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Mudskipper
By Robbieana Leung

She awakes in the Land of Hard Work and Discipline
Gong gong, Po po, Baba, Mama, zao an, ni men hao. 1
“Chi fan! 2 Steamed rice, cooked cabbage, and chao mien 3
Ren bu yinggai yinwei hui yezhe er bu chifan . 4
Na ni kuai chi - Yi ding yao.” 5

She sleeps in the Land of Opportunity and Dreams
Smiling and dazed, she loses touch of reality as she begins to fantasize
Swimming in endless, forbidden tides of her lao jia 6
Sweeping her away from reason and reality
Ensnaring…endangering…and drowning…

The foreign land of her birth, but not her cultural heritage it seems
A face she knows but an attitude she does not recognize

Once a sea of black, now an ocean of gold, brown, rose…
A mirror! So familiar! Butterflies. So anxious to embrace and fuse!
…they answer, she hears them, but they morph into fishes, mouths open and close
Alien sounds escape; utterances that confuse!
Glass thorns shatter and cut...how painful that deceptive rose, only sweet once.

Rudely awaken, roaring black horses.
Eating rice with a fork, she realizes
This isn’t a Dream.
She has become a fish, suffocating outside the stream.

1 Gong gong, Po po, Baba, Mama, zao an, ni men hao: grandpa, grandma, father, mother, good morning, how do you do (polite form of address).
2 chi fan: let’s eat! (literally, “eat rice”.)
3 chao mien: a type of Chinese fried noodles; mixed with various vegetables and meat (there is one flavor; as the ingredients are cooked together and are unified in taste)
4 Ren bu yinggai yinwei hui yezhe er bu chifan: one cannot refuse to eat just because there is a chance of being choked (Chinese proverb)
5 Na ni kuai chi - yi ding yao: So hurry up and eat - you must (no exceptions)
6 lao jia: hometown (literally, “old home”.)