

LYRICS for HYMNS FOR THE EXILED (2004)

BEFORE THE EYES OF STORYTELLING GIRLS

i could tell you stories like the government tells lies / ah, but no one listens anymore
in the rooms, the women come and go / talking on the mobile phones
and the television talks about the war
when i was a baby, there was laughter in my house / my daddy smoked domestic cigarettes
and thursday nights on the radio / live in concert- live from cairo
mother of egypt!

*mama, mama, be with me / with the music in your breast /
in your glittering evening dress / and the white flag in your fist / trembling*

i could tell you stories like the past was dead and gone / but i know nothing changes in this
world
every day the muezzin calls / sun comes up and baghdad falls
before the eyes of storytelling girls
she was just a poor man's daughter / going down into the sultan's bed
he was desert, she was water / and he remembered every word she said

*and i say, grandma, grandma, be with me / in your tragic wedding gown
with your long hair hanging down / and the stories tumbling out / tumbling*

i could tell you stories like the government tells lies / ah, but no one listens anymore
in the rooms the women come and go / talking on the mobile phones
and the television talks about the war / the television talks about the war

1984

down at headquarters, there's a big database
with black and white photos of the side of your beautiful face
and your library record, and all your test scores
and an invitation to party like it's 1984

baby, don't look so nervous, they just want the facts
and it's all written out in the usa patriot act
cause we don't take no chances in a nation at war
so tonight we're gonna party like it's 1984

oh, honey, what did i tell you about the house being bugged?
they can hear us making breakfast, they can hear us making love
but excuse me a minute- big brother's at the door
and he's ready to party like it's 1984

you know you're my one and only and you always have been
sure is gonna be lonely after i turn you in

so i'll wait till tomorrow to file my report
and tonight we can party like it's 1984

COSMIC AMERICAN

i'm a live wire, i'm a shortwave radio, do you copy?
i'm a flash of light from the radar tower to the runway
if i leave you i'm gonna do it semi-automatically
do you blame me?

you are so far out there in the static / hey, baby, am i coming through?
i am up above the buildings / i can see forever out the window of a hotel room
i spent a long night with a stranger i give my body to
and still i miss you

*still i never knew a love so tender / we're out behind your astro van
and you've got me up against the fender / you are the cosmic american man*

i'm a live wire, i'm a shortwave radio, do you copy?
i'm a flash of light from the radar tower to the runway
if i love you i'm gonna do it semi-automatically
do you blame me? do you blame me? do you blame me?

THE BELLY & THE BEAST

i in my longing fly out in the night / unveiled and irreverently dressed
i'm lip-stuck and liquored up- picking a fight / i'm the wicked wicked witch of the west
over the alleyways, backward and blind / and the sad and insatiable sprawl
over the marketplace, darkly defined / his desert is sounding a call

he was a businessman twenty-five years / when the angel appeared with his orders
I'm making you mine, my divine volunteer / and i'm flying you over the border
and he can't recall where it all fell apart / was it north of medina or south?
where the prophecy ends and the politics start / where the weapon went into his mouth

and everyone's sleeping, and he's flying out / and no one can keep him down now

the morning delivers the news to my door / of my president's war in the east
but he doesn't tell me and i don't know who's / in the belly and who is the beast
when there's no place to run to, when there's no place to hide
it won't matter whose side you are on
like the bomb in the basement we couldn't stop if we tried
and it won't be long, and it won't be long, and it won't be long...

ORION

you were dead when they found you / on the floor of your apartment
you were dead, and your drumset stood there shining in the dark
shining like stage lights / shining like your eyes
shining like orion in the night

you were small time back in austin / where the drummers are all poor
you were rocking out this dive bar / there were bottles on the floor
and a couple lonely people / and the bartender and i
remembered what it is to be alive

hey, orion, he's falling / catch him if you can
hey, orion, he's calling / amen, amen, amen

were you dreaming of the big time / when you fell down all alone?
could you see the velvet curtain / and the silver microphone?
could you hear your own heart beating? / did you hear it getting slow?
could you hear your own heart playing rock & roll?

hey, orion...

gram parsons in a hotel / buddy holly on a plane
and you, in your apartment / with your drumset shining
shining like stage lights / shining like your eyes
shining like orion in the night

hey orion...

