

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