

I remember the house with its open door through which old neighbor women who knew everything came unannounced. And its two mulberry trees, laden with dark fruit and caterpillars. We sat on the porch on kiddie chairs, watching the grapevine-covered yard and the road below.

The dusk fell for a long time. The chickens were pecking the pieces of history strewn everywhere, fallen mulberries and caterpillars mixed with dust and blood. Only we didn't know it was blood. Little bits of our previous lives gleamed in the dust.

In the kitchen, grandmother resembled a seventy-year-old Virgin Mary. Her back was hunched because she carried the world on her back bundled up under her dress. Her name was Maria, and she kept stirring something on the stove. She called me over to taste the stew. I gave her my necklace of tears to sprinkle in instead of salt.

She prayed to God with fear and talked to Virgin Mary—woman to woman, mother to mother. One old Virgin Mary to the other, younger one, perched over the bed, in an icon with large cloth wings. Maria asked for Mary's help. The icon was mute. A tear sparkled and fell into my hand like a pearl. Soon, I had enough for a new necklace.