

émigré

by toby sharpe

here's why you pack up two bags & cross one ocean:
your life is not bueno. you are not bueno.
& you've started unironically saying bueno.
(bueno haha).

you aren't sure when all your friends
started work at marketing firms with ambiguous names
conveying a capitalist sincerity & bonhomie.

you don't seem to be at one of those firms.
was a memo sent out? a group text?
should you buy a pair of chinos?
how did everyone make this decision at once?

friends with whom you used to neck cheap vodka
now seem only to wear business casual
& talk with authority about rising rent in south london,
about carolyn in human resources,
& engagement parties.

you want a boyfriend & a flat of your own
but instead you're living at home with your family,
looking at menus of men online.
everyone has abs & tight windows of availability.
you're funemployed, you tell these men. sometimes they reply.
maybe you should get a job in human resources.
(god you're so fucking depressed it's becoming
overwhelming).

nah, fuck this noise!, you think. you're **young!**

work visas are easy to get if you're white!
you throw a leaving party on a weeknight,
& people leave by half ten.
you wonder if anyone took any photos
of your nice, mint-green shirt.
what is the point of being young & gay
if no one is documenting your ugly duckling adulthood?
some so-called fucking friends.

the plane journey over is ripe with so much possibility
that you basically can't stop crying.
you just can't stop crying!

yeah, so, at first,
the sheer novelty of it all is fucking *incroyable*.
you used to go to a different bank - can you believe it?
you used to queue for other-coloured money
in a country far from this one - there are banks here too!
everyone you know back home isn't having *this* experience.
sure, they've all been to banks before,
or maybe they're on some kinda bank manager grad scheme,
but you're experiencing a unique kind of simulacra facsimile
replicant bank vibe that is very funny
(& unique only to you in this experience of
emigration).

you think you're probably not pro-capitalism, but you're not sure
you know enough yet to confidently say this at parties.
you've been to a few parties in your new city now,
& nodded a lot.

you try to explain why you've moved to the canadian bank teller
who impassively nods a couple times & offers you a free pen.

you realise you have insecurities here too.
you hate when your father makes awkward small talk with waitresses,
so why are you doing this, holding up the line?
how has your lineage found you - an ocean away?

you take your maple-flavoured money
& walk out onto the chilly street.
you don't yet know enough people here to tell a great anecdote
about your first banking experience abroad.

you now have four to six friends in your new city,
depending on what friendship means.
someone you could tell secrets to?
someone who would come to your fucking
leaving drinks even if it was on a weeknight?

you buy a croissant from the same bakery almost every day.
you have a routine of sorts.
you teach english ineptly, relying on your accent
& a brand of humour you could charitably deem slapstick.
your students place the stress in your name oddly
& you don't have the energy to intervene.

one of your mates in england just sent you a message
reminding you that you can't run away from your problems.
how would she know? she can't run away from those eyebrows!
you choose not to reply.

things are almost as good as they could be.

admittedly, you worry each morning that this is the day
you might genuinely have to confront some
emotional truths
& then you decide to stop thinking about
anything.

you spend a lot of time in diners because
the refills are free,
the décor feels suitably familiar yet foreign:
all the neon, the conversation,
the cheese curds melting into something alien & plastic.

how long can you maintain this new life?
every phone-call home is becoming a sick joke.
even the money smells like maple syrup!
did you mention that already?
nothing could be bad here!

things here must be better because
they must be better.
you have started to notice that half of your new friends
seem aimless too. you all have the same scruffy facial hair.
all their/your stories begin "i was so fucked &".
everyone seems to be an australian on a gap year,
or french-speaking & deeply depressed.
a new pal in the latter camp, with her heavy accent that reminds
you of a drunken aunt, a childhood day out,
offers you a job in human resources.

you keep looking idly at plane tickets
somewhere new.