

my Shenyang speaks a rough northeastern tongue  
and breathes homespun evening smoke;  
i rest in its cove of swaying willows, knowing  
your alps and vales are not worth a nick in my sidewalk.

i have been sitting at the nanhu lake with my Grandpa  
for nineteen years, as fish bite his hook.  
i never had his patience, so i pick wildflowers and  
crown his fisherman's hat.

my Grandma is as bright-eyed as she was  
at nineteen, in her old monochromatic photographs.  
her laughter rings through our sunlit kitchen,  
where flour dust dances around fresh dumpling dough.

behind their old school, in midsummer heat,  
my Older Cousin and his high school friends teach me  
to catch lightning bugs in plastic water bottles  
before civility caught up to me.

i've never felt this old before:  
i threw rose petals at my Aunt's wedding when i was nine;  
now my Little Cousin can't fit into his baby shoes  
anymore.

the airplane dips softly through the clouds  
and rumbles loudly in my ears as it lands on earth.  
Shenyang kisses my hair and cheeks,  
always welcoming me home.