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## Helen Todd: My Birthname

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Helen Todd: My Birthname · *Sandra McPherson*

They did not come to claim you back,  
To make me Helen again. Mother  
Watched the dry, hot streets in case they came.  
This is how she found a tortoise  
Crossing between cars and saved it.  
It's how she knew roof-rats raised families  
In the palmtree heads. But they didn't come—  
It's almost forty years.

I went to them. And now I know  
Our name, quiet one. I believe you  
Would have stayed in trigonometry and taken up  
The harp. Math soothed you; music  
Made you bold; and science, completely  
Understanding. Wouldn't you have collected,  
Curated, in your adolescence, Mother Lode  
Pyrites out of pity for their semblance  
To gold? And three-leaf clovers to search  
For some shy differences between them?

Knowing you myself at last—it seems you'd cut  
Death in half and double everlasting life,  
Quiet person named as a formality  
At birth. I was not born. Only you were.