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## El Rio

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## El Rio

The river, like a dream, keeps changing,  
pixelated in a soap opera  
that throws love in the water,  
lets it float and turn, reflecting  
a woman's face, my mother there

chuckling in the dream each time  
someone shouts *¡la migra!* explaining  
the bogeyman of restaurants  
where at a moment's notice  
you had to be ready to catch fire,

to drop and roll — keeps changing  
across the gleam of sunglasses  
and badges where I see myself  
reflected in the backseat, a child,  
hiding how scared I am

by keeping my eyes wide,  
cold waters rising, stinging,  
I feel the whole sky could fall in —  
keeps changing in the dream,  
walking with my mother

down a street she's never been on,  
talking of California, how people  
have no more luck than frogs  
dashing across the interstate,  
a river of cars coursing,

leaving people to be dragged off  
like driftwood — keeps changing  
around my mother's shoulders,  
mosquitoes bristling across her neck,  
her ponytail black and shining

with sunlight one moment,  
with moonlight the next – like a dream,  
keeps changing, I feel the waters pull  
when storeowners see me and freeze,  
become those paintings on the wall

with eyes that follow your every move –  
the river, like a dream – the drag  
when I'm pulled over and it takes  
three cop cars to do it,  
my name, coughed in static,

read off my license with the grace  
of a beer can crunched underfoot –  
the river, like a dream, keeps –  
my mother shaking her head,  
saying there were no breaks,

no sweeping violins,  
no rescuing lover in a jeep –  
like a dream – *Cuando viene  
la migra, vienen lagrimas,*  
she says again,

and wipes what could be light  
from her face.