

Letter From My Grandmother in Tsingtao

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Once in a drought, I dropped
all my children down a well
to make the water rise.

Mothers always choose their own
mouths over mourning. The myth
of hunger begins like this:

in Tsingtao, the German army
stole rice & millet, fed our bodies
to bullets. They built

churches to keep a god & barns
to keep their women. How many girls
can be stolen from

the same body? I sold
myself to a soldier
for the price of a fish.

I gutted out his green eyes,
gave them back to my children.
Even a fish mistakes the sea

for safety, the fisherman's
hook for god. I raised you like a river
outrunning her land. I nursed you

native to thirst & rain
outsourced from a foreign sky.
I taught you to butcher

a bird & convert its bones
into perches. I taught you
every woman needs

a man like a weapon

needs motive. The nation
I was born in now

belongs to burning. History starts
like a housefire & I braid smoke
into your hair. I once beat you

for forgetting to pray
before bed. Remember
to take the lord's name

nightly like a pill. Kneel
now & remember I knot
your tongue to mine

so you never drift far
from my hunger. I alphabetize
my gods by country

of origin, America always
first. Daughter, count soldiers
til you sleep. One of them

will hold you by the black
of your hair. One of them
will father you & the other

is your son. There is no ridding
a sheet of blood. Grieve that your eyes
are green. Surrender your skin

fasting into a white flag.

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