stay in the US.

What's new under US-VISIT is that the US Customs and Border Protection Officer now uses the inkless, digital fingerscanner to capture two of your fingerscans. You first place your left index finger and then your right index finger on the scanner. The officer also takes your digital photograph. These procedures add only seconds to the overall processing time.

## **Fingerprint Instructions for All Immigration Benefits Applicants**

1. Do not submit a completed fingerprint card (FD-258) with your application. Your application will be accepted without the fingerprint card attached. If you submit a completed fingerprint card with your application on or after March 29, 1998, the card will be rejected and you will be scheduled to be fingerprinted by USCIS.

2. Do submit fee, in addition to the application fee, payable to USCIS, with your application. The fee is noted at the top of our Forms and Fees page. This charge will cover the cost for you to be fingerprinted by USCIS.

3. After USCIS receives your application, USCIS will provide you with an appointment letter with the location of the nearest USCIS authorized fingerprint site. Please read the instructions in the appointment letter, and take it to USCIS authorized fingerprint site when you go to your fingerprint appointment.

## Homeland: advice for citizens

*Preserving our freedoms  
protecting America  
we secure  
our homeland*

it was almost Poland  
Germany Israel France  
it could have been Belarus  
it could have been Russia  
or any of the Russias

the country of birth  
be/longing  
as in, security  
as in, department

it could have been Canada  
it could have been England

home base  
home bound  
Homeland  
homeless  
homemade  
home run  
home stretch

it could have been you

**what you are not (and where**

the reef inside / my chest  
not blue / not as far as eye can see

not girt not by

you are rugged      I grant you

you are mountains and ranges

you are not the only one

the song is false  
as I am false  
and you

I recognize your rains      this lack  
that which is gold and that      which is red

you are incomplete)  
as I

we look away / we neither  
as brown or as green      as desire

but still  
I would have you  
and do

## **I don't want to want**

you  
with your landscape  
curved against my  
landscape, how we  
nook and cranny  
one into the other  
how we hand in  
hand in glove  
or love or  
something  
like the ocean  
which is where  
I would have  
you, again

## **Sonnet for staying**

here:

in, at, or to the place

where you are

at a place

near you

used to draw

attention to a particular

point or stage

a situation happening

at the present time

somebody is offering

something to somebody

people in general

and their life on Earth

## **Sonnet for leaving**

there:  
a place  
already mentioned  
or understood  
an emphasis  
an identity  
a something  
a somebody  
that is to say  
somebody exists  
something can be seen  
such as anger  
satisfaction, finality  
relief

**There are only two signs:**

“This line US citizens only”

“Visitors”

I am the middle road  
I am the lack of  
a door