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Across These Landscapes of Early Darkness

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Two Poems · *Dionisio D. Martínez*

ACROSS THESE LANDSCAPES OF EARLY DARKNESS

He is learning to play the elegant songs
again. By ear. By heart. He is picking

up a signal from America, a faint humming,
a plea. He doesn't understand it. The elegant

music will suffice for the moment. This
time he will listen for the diesels slicing

the fog as they come up each morning,
their headlights leaving trails like a

photograph's version of life. There is elegance
in this, too. But there is more. A sense

of decorum as motif for a whole generation.
He is learning to live in style again. Here's

the suit for the nights when all
the stars are out and closer than usual

and some tradition says that you must count them.
Here's the pale shirt with no purpose.

Here are all the pointed shoes, all
the hats, the ties with the wrong patterns.

It is no one else's style. This makes it
more solid somehow, more durable. This

makes him happy. He hasn't laughed this
hard in years. He is picking up signals from

countries where the last transmission
took place light years ago. This is how

he learns about light years and how time
equals distance and distance is a kind

of salvation. He wants to come to America,
home of the faint signal, land of stolen

elegance. By now he has caught on
to the way we package someone else's tradition,

the way we price each package. These days
he is in the market for a new tradition.

It is all so obvious—the way we manufacture
our legacies. We are not the best of

thieves. Our music is always holding something
back, always looking for its source. He is

willing—at last—to take us as we are.
He runs to catch up, but by the time he manages

to get his hands on the essence of a song,
the song itself is light years from his hands.