

Dear Mao,

I want to describe for you the moment where we try to articulate what it is we are all longing for. My mother always told me that I need not divulge everything to a man, so these are things I shall divulge to you: My father's parents had an anger with history that I felt palpably even as a child; so it was with curiosity that I watched them return at the end of the summer to a home of mournful streets and a sky burnt with smoke. Here is another: Never mind the politics of water, distance for a child is a matter of fact. I saw my grandparents for a few weeks and then I didn't. I played in the shadow of rainy green hills and then I didn't. As an adult, distance feels like nostalgia. In the summer whenever we visited my maternal grandfather in Chicago, my mother and sister and I used to sleep on a mattress on the floor where the carpet smelled of orange peels and dried plums. We did not speak much, and most afternoons were spent walking to the public library, where afterward we lingered by the swings just as the air was beginning to smell of shadows. My father's parents were much farther away. Travelers, migrants, interlopers: these are sounds that preoccupy me in a way I do not know how to explain. It has to do with the ocean, which is 361 million square kilometers that boat dwellers navigated using the night sky as a map. Later on in school, I learned that spaces are divided into boundaries and shapes, and each of these shapes has a name.