

Nanjing Road

6AM at the market on Nanjing Road
we watch red herrings unzip like surgery,

lateral lines flossing our toes on tile, a
sheaf of shopkeepers nodding away the heat

as if to tell us that this kind of murder is nothing
more than peeling rice off the collarbones of our

ancestors. You tell a hollow room *wo ai ni*
because I am too busy trying to unfurl the runes

on your cracker tin label, a baby lapping water
from your elbow, so strapped in the strangeness

of this gold-laced lung that I strip your prayers.
Spiders skim paper bridges, their eyes sewn shut.

My hands grip chopsticks like spineless merchants,
can't bone a chicken breast they way you do,

brutal and unforgiving on marble. After breakfast
you kiss lily soup from plastic ladles while I

collect the silt from your chin and calcify it
in jade. It was easier to ignore the importance of

red tablecloth back when politics were but a
chalk nub's exhale matted on bamboo and wet

resolve. The bite of burning incense will never
brine me in this country's roots. I choke, instead.

Helli Fang

Autumn

How the years end: when we choose to
speak, the river turns stones. I swallowed the
foxtails to bottle-cleanse my throat. I want

to watch you furl flesh the way you string
a cello, your knuckles bending my body
like tradition. The last of the mayflies

ricochet off our scrolls, aflame. We
asked to live someplace where we could
breathe the hours. But the vision of

an empty room is something so potent
in you, fattening your vowels with
honey. I introduced you to these rivers,

where eyelids clench quarters in anguish,
the maples flooding the gap between our
thighs. Your hands, too still to be alive.

Helli Fang

Glass Familia

I.

How every dream begins: a swollen ear
sprouting hyacinths

My father lying face-down in the
elevator, hangnails unstrung like a peg
box, waiting for the dog to snip them

with her teeth. My mother's body
is buried beneath the millennium,
still trying to fit its knuckles in her mouth.

II.

At the funeral, I gave her the shell of a fish's eye
and she spat clay at my feet.

The children stand stuffed with mints
that spill into the casket as they bow.

III.

I try and remember her as a
bird: the slip of yellow feet on tile,
peeled-open seaweed packets, the bayou
salivating over the slick of the sky.

Upstairs, my sister mends an apology from sea glass.

IV.

I bite it with the shock of dissonance, its weight
throttled inside my gut, tipping
planters over the balcony like salt.

She tries to swallow everything at once,
pausing only to plumb the grease from her pores,

A renaissance of defiance tattooed on her lips.
Ties me to the back garden and strips me
to my socks; says,

V.

there is never tragedy
without nobility.

I can't learn to breathe with this conscience

Helli Fang

inside of me, a hollow-boned fox singing
its daily devotions. Still,

no one has died except me.

My father calls himself a broken empire,
waiting for protest,

but the doors have already churned shut.
I choke on my final sigh.