Intracoastal, 1995
Kathryn Merwin

Mother carried
the rags. We lit the house

with matches, sometimes had no lights at all. Jenny slept

in the backseat of our ’87 Saturn, semi-automatic
jammed under the seat. Quiet – you could hear

the Holy Spirit speak, the whisper
like a snuff in the dark. Father,

a rolled up twenty in a dip tin,
a sleeping bag still smells like loose ink.

Put a face to the number. We cut our palms
puncturing the last cans of tomatoes. There is a truth
to being hungry. Memorize these lines. Pokni bathes
five children with her brass river bucket, chews

onion stalks and keeps time on her knee. Tallies the days
with a stick in the soil since Jackie left to find America.

Walking Wolf looks out from behind my sister’s eyes.
Her delta veins sprawl

the way rivers part the land. Okshauanli:
washed bright. Code this child’s language

to your skin.
A Forwarding Address

Kathryn Merwin

You know where to find me.
I dreamt of a storm last night and woke
head full of rain, hair spread about like roots
of a tree. I am desperate

for water. Everything moves
in reverse. I have been rowing a boat
through waves of half-consciousness,
searching the shore for your dying out

fire. It was only a dream
half remembered – but what are these broken
stones, these cuts in my palms,
the spectral sea rust on my ankles,

between my ribs. I found you in the brambles.
Found you breaking acorns open. Duct tape
on your wrists. Cut you out of the sky.
Tore out the stitches and left a line of

holes. Your mouth was ripe and full of
blackberries. Plumes of ginger air,
of spices and the hills of Darjeeling.
I cannot bind you

into a poem. I will take back what is mine.
Hijack this ship and smuggle your weapons.
Watch the purple light break upon the throat
of the shifting Bay of Bengal, just

inside. I am sorting through the lights and darks
within. Weaving cobwebs
with bare hands that you
would thank me to
get tangled in.

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