

Nameless Honor

*Yī Huì: a moment, a while, in a moment*

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I

Gingerly, she peeled her eyes open. The tungsten lights pooled into her vision first as orange orbs, then took shape illuminating the hallway she recognized as home. Not home as constructed by company; she knew instinctively that she would not find her husband, her daughters here. But, home in the way she would kick off her shoes with a quick ‘*hui lai le*’, and slip them on, heels hanging out with a hurried ‘*bai bai*’. Home in the familiar smell of *zhou* and *youtiao*, and the scent of fried dough locking lips with that of motorbike grease and vendors selling bagged soymilk.

Her fingers traced the grooves of her door, she measured up to just over half its height. Upon further inspection, the splinter that had run from the door handle to its base hadn’t been born yet. *Middle school*, she noted quietly. There was no thought, only knowing. Her room at this time would be plastered with posters of Andy Lau (more a collection than shrine, to outdo her younger sister) and in her desk, a stack of letters hidden beneath books and slabs of notebook paper. Her school uniform and volleyball outfit would be hung on the back of the door, existing and undressing only in the two spaces of her room and the all-girls school.

She bit her lip, wondering if she were to rid the letters in her desk now, if she could save the door from its fate. The door and her best friend. Love had not yet been a subject tainted.

“*Yī Huì!*”

She felt her true age when she found herself turning slowly. The instinct was lost. No one had called her by her name in a long time. And in her mother’s voice, sharp and shrill and all *Taiwan-chiang*—she realized she had almost forgotten it completely.

She slipped her head through the door, the shuffling of her feet masked by the soft clicks of oil popping. Her mother’s silhouette swayed at the stove, shoulders not yet sagging, back not yet caved in.

“*Māma.*” She savored the word with a whisper. It unearthed itself from her tongue unacquainted with addressing another for so long. *Yī Huì, Māma.* She rolled them around in her mouth now two separate entities. Quietly, she wondered when it had happened, that she could not find when one began and the other ended. Still facing the stove,

“*Yī Huì, lái chī ba!*”

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## II

She had arrived in the United States with no intention of staying. The food was too salty, and the people too loud. She'd satiate her modest hunger for adventure, get her masters degree, and return home— *hui lai le*, kick off her shoes, dedicate herself to research and fry *youtiao* for her parents one day when they could no longer. Meeting Jun hadn't been part of the equation and, tangentially, becoming a mother was scarcely an idea. And yet when she stared down at the two lines and imagined her child, eyes crinkled in smile, fingers wrapped around her nail, she found that there was no thought, only knowing.

She wrote two letters: one back home for formality and the other to her former best friend, reporting her pregnancy as a last resort to rehabilitate her character in their eyes. She finished her Masters in Biology while carrying her daughter. In between studying and Jun dropping in and out of the house between shifts, she spoke to the baby in Mandarin, Jun intermingling her dialogue with foreign phrases in Korean. When her father presented Jun with a ticket to 'go back to his country' the Korean stopped altogether. And so the two fell away from the habit, claiming that to raise the baby here, they had another excuse to practice English.

Though her father had thrown a fit, her mother's treatment might have been worse. She did not congratulate her on the baby—and now she realized it was because Māma had been bracing for it from the moment she had her own daughter. There were no harsh words and no cajoling, only the silent understanding that her daughter's body was no longer hers or hers. Her mother watched the occupation of her daughter's body from afar and felt the thread of sacrifice weave itself again into the family line. The title 'Māma' ravaged itself a new home and left its old one in all neglect and silence.

On sleepless nights poring over chemical compounds and pipetting with hand cramps she'd gaze out the window, wondering if this time, if she called home, if someone would pick up. If, this time, she would be shown some forgiveness from being discarded from what was once home. And if once they picked up, for a moment, at the sound of her name she might feel wholly herself again rather than the occupied body she was juggling as mother, wife, immigrant. *Māma, Lisa, Yī Hui*. She collected the pieces to tend to herself.

When Vivian was born, all the things left unsaid were poured into her. Holding her in her arms, she could only feel consumed by how so much sacrifice could be held in such a small body. And how the product of much pain could radiate so much joy. Vivian cried little, never slept, laughed a lot. A child born of constant wake, filling the silence with the sound of new time. In her newfound motherhood, Vivian was everything. In all *Yī Hui* had lost, Vivian would have to be everything.

She had come to the States ready to map new waters. Now, Vivian clinging to her chest, hands webbing her stomach, she knew herself as a lifeboat. Manufactured not for safety, but for survival.

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III

In her rush to recollect her youth she did not stop to think of *how* she got here, suddenly inhabiting her middle school self—half her body size fifteen years in the future yet more whole than ever. She felt herself slip back into the rhythm instilled in her since birth and the words sang from her teeth, no thought already knowing.

*“Māma. Wo hui lai le.”*

I’m home.