

## Meeting the Woman Who Forged My Birth Certificate

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Henry Wei Leung

You'd recognize me anywhere,  
you said. You'd mistake me  
for the ghost of my father.

You'd wave.

You jumped at this voice  
like his voice, gene of accents  
cleaving. I came to return

the lost parcel of a tongue  
undelivered, a hair grayed  
and lifted by the storm

that bore me here, lifted  
like your home's brick face.  
You removed your glasses

and were beautiful, the mirror  
vanishing, the watches dead.

You left before my birth.

I came after revolution  
and refuge to speak, for all our grace,  
of helplessness: every cry

and eloquence is that.  
Every sorry, every thanks,

and here I am.

Did our village echo in the hall?  
Or was it just a broken pipe?  
Did neighbors yell songs

into the flood? We made it,  
most of us, made sumptuous

a road without mail.

Your husband sickled  
fields of anonymity  
with my father.

He crooked his hand  
to explain, then rubbed his eye,

the scalpeled one,

then asked who else  
of mine had died.

Correction:

you didn't forge my birth  
certificate, but the permit  
for my birth.

Correction:  
it was a two-child policy

for villagers, some mothers hidden

in the bellies of mountains,  
with a valley between births  
which you doctored.

Correction: but the year  
I was born: correction:  
stray cat subtracting

from your door's cool bark;  
all of us opening inward.

Correction: not most

but some, some of us made it.  
Some became lantern rice:  
hollow, infertile grains

on stalks too slight to bend  
and nourishing no one.

Correction: not hollow.

We set the table for dinner,  
filled it with light. No, we set  
altars. We set a soft fire.

## Goods of Democracy

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Henry Wei Leung

Theseus built the first democracy,  
a cult of two bodies—  
Aphrodite Pandemos, and Peitho:  
*desire, and persuasion.*  
Peitho was the wife of Hermes,  
so throw in winged correspondence  
and a tourist underworld, too,  
pillar of salt wind mistaken for want.

Back then, in a honey dearth  
a girl was sent to slaughter  
an ox, beat its corpse  
to softness, then leave it shedded  
for the new year.

From the body: bees.  
From the one: many.

I loved an aphrodite once  
who rock-climbed without arms

like drift smoke in a dark mouth—  
I wrote her to the second cloth,  
from eros to error, sprayed crowns  
on painted names  
we couldn't sustain—  
slender omen, my venus  
and *venenum*.

I tried to be the unnamed symbol  
on the walls before the buzzing,  
when horns and bones and hair  
resembled still unbroken road.  
I tried to map a person  
like an aubade  
with no lines set down,  
raised to heaven as is.

But maybe love is best indifferent.  
Democracy, too. *Metaxu*:  
the force that cleaves us  
is the force we cleave to,  
double-surfaced thin transparency,  
mirror in a daylit window, freed  
and for free

and for nothing.  
Is privation

a proof of love?  
Persuasion

is a wilderness

arguing on a street corner  
almost near home.

Some days someone else's  
cold hand remains  
in your coat pocket,

cracking at the seams.

Some years the bees come early.