

CUSTOMS DECLARATION TO A WHITE EMPIRE

Christopher Tubbs

The traveller declares that his name is a silence as dangerous as the river in winter.

The traveller declares that his home address is unpronounceable to most missionaries.

The traveller arrives by air, in the red mists of dread sacrifice; by rail, with the nameless sons of seven generations at his heels; by marine, in a war canoe decked against the flatteries of the champagne socialist; and by highway, trailing tears and stumbling over murdered women.

The traveller declares that the purpose of his trip is “Personal.”

The traveller arrives from another country and another time, yet also from this country and from this time, and insists that he be recognized at home.

The traveller declares he cannot free himself from duty.

The traveller further declares that he bears the following goods: One (1) fragrant cedar cloak, rose-gold as the dawn, living and austere. Two (2) adzes in jade, terrible and strange, worn with purposeful use. Three (3) planks of pine, sap-stained, punctured, jeweled, richly frosted in otter’s teeth and fire-blackened bone. Four (4) blankets, imported and diseased, one sewn into wrappings for a child and another clawed in fear. Five (5) treaty drafts, four unsigned, the fifth edited in treachery and re-notarized by a respected gentleman of leisure at Ottawa. Six (6) memories of mother’s glance falling absently on the reflection of the shadow of the great tree, saying, “We’ll talk about the reservation when you’re older.” Seven (7) stillborn half-breed cousins made fertilizer to a schoolyard garden, buried there by a stern father’s command and a trowel.

The traveller certifies that his declaration is true, but cannot be complete; memory flows off the table’s edge from an over-filled cup and is lost in Christian soil.