

A Letter from the Bottom of a Well

My father's cousin suddenly disappeared during the mass-seizure movement of the Cultural Revolution. His body was never found, and the exact reasons for his disappearance were never confirmed. Rumours suggested he had either been killed by Mao Zedong's soldiers or forced to flee the country. According to one story, he had been drowned in a well.

Mā ma, Mā ma, wǒ xī wàng nǐ shēn tǐ jiàn kāng. Nǐ hái zài zhǎo wǒ ma? Bié hài pà,
wǒ hěn kuài jiù huì huí jiā / to rub fish oil into your back / & place a glass / of warm jasmine
by your bed side / don't worry about me / down here / it is dark enough / to remember the
sound of azaleas opening / to the memory / of daylight / down

here / nothing beautiful can grow / only shattered & found / like the crushed wings
of a swallow / flickering in mud / or trumpet lilies wrapped around / bones porcelain &
iridescent / or perhaps these hands / I cupped to my face / as a sign of forgetting / how
the body longs for / more than water / my brothers' faces / floating up to meet me / in the
broken bowl of

these palms / there is so much music / in memory / so much memory / in music / the
long nights / when I played the strings of the rain / falling through my fingers / & heard only
of / my thirst for you / a dusk of your voice / or was it the broken thrum ringing / from the
jaw of a dead bullfrog / the long nights / where I looked up at the moon / mistaking it for the
brightest exit / of a gun

chamber / the stars shot down / into teeth rattling / across these salt-slicked stones /
the moss I run my lips across nightly / for the silk of a woman's thighs / Mā ma! / Mā ma! /
Wǒ hěn lěng! / Wǒ hěn lěng! / the winters down here are so dark / when will it be Spring /
again the orchards ripening everywhere / daylight on the tongue / sweet as strips of rice milk
/ everywhere ripening the Spring /

field 7.62mm rifle he cracked / against my temple / his fists heavy / with the scent of
freshly pulped / magnolias & burned stupas / the young soldier's eyes ripening / like orchids
/ as our bodies bloomed / open like orchards / in the serrated night of knees / dragged
through rust / & fresh semen / of wet cornfields / my white palms / dangling ahead / like two
lit windows / they tossed me

down / I didn't know why / the water knew / my name / why the water still speaks
/ my name / but don't worry about me / down here / it is dark enough / to remember the
sound / of your voice opening / to the daylight / of memory / down here / all water returns
/ to the body it came from / the body where we will meet again / & drink from what's left of
mine