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Desaparecida

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Desaparecida

I was one of the disappeared.
No junta, no death squad, no secret police.
Solamente la familia.
Sin memoria, sin senda.
Without identity.
I did not exist to myself.

Nightmares came and went.
I fled Nazis, volcanoes, nuclear fallout.
My family ignored serpientes
in every cupboard, under la mesa.
My mother barricaded the basement door
after a crocodile mangled my leg.
My dad couldn't see any of it.
¿Cómo se dice "denial"?

It was only scents, grunts, sighs, touch
that told me who they were
and what this was about.
The body remembered when my eyes could not.
When the mind could not.
When I could not face the faces
of the beloved, hated, feared familia.

What happened to memory?
When the child could not forge
a sense of self,
no era posible dar a luz
la memoria verbal.

Sin sentido del yo,
sin ego de completo,
era desterrada.
¿Qué sabia yo de mi misma?

Sin memorias that painted pictures.
Without memories that spoke.
¿Quién era?
No sabía.
Who was I?
A list of labels I could not piece together.
I began to create myself
with a flowering branch of redbud,
a toothful of cilantro,
eyes filled with sky
and hands with earth.
I sighed with dread,
drove with vengeance
and dredged the riverbottom of self-hatred.
I slogged through every minute of every hour of every day
until there was a glint of hope—
tiny, infinitesimal, iridescent glimmer.

I prayed other writers' words.
"Make meaning," Frankl said.
Create a sense of self.
I began to paint the nightmares—
The dream horses came and went.
Black Elk's horses.
Mary Oliver's "wild waste spaces of the sea"
buffeted me.

I battled in la corrida,
yo torero y toro.

One day I laid a brick
in a road over the river.
Three years later I saw a bridge
overarching the wreckage of memory.

Now
Yo soy yo.
I am myself
and no one.
No one
can bedarken memory.

Kim L. Ranger is a senior librarian and Information Literacy Coordinator at Grand Valley State University.