POETRY

The Man I've Never Met

by Aiden Heung



"Green Wind" by Mirja Paljakka

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Memory does not work like a picture
in an album to be opened, perhaps
on new year's eve. I don't know
what emptiness can be parsed into loss
or what image can surface
like a sudden reflection in water
rippling misdirected light.

What can I tell about the trees he felled?
Or his pickaxe with the blunted edge?
Like the pinking landscape of his village,
were his boots always smudged
with splayed cuts?
Ma mentions him after dinner as if
he were the debt unable to pay off, and Ba,
smiling his usual smile, pours himself
one more Baijiu and asks if I still
remember him. I'm not sure, it's hard
to piece together gristles and make a man
out of them, and even harder to conjure his ghost
from rivets and boards. The house he built
is now someone else's property.

Ba asks again, laughing, hurt, his voice
shimmying like the wind on a pool.
I'm overpowered by something urgent
in Ba's eyes as he nervously rubs
his vein-cut hands from another time.
Maybe I should learn to ask,
to document loves littered in time,

like gathering snowflakes
to build a beautiful winter.

Tell me more I say
and fall back into the well-cushioned couch,
far from the gelid breath
of the January night.

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