

Notes on the War, from My Mother

when she first mentioned the soldiers,
between spoonfuls of warm rice
i paused, mid-slurp, and arched

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

i learned to cover up, wore skirts
sleeves and pulled my hair taut
clucked, 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?
trees—and for lunch?
datshi, piled with scorching
Chhori, what fresh horrors
things I wanted my mother

instead, she remarked, your hair is like
yellow bottle of acrid mustard oil that
i nodded, closing both eyes as she began kneading my scalp with her warm, slippery fingers.

i was drifting off on the couch
drenched in spicy, turmeric curd.
an eyebrow at my mother.

the army ones, she replied.
the government's, of course.
she shot me a look. in this family
things we had no control over.

between us, none of which
of dispossession. they never hurt
around us, girls were vanishing
dandelion seeds. at night,
your grandmother and i, ears
of army boots on gravel.

that 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 infants and ovaries and—

i'm not hungry, i said
olives, *fruiting from bulldozed*
mud crab, *trapped in the Arakan,*
peppers, and bread fried in lard—
will you swallow, come tomorrow?
to ask, to know, to name.

moldy straw, and picked up the
sat perpetually on the coffee table.