

# UNMADE IN CHINA

Poems of the factory worker **Xu Lizhi**

-Translated by Eleanor Goodman

## I Swallowed an Iron Moon

I swallowed an iron moon  
they called it a screw  
I swallowed industrial wastewater and unemployment forms  
bent over machines, our youth died young  
I swallowed labor, I swallowed poverty  
swallowed pedestrian bridges, swallowed this rusted-out life  
I can't swallow any more  
everything I've swallowed roils up in my throat  
I spread across my country  
a poem of shame

## Meditation

After finishing this poem,  
I will go to meditate in the willow grove  
I will watch the sky above the mountains, as the setting sun  
lets cicada chirps and lake water  
wash the mortal world, and a visitor's heart  
and in the dusk I will whisper pardon, forgiveness,  
absolution, compassion...

## Rented Room

About ten square meters of space  
cramped, damp, never seeing the sun  
in here I eat, sleep, shit, think,  
cough, have headaches, get old, sick but not dying  
again and again in the dusky lamplight I stare blankly, laugh stupidly  
pace back and forth, sing softly, read, write poems  
every time I open the window or the grated door  
I'm like a dead man  
slowly pushing open the lid of his coffin

## A New Day

I want to look at the ocean again  
to see the vastness of my half lifetime of tears  
I want to climb a tall mountain again  
to try to call back my lost soul  
I want to lie in a prairie  
and leaf through the bible my mother gave me  
I want to touch the sky  
and stroke that swath of pale blue  
But I can't do any of that  
so I will leave this world  
No one who knows me  
should be surprised by my leaving  
There's no need to sigh, or feel sorrow  
I came at the right time, and will go at the right time too



## I Know a Day Will Come

I know a day will come  
when those I know and don't know  
will enter my room  
to collect my remains  
and wash away the darkened blood stains I've shed across the floor  
rearrange the upturned table and chairs  
toss out the moldering garbage  
take in the clothing from the balcony  
someone will help me write the poem I didn't have time to finish  
someone will help me read the book I didn't have time to finish  
someone will help me light the candle I didn't have time to light  
last will be the curtains that haven't been opened for years  
someone will help me open them, and let the sunlight in for a while  
they will be closed again, and nailed there deathly tight  
the whole process will be orderly and solemn  
when everything is tidy  
they will all line up to leave  
and help me quietly shut the door

**Xu Lizhi** committed suicide at the age of 24 by jumping from the 17th floor of a building in Shenzhen not far from the Foxconn factory where he worked. His reality was one that millions of other people face across China, but particularly in the south, which has become a centre of production and exploitation. His "poem of shame" (I Swallowed an Iron Moon) is not a personal one, but a public and national one.