

“Love Letters from an Urban NDN”

removal

SEC. 1. Be it enacted that Indian title has been extinguished divided into territory into outskirts
dirty apartments belonging to the United States easily distinguished from the other
Indian is the other lawful to exchange and remove there remove them

SEC. 2. And be it further enacted that it shall be lawful for the President to prescribe
without limits any tribe within limits where the land occupied by Indians occupied by
ghosts owned by the United States in which it lies it lies

SEC. 3. And be it further
enacted that the United States will forever secure their heirs executed: provided
always provided lands shall revert if the Indians become extinct the Indians become extinct
extinct or abandoned the same

SEC. 4. And be it further enacted value to be paid to the
person to the person passed in value to the United States

SEC. 5. And be it further enacted
aid the Indians the emigrants city immigrants necessary for subsistence after removal

SEC. 6. And be it further enacted protections from new residence or deadened apartment on the
outskirts of Nation

SEC. 7. And be it further enacted He is authorized He is over them
may remove present places of residence remove residence

any tribe over over over

termination

when the two gods met and the high rise
eclipsed the sky, this city unveiled secret ceremonies
tucked under the steaming urbanscape. in the ads,
before we came,
real injuns smiled and packed their history into moving trucks.
we were told to *gut the land and call it the chance*
of a lifetime,
no need to practice silly animisms, for the city is nothing
but technoconfusion and chemicals. they lured us with churches
in the basements of skyscrapers,
offered replacement gods, *perfect jobs*, but we called it reclamation
as we turned metalwork into retribution, imagined the city
as a sweat lodge. every night we filled the spaces between traffic lights
with song. *success & happiness* draped themselves in jingle dress,
happy homes heavy with the scent
of sagebrush and medicine.
now we wait for the collision
of old gods dancing. our bodies are waves
against the metro lines, unfulfilled as smiling injuns so we fill ourselves
with cement,
with transmission,
with anything we can transform into salvation.
on the rez, our elders told us the seventh world was strewn
with cornpollen.
in the cities in the night, we watch the gods ebb and crash together.
we smear our bodies with the fallout and swear
it is just the same.

consolidation (naatsis'úán)

a girl comes to the mountainside kneels in cornpollen dirt
the red on her jeans on her nikes fresh from the city
 beneath its face rimmed with moss the mountain
 was a monster the little-known giant
this is what her mother sings in the night
with a brush in her hand she brushes with grasses
and sings of the monster the monster the mountain
 the girl with the red on her sneaks knows
 the biggest she has seen is the baseball stadium
 but this mountain this monster is bigger than the buildings
 that ring her city like skulls like shards of pearl
she is that she has become the stories
of her mother kneeled at the mountainside this monster
so long ago paralyzed by rock clay and grass
 it's the biggest she has seen
 rimmed with strings of things
wonders what then is a city
 swallowed by red and the moss
 the cicadas carrying the difference
 on their backs in the night
the girl takes off her nikes they are red from the sand
she takes off the face rimmed with mosses
the songs of her mother that bridge life past a desert
 beneath is a city a monster a pearl

k'é (*reclamation*)

tired of being tired, I talk too much to white people
on the street who ask if I get money. I point to my worn-out nikes
my worn-out mother, my history that does not fit
between the earth and gummy asphalt. this—
 the collective sigh of urban NDNs—
balloons below my throat.
somewhere beyond the horizon shivering in the heat
 is a home I pretend I know (in truth
I would recognize the 101 before the trading post).
oversharing is a second language b/c how else can we preserve
 in a city that inhales our children
hands press to the underside of concrete and they call it burial
and I am tired of feeling as if my words will take Los Angeles
apart. my exhaustion stretches toward the rez, becomes older
every day. is it my city or the memory
of those blistering beneath

glow

when the government gutted our land, they didn't think of brown hands
in the earth, sleeves pulled up to the elbows, ankles deep in rez mud—
the water running yellow with corn meal,
golden runoff in a parched backyard.

in Utah, my grandmother farmed and molded her body to the world,
my grandfather drove his truck for hours through rolling hills
with country rustling in the breeze,
and somewhere in the rivers my mother played,
her knees yellow with mud.

in Arizona alone, there are 521 abandoned mines,
sunburst-stained streaks in the earth my grandfather must have passed
in his elevated Dodge, that our horses must have dipped their lips to
for drink,
521 mines plugged like wine bottles, as if boards and a handful of screws
could mend a hundred years of exploitation.

our families name our bodies after poisoned land.
don't talk about the ghosts of detonation, the Navajo men swallowed
by yellow dust and dynamite, apologies never offered, a culture
bred from widows and sickness they didn't give us hospitals to identify

when I came of age we poured batter into a hole in the ground,
cut slices to share with everyone, and the cornmeal seemed to glow.
just last week I learned a bucket of uranium dust is called a yellowcake
and I can't stop thinking of bone dust, brown hands in the soil,
the cows that died with their stomachs bled, how before I was born my grandfather
died from cancer and how the deaths still haven't stopped.

being Navajo may just be a synonym for being poisoned,
because four years ago the Gold King Mine raged/explored/vomited/ into the San Juan
and the water bled neon with toxic waste.
residents were alerted 24 hours after the blowout, after consuming
a full day's contamination.
the EPA dodged questions and blamed it on the contractors.
the EPA didn't bother to show up until a week after rivers ran yellow.

at night, I dream of the landscape opening like a wound, spilling out old ghosts.
hand in hand, they circle the mesas in their helmets, singing ceremony
and heartbreak, and I almost believe it all.
just before they are swallowed by the rivers, they see me.
they stop. there's country music in the wind, old songs
just beyond the wave of faces, and faces—
they're faces we know.
and in the cold moonlight, they glow.

from Love Letters from Occupied Lands

I.

he tries to write me with moccasins, but their skin
melts on the city blacktop.

I wear nikes, white and fresh.

he tries to write me
with raven-silk hair past my waist,
but L.A. is hot in the summertime
(steam comes to my knees).

I whisk it up and wear it short.

he tries to write me on the reservation,
but I love this city, love her shape—
love her brownness, her woke, her shimmer
at night, her voice,
the hum of the 101
against the smoggy sky.

II.

Indian boy! brown baby, lemon grove,
you caught hummingbirds between your teeth
& their wings brushed your palate,
ribbed and pink.
my heart opens itself like a peel-back can.
Indian boy! I knew someone with your skin,
washed with grooves like the riverbank. come whistle
the tune of an ancient war. the one—that one!
make me remember.