

YAN ZHANG

事故 // INCIDENT¹

After Layli Long Soldier

INCIDENT. From *incidere*. A word
of *falling into*—to cut, to trespass, to bleed.
In law, *attaching to*. In body, *detaching from*.

INCIDENT: the broom-handle jabbing the gut
into shards of glass, lodged where spine meets air.
Winter breath stabbing nostrils, sharp as the *t*
capping *incident*: that final huff, the icicle of a joke
snapping. Lips tightening. Tongue clicking teeth.

In place of *incident*, teacher explains it as:

A blank space where the body was.

The sound of a rib cracking. (See: DANGER.)

The moss growing inside throats. (See: GUILT.)

INCIDENT(S). Plural. Reefs harboring boats
long-since wrecked, split open. Groaning wood. Wood
filling with water. Dirt. Glass becoming seaglass. *No—
they are rifts*. Lacerations. Wounds pried wide to hold
everything politicians leave unsaid.

¹ The title of this poem, *shìgù*, means incident in Mandarin. The translation of individual characters are: 事 *shì*—event. 故 *gù*—cause. 事故 reversed is 故事, which means *story*.

INCIDENT: the soldier who knows blood like his daughter's
braid, knows fire like his mother's stove. As the tide
recedes, he lines the bodies neat, legal margins along the ditches.²
RECOGNITION: He lies, believing he doesn't
recognize the faces once he wipes the mud from their cheeks

² Official records note. Fragments. Zhejiang, 1954-1983.

1954.5.3—Chen Yuanqing (陈元青)'s timber raft capsized in floodwaters at Shiguojiang.

1961.6.3—Fang Meidi (方美弟) drowned steering grain barge through Qingwan Rapids.

1974.8.20—Unlicensed passenger boat overturned near Baiyan. 4 dead. Captain Wu (吴).

1975.6.19—Hu (胡)'s overloaded vessel struck reefs at Taohua Shallows. Li Xingnan (李星南)—Yunhe town's Hydrology Director—among lost.

1983.3.4—Wu Songcheng (吴松成)'s freighter sank at Tankeng Reef. 24 aboard. 5 fatalities.

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