MOCKINGBIRD

hush, you little baby, don't you say a word
here comes the devil, all dressed up like a mockingbird
and if that mockingbird should try to steal you off the ground
mama's gonna grab on tight and hold you down- down- down

mama, can you tell me: where did my money go?
what did the devil sell me? i don't even know
he's been pecking in my pockets, diving round my door
trying to take me with him- what does he want me for?

mama told me don't let go the ground / somebody hold me- hold me down

i got the devil on my shoulder- hollering- beating his red wing
saying "polly wanna dollar, i don't care if you can sing"
and "put down that guitar, now, darlin', you can't really play it
don't matter what you got to say- you don't know how to say it"

mama told me...

what's this coming? what's this coming? coming over me

i can't stand myself- i can't even stand on my own feet

mama told me...

I WEAR YOUR DRESS

this is just to tell you that i wear your dress sometimes
the one you made with the gold brocade and the empire waistline
you fitted to your figure when it looked just like my own
that was jersey in the fifties, and the women stayed at home

so you laid your paper pattern on the table in between
the silverware and napkins and the harper's magazines
from a slow suburban season that is nothing but a dream
to your granddaughter

this is just to tell you that i wear your dress sometimes
i wear it down to the bar in town and dance around all night
talking and joking, swearing and smoking like any stranger in a crowd
and nobody stares, nobody cares to tell me i'm not allowed- i am allowed

and my body, by the letter of the law, is still my own
when i lay down in the darkness, unburdened and alone
with the liberty you've given like the clothing you've outgrown
to your granddaughter

this is just to tell you that i wear your dress sometimes

A HYMN FOR THE EXILED

one two three four five six seven / the word came down to him from heaven
and naked as an animal, he knew
everything of flesh and bone / he could call it all his own
if he could name it, he could lay claim to it, too
but after all the word was spoken / you sent him out into the open
all alone to make his broken promise whole again
eight nine ten eleven twelve / did you see how far he fell?
did you watch him covering his body in his shame?

*and wanting you near him / though you couldn't hear him
he was falling down with your name in his mouth*

a thousand thousand years pass through me / stoned on loneliness and movies
where people make their love in foreign tongues
every family locks their door / every man in uniform
reminds me of the body of my own one
i knew you before i met you / i've forgotten why i left you

all i wanna do is get back into your good grace
call you by your hundred names / till it makes you mine again
till i get my will back in this godforsaken place

*i want you near me / i know you can't hear me, now
but i'm falling down with your name
i want you near me / i wish you could hear me, now
while i'm falling down with your name in my mouth*

QUEECREEK FLOOD

it was late in july / at the queecreek coal mine / when the water came rolling down
as black as bad blood / to where nine good men stood
shuddering, shivering / shouting for deliverance / sure they would drown

and safe above ground / the boss paced around / surveying the scene of the flood
after chasing away / the UMWA / so inspections were cheap / he didn't lose sleep
he just stood in the sun / "what could we have done?" he said / "this was an act of god"

and the president came / from his party campaign / to shake every hero's right hand
after slashing the funds / for the miners' black lungs / and the regulations
"god bless our nation," / he said, "united we stand"

and the anchorgirl cried / when the miners survived / she lauded her god in his glory
and the tired cameraman / packed up the van / and they wore the same frown
as they drove out of town / where they found the next sellable story

and we who were raised by invisible hands / and we who were raised on government lies
we prodigal children of the promiseland / who's gonna open our eyes?

TWO KIDS

my daddy's house is the safest of houses / he sealed up the windows so no air gets in
and there's plenty of campbell's and beers in the basement / in case we can't get to the store or
something
and my daddy told me that some people hate us / they even hate me, and i'm just a kid
i asked how come, but he didn't answer / so i started thinking it was something i did

-IRAQI VERSE BY SYRIAN POET NOOR AL-DIN-

i have a bed with a superman blanket / he's not afraid of the dark like me
sometimes i can't fall asleep when i'm supposed to / i'm thinking about something i saw on tv
there was this house in a field full of houses / it was the bad guys living in there
but i saw this kid looking out from the window / and he didn't look bad, he only looked scared

ONE GOOD THING

turn that tv off, now, baby / i'm so low i don't even sing
tell me something 'bout my country / tell me one good thing

cash and elvis, cain and abel / down in memphis, trading hands
big girls dancing on the tables / dancing for the band

put that paper down, now, baby / i'm so low, i don't even sing
tell me something 'bout my country / tell me one good thing

king and malcolm, lamb and lion / setting alabama free
thirty thousand angels flying / from Montgomery

switch that station off, now, baby / i'm so low i don't even sing
tell me something 'bout my country / tell me one good thing / tell me one good thing