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El Rio

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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.