Dusk Requiem at Perrin Park

I.
a woman with half a stomach stares at the naked trees of Perrin Park with an ocean swallowing her eyes.
her legs steeped too soft in memory’s cobalt salt, knobbly jade coral that crumples a beckon
to come sit, Aihua, let’s watch the sun set. the silvering gaps of this bench
so wide bone seeps through. she waves her translucent fingers
stippled sienna in autumn’s teeth, weaves them into
bluegill fish and says look how they just leap into our palms, Aihua—

I try to catch these stories she sutures in water-warped air but they sluice
past my upturned hands, my mind an unwilling, gilded sieve. see, I have left Shanghai
sidewalks too far an infant—strange mosses now burble and crack open orphaned cement.

I have developed an accent in the language of touch.

II.
her chin shivers like the five egg yolks churning a cold foam with her chopsticks. lips clouded by that murky
scent I now know is gastric cancer. our anti-Zeno effect: how time unsheathes knives of light, a roiling,
heatless white: she’ll fade sterile into stenciled wheelchairs and post-gastrectomy gurneys
but will still dream of that bluegill boat, still smile when my decaying tongue
can only repeat one Chinese phrase—Wai po hao/Grandma good/Grandma good?

—a courtesy greeting or question she won’t answer. jaded wish to unspool history from her
body drifting into blue: timeless. unanswered.

III.
the pollen is salt spray until passersby blacken the wake, lapping of the light dirge-like. airless. cyan sighing
into a mirror under dusk’s tongue. I reach for her hands only to clasp my own; I cannot remember
how to speak like an infant. her touch unspooling a dried river in the crook of my elbow.
the small of her back a divot in the eggy maelstrom—disappearing as
the pooling gold calms. underfoot, I find a few of her knuckles and press them against
the sky, scattering the sun’s splayed palm into staccato firelight. on this churchless pew, I find
fishboned syllables with no language, oaken splinters settled for centuries, plastic roses yellowed by age.

the soft, brief handprints of a love crystallized amber.