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WHAT THE BODY REMEMBERS

By Ann Folwell Stanford

Through an arch of massed Cieba trees
blue mountains stretch away to where husbands
and sons slept before the shelling began. Escape
was as pointless as catching water in a net.
Our children’s bodies?
Flung like rag dolls in the street.

And the sky so blue it blocked our breath.

Now instead of war,
Earth shakes us over and over,
splits itself like a loaf of bread,
flings mountains against villages,
roars up through concrete slabs,
our lives sucked dry as marrowbones.

Look here. A boulder shattered my front yard,
the walls of my house crumpled fine as
harina.
My child’s bed, snapped like straw.

In the alberge, thousands of tents
burn in Salvadoran sun. 500 families
share one kitchen pitched in mud.
We sleep on mud, peel crusted mud
from our children’s faces, curse
and bless the steamy rains
as we pound corn for tortillas,
stare into the distance
where tents sit like little boats.

In one of them, though, something like mercy.
Clelia, whose slumped body appears dead,
has not been shot today, has not been tortured, not raped,
hasn’t watched her house fall today.

Today she gives herself to her neighbor’s hands.
Like a delicate sonata, the woman