

**Like Father, Like Daughter**

“A bright sun darkens, a full moon wanes, a full cup overflows, and decay follows prosperity.”

—Mo Yan

October stumbles into our gas station like a drunk traveler  
& the fuel dispenser crumbles out of service. That same day,  
I wipe down every pump and watch a gray Toyota ram its jaw

into our pole sign. Back then, I wanted to run away—  
become my own killer. But you told me that disruption  
happens everywhere: it’s the risk of living that matters.

Come midnight & we start grabbing fistfuls of quarters  
& ancient coins from our savings box, throwing them  
across the highway. We bet on a future so unimaginable

that we remember its beauty next morning: junkyards  
with Laura Ashley dollhouses, expired pu'er bags,  
father-daughters that looked like us. I wake up

before the sun splits the road golden & gather all coins back—  
even ones crushed by new wheels. I pretend that money turns  
into wheat stalks & we will soon walk along a never-ending

path of seeds. Father, the clouds are hitchhiking East  
& charcoal drools into our window. I refill the soda  
fountain with ramune and cola. No Halloweekend

invitations because all I know about October is our station  
flickering into liminal space & asterisks spinning  
in your eyes. I flip the back of a poker card: twenty hungry

fingers. Chiaroscuro outlines your face. I wonder  
how you pull apart the backstory of each passerby  
like how meat falls off the bone; you once said, \$10

*that driver’s heading to his mother’s house upstate, give  
or take.* My mouth pivots away from intimacy, never  
confessing why I wore your old loafers. When you forgot

my age, I braided Liuyang fireworks into the sky—  
the ones we were saving for your birthday. On Halloween night,  
I flush fortune cookies down the bathroom while you stuff

the last batch of scratch-offs into a drawer. How you call the slot  
machine a god. Dice rolls on the table & sharpens the air. Outside  
footsteps & the arrival of a stranger. Like any normal daughter, I give

my life to chance. Bargain for another game of cards. Gamble  
towards some royal flush. After you lose a round, I leave  
a day's worth of change on the counter & we begin to laugh.

Translation

Pu'er - tea produced in China's Yunnan province

**jarfly**

“—love was both in / and out of the question”

—Jennifer Whalen

whitewater→days by the rapids→and flash flood warnings→when the rafts push back on  
 waterfoam→like spinning teacups→like milk in a bowl→like homemade whipped cream→like  
 water and danger could save you and me→from our own smell→from jumping across straw  
 bales→and falling→the barn shadow→making up its own space→to this story→down the left  
 there’s the dairy bar→with never enough Marasca cherries to eat→and we keep coming  
 back→to the hardest question→of choosing the marshmallow swirl or chocolate fudge  
 scoop→you insisted on the first bite→never being both→and butterscotch syrup sliding down  
 our hands→now→that haying season was taken for granted→and forever is just a word→and  
 they turned the tunnel into a headline→and I tried so hard to come back→like the raft plunging  
 to a hard tug→like a curving line→and we would almost drop inside→the river→like if I could  
 just fall to save this place→when we were too scared to raft at night→so we lied on straw  
 bales→and listened to the sound of a jarfly→and I asked when we wanted to release these  
 jars→of peach jars or gift jars→empty them to take up their own space→and you’d choose to  
 put a jarfly inside→that we could believe we weren’t trapped→inside a mountain→and told me  
 one day→their wings can fly freely to nowhere→and roads could drive beyond what’s on the  
 map→and arrows can point freely to nothing→and the nothing becomes→it becomes its own  
 thing→and grows→two knees→buckling

whitewater days	like water could save you and me
and we keep coming back	never being both

### **Moonlight Sonata Before Ma's Surgery**

Somehow, the cobweb at the edge of the kitchen  
looks bigger without the spider. White body, six  
eyes. Ma, I can't help but spin a conversation  
into confession. But here is what happened: I bruised  
myself on the front doorstep. The Chinese evergreens  
you forgot to bring from the car trunk ended up  
on my knees. When I felt lava creeping out  
of my fractures, I pushed myself into the freezer  
and slapped yam nutrition labels onto my skin.  
You believed you needed to cure this house  
before you could save yourself, stitching band-aids  
onto our walls like a child. All the medical bills  
stuffed in the paper shredder. By the oven, burnt  
ginger seeped into vanilla candles. I'm sorry.  
I tossed your earrings down the shower drain.  
Right after, I heard you talk to yourself. *Wash*  
*the radish. Call the doctor. Almond flour*  
*has 7 grams of protein.* You spoon-fed me obligations  
to save me from superstition. *Here is where you can*  
*pick up my medicine. Become a shopping list. Rescue*  
*houseplants from this wasteland.* Ma, our conversations  
taught me how to avoid you. Instead of confrontation,  
I crushed vitamins in Greek yogurt and canceled  
my Spotify subscription. I thought we could reshape  
into parallel lines—extending beyond this plane  
you'll take to the hospital. I must learn how to be mature  
enough to keep a secret. When you hold this cup  
of Jasmine Tea in your hands, the noise of an old fan  
surrounds your torn body, clouding your two brown eyes.