

Notes on the War, from My Mother

when she first mentioned the soldiers,
between spoonfuls of warm rice
i panted, mid-chew, and asked

what soldiers? i asked,
whose army?
which government?
we did not name

there were three languages
possessed the full vocabulary
me, she said, but all
from their homes like airborne
we huddled by the fire,
pricking for the crunch

learned to cover up, wore skirts
dresses and pulled my hair near
checked, tugging her fingers
was to be at war, she reminded me,
shell of your body, with men, with
god, with scales and wrinkles

do you want more rice? she asked
what did you eat this morning?
rice—and for lunch?
dishes, piled with something
Chines, what fresh heaven
things i wanted my mother

instead, she remarked, your hair is like
yellow beads of acid instead of that
i nodded, closing both eyes as she began lathering my scalp with her warm, slippery fingers.

i was dozing off on the couch
drenched in spicy, narcotic rice,
an eyebrow at my mother,

the army ones, she replied,
the government's, of course.
she shut me a book, in this family
things we had no central ones.

between us, none of which
of dissemination, they never hoot
around us, girls were vanishing
doubleton words at night,
your grandmother and i, even
of any beam or gravel.

she dragged across the floor, long
against my head, not like you, she
through my curls, to be a woman
with your hair, with the delicate
other women, with culture, with
and uterus and ovaries and—

i'm not hungry, i said
alms, having done halfhearted
meat crab, capped in the Asian,
peppers, and bread fried in hot—
will you swallow, come tomorrow?
to ask, to know, to name.

moily water, and picked up the
sat perpetually on the coffee table.