

*My Land*  
Ryan McAdams

they say doctors make the worst patients.  
do patients make the best doctors?

horizontal in a head cage, slid  
in the ceramic catacomb, the MRI magnet  
preps a warning blast of phaser fire—  
five seconds of silence.

sonic bursts pulsate, vibrate, rock  
the skull base, zombie beats bounce  
a dendritic drift, a synaptic trip,  
a galactic whirl, flip, tilt, turn;

cosmic chirps and voltaic clippers,  
the fervent squeak of rubbed glass,  
rattle sockets, concha, and condyles,  
shake fossa, ossicles, and foramen,  
while the aphotic hammer pounds  
staccato, slams astrocytic, bang bang,  
hum knock, brain clang, clip clap,

*you okay doc?*  
frantic thoughts grow like bindweed,  
dark vibrations echo as the urge  
to swallow peaks into a panicked gulp,  
frenetic tick tock, the scanner jabber wanes  
protons align as gigabytes  
of pixels rise from magnetic mist,  
to unveil the neuronal hieroglyphics

a walnut in a white shell, sliced  
into hundreds of grayscale images,  
viewed on a glowing monitor in a dark room,  
annotated arrowheads scattered over blood spots

numerous microhemorrhages,  
throughout the subcortical cerebral  
white matter, cerebellum, pons, and medulla  
small foci of enhancement at the left superior  
temporal gyrus and left occipital lobe.

the neuroradiologist dictates her differential

multiple cavernous malformations,  
hypertensive hemorrhages,  
amyloid angiopathy,  
sequela of a prior infection  
*we are not sure*

which bites when it's your own brain.

seated. not leading the discussion  
but being discussed. staring at the black,  
gray, and white slices of me.  
a medical record number. a filed report.

blood draws, see-saws, check-ins, signed consent  
lumbar puncture; *we are still not sure,*  
*you could have seizures and may bleed again*  
*which can lead to paralysis or death*

on night call in the neonatal ICU  
i sit with a mom and dad  
to talk about their baby girl's head bleed.  
    as i point at the screen  
i see my reflection  
a ghost face flickering on blood puddles

awake at 3 a.m. my head flows volcanic  
i stare at a screenshot of my MRI,  
white and gray plots and patches  
fed by black tributaries  
like a map of Nunavut  
a place that no one knows about,  
like my injured brain, my land,

my secret Canadian Arctic Archipelago  
filled with thick tundra, mountains crags  
and speckled quilts of color like Eureka,  
Oymyakon, and Alert; bright stories clustered  
and layered like ice sheets and shelves—  
but zero in, so close the snow tickles your nose,  
then closer still, covalent bond-close,  
angstroms away from the polarized light

reflecting off a single snowflake spike,  
a prism plate illuminating eighty billion neurons

filled with forty seven years of me  
electric green molecules that merge and glide harmonic,  
free-flowing along one hundred trillion synaptic strings,  
crystalized memories that melt fluidic;

bedtime stories in my mother's lap, the gentle  
safety of my father's embrace, grandma's  
weathered hands rolling cookie dough,  
memories bound in elements and ions

thunder claps in the distance  
my son hugs me  
my daughter kisses my cheek  
    will i last the summer?

tears fall on my midnight drive home.  
knick-knacks neglected in a basement box,  
awards, publications, and plaques  
the hundred thousand emails in my inbox;  
the cold trophies won't keep my wife warm  
if i'm dead

in Nunavut  
the Vikings left yarn spun from hare and rats,  
hidden tally sticks and carved masks  
buried deep below the permafrost,  
like the blood filled caverns in my brain  
that leak the clotted whispers of Kubla Khan  
beware! beware!  
but who understands that they only speak

Inuktitut north of the tree line?  
and that my calendar chokes on meetings,  
who will hire the candidates? who will deal  
with the issues before the ice shelf breaks?  
my global thermostat leaks mercury  
and another baby just died.

polarized in my nautical nightmare, i'm so tired.  
i want to hibernate and heal  
but the relentless drip of melting ice  
torments me as my eyes strain to see the fading  
glacial hue, melting blue to gray, tracing the slight  
depression in the mattress beside my wife  
    who will help with homework and dinner?  
    who will help tuck in my kids at night?

the hollowed mines in Nunavut have left  
black pits vacated of gold and iron ore,  
dormant diamond, zinc, and copper graves  
scattered over the white terrain like the  
ambiguous holes that riddle my head.  
i wait, caught in a crevasse wondering  
if the trickle of blood will turn into  
a massive torrent.                      but then

my son smiles and my daughter laughs  
as we play on the beach, skipping stones,  
we run and splash in the salty waves  
as the sky glows yellow orange red  
the sun seems brightest just before it sets.  
my grief  
like the last bit of nickel in Nanavut  
sinks out of sight, concealed in the mouth

of the Meliadine River, washed by  
the subarctic waters, currents that cut  
the dreck, carve and polish the bones below—  
bowhead whale ribs and caribou skulls,  
osseous treasures tapping beats on bedrock  
as a pray for time and search the nebulous night  
for astronomical twilight to shine  
at the solar culmination

should i retreat to Nunavut where silence  
and solitude cajole safety? a bleak surrender,  
a pandemic escape to save a pocketful  
of snowflakes

No. I choose the promise of warmth  
the hope of recovery  
over this ephemeral anxiety.  
that's my corona, my land to nurture

in Nunavut, my land, the dark of december  
is followed by the light of june