



On Terms of Surrender **by M.C. Taylor - Hiss Golden Messenger**

*Move me
In some bright direction
Looking to be captured
Looking for my freedom
Oh, dreams will come to get you
So careful what you're wishing
Your family might correct you
Your heart might take a pounding
Make sure you take a picture*

Traveling the world in rented vehicles year after year after year will do some funny things to you. Once, I was in Beckley, West Virginia, making a right turn, and it hit me: "I'm a stranger everywhere. I'm just passing through." It's not too far a jump from there—if you're inclined towards that kind of jumping—to feeling like a stranger in your own hometown. In your own house, even. That sort of disassociation is dangerous. Deadly. I've seen it eat some people alive. And to just let it be, to just accept it and drift—along Highway 10, say, outside of Lordsburg, New Mexico, at sunset with the border radio washing over you—well, that's another kind of lost, in a way. Damned if you do. Damned if you don't.

It's hard to talk about this unless I just say it straight: 2018 was a very hard year. I wasn't sure that I would survive it, and it's hard to put my finger on just what I thought was going to kill me. Maybe it was all the leaving home and then trying to come back and re-assimilate, living motel to motel, highway to highway, night to night, plane to plane, starting to catch up with me. Puking in airport bathroom stalls, forgetting names and faces and birthdays. Or perhaps it was the fog of depression that called for more and more of my attention and time, depression that meds couldn't quite touch. I felt confused—for the first time, really—about what my purpose here on earth might be. I didn't know what I was made for if not for singing songs.

Yet, even when I could not find hopeful things, I wrote because writing songs has always been my salvation. I wrote about the consequences of having too much freedom and the comic complexity of getting exactly what I hoped for. I wrote about my wife and kids, my parents, my brother and sister, how much I missed them, and the ways that I've failed to understand them, and how much I love them and hope that they love me. I wrote about spirits hanging in the air over the Pacific Ocean above the red L.A. smog, beyond the Bowery and way up in the cold blue Virginia night. I wrote about getting older, being afraid, feeling guilty and lonely and vulnerable to every light and loving

touch. Songs about the wheel, the ever-rolling wheel of life. An inventory of flaws. I was writing what felt like, as I read over the lyrics now, a last will and testament.

How much of myself had I given up to live the life I thought I wanted? And, knowing what I had given away and how much more had yet to be given, did I still feel whole? I was writing my terms of surrender.

I composed the songs that became *Terms of Surrender* with no guarantee that they would ever become a record; they felt too raw to be of interest to anyone but myself. They were my therapy and my church. But then we were there in Aaron Dessner's studio in upstate New York, and in Sound City in L.A., and Roger Moutenot's Haptown Studio in Nashville, and Phil Cook's harmonica was screaming and Jenny Lewis was singing and Josh Kaufman's guitar was etching the cosmos, and I realized that maybe these songs were good for something after all, and it wasn't my year to die. And I was glad—appreciative, maybe—of the previous year because things on the other side now looked sweeter and brighter and not so dire. And through the songs ran a line—the most important theme of the whole record, I know now—about love, and how nothing of value that I have created would exist without it, and I better goddamn well keep my eye on it. Love is so powerful that people made religion to give a name to it, but if we don't treat it with a sensitive touch, it disappears like smoke. I had a dream once, many years ago, where I heard a voice say "God is love," and I felt it with my whole being. This record is a reminder of that dream.

I am a work in progress. I have my good days, and I have my desperate days. I love what I do. I can't believe I get to sing songs for a living. But it ain't fancy. I do it for the spirit; it tells me things about myself that I didn't know before I wrote the words down. I didn't die last year, and I still have work to do here.

—M.C. Taylor, Durham, North Carolina

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