

Motherland: Return to Me

In the waning vestiges of your Szechuan dialect, you tell me of a blazing
chromatic city in the last breaths of dawn,

and I listen because
my home has always lived inside a human body.

Ruddy cheeks imprinted on tethering skin,
bloomed florets of reaching hands,

I see a smeared glimpse of your features
in the blinking reflection of the algae-filled lake.

Darkened knuckles interlocked together,
we hug smiling dolls with painted wooden faces to our chests.

Whips of chili smoke from glossed black surfaces,
fuming woks and wrinkled noses and watery eyes,

the essence of Chengdu food slathers the tongue
before the taste and we scarf down our *mala* noodle bowls

with pride and reddened stained smiles.
Looping down the streets, warmth filling our

heaving bellies, the streets come alive even as the old clock strikes
midnight. the billowing fumes that swirl from cauldron pots

envelop us and beg us to never sleep,
thickening in our tender throats.

And we listen, we keep dancing,
we strike hot oil atop wooden chopsticks,

we drink tongue-scalding tea that heals our insides and
our young souls.

I see you call out softly,
and in your eyes, I grasp furled gold.

Softly glowing red lanterns of dried ashes of hope,
they awash the city in brilliant halcyon gold.

The painted arches that saw a little girl running
through bustling streets, knocking over burnt candlewood

and chilled clay basins, saw her precious dreams come true,
and saw her leave, her arms plastered to her sides and her feet unsteady

as they touched down on new soil;
they smile a secret smile with a hushed blessing

hidden in their stoned wrinkles.
We never forget our homes.

I hope the city inside of you still lives,
gilded and imprinted within your lungs as you breathe,
enveloping your heart as it beats.