

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.