

*The Fish in Fuzhou*

My father was born in Fujian, a southern province  
near the water where boats lull the seas back to land  
and men with throaty shouts sell fish at the market.

The streets of his youth are filled with women washing clothes in stone basins,  
clacking rickshaws and children in flip-flops, their rubber soles slapping pavement  
as dust and steam blur, hot noodles from the corner cart.

He left at twenty-eight  
boarded a plane with a ticket that had a stranger's name on it  
told us he tore all of his papers, flushed them down the drain,  
an identity discarded three thousand feet above.

Wheels touched down in the West where new men,  
white in complexion and uniform, took him in  
took him into a holding cell  
where he'd wait thirty-two days to make  
his claim that one child was not enough.

“那面还好,” he said, it wasn't so bad there,  
days spent with others like him  
outside to stretch arms and legs and mind  
his own business, swallowing cold water  
when his body ached for the warmth of China.

Sunsets sank slowly until the noon of release  
and I asked how he had felt in that moment,  
who did he call, where did he go?  
He had finally made it to this land of opportunity.

He laughed at my wide eyes, revealing  
the first stop he made was to the closest  
Chinese restaurant where he ate boiled fish and crab  
because this country's food was too dry and too bland  
and he had missed the taste of home so much.