All That Divides Us

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FULL MOON HARVEST FESTIVAL
AT THE SPA CITY

In the restaurant and all over China tonight
there are millions of mooncakes, flat and round,
white with mysterious dark centers.

Here in this luxury retreat built for him,
aging moon-faced Mao never quite arrived,
ever climbed the three hills or dipped
in the seventy-two springs that dried up,
or swam in the Olympic pool still waiting
without ripples behind glass walls.

Now among second-level bureaucrats driving
Japanese cars, our study group steps
from a minibus, inhales the bourgeois roses.

Beyond the hotel’s blue-lit fountains,
exotic pines and pagodas loom at dusk.
Then an enormous moon appears.

Next morning at the prison seminar
we taste mooncakes fresh from the oven.
The warden breaks them apart for us
at the kitchen door after his lecture
on all the lies our press tells about
Chinese prison labor. Fuming,
the torn cakes reveal their dark secret
and we agree, they’re the best ones
we’ve eaten. We lick our fingers
and proceed to the last courtyard,
where a small brass band of prisoners
breaks into “Auld Lang Syne.” We wave
goodbye with mooncakes on our breath,
believing most of what we have heard
in hope of a fortunate harvest.