

Inheritance

Ba oi, when you called me post-spinal fusion, rigid
and frail, I envisioned your death. I hovered over you

and your eyes, seared through me. Taunted
me. Fear defeats my body and my will

to obey. I bowed to you, *con xin lồi ba, con xin lồi,*
tha thứ cho con. Your loss is nothing short of a tyrant's

and I feel relieved more than pain, more than reason. I tell you
of your nameless guilt. This time, I ink your bruise. You must

let me. But I cannot blame you. I know
of your trauma, your rattling exile. Decades ago

when you were thirteen, you rode your bicycle home
past the auntie's sticky rice stand.

Your father held you by your scruff
like a dog and stamped his cigar. You'll pass it off

as a vaccine scar, but I know
your right shoulder betrays you, blistering.

You bowed to him, *con xin lồi ba. Con xin lồi, tha thứ*
cho con and *Ba*, I am afraid. You've taught me to fear

you and even now, I am afraid
of being you. Even now,

as you arch towards the ceiling,
I bend my face to yours and outlive you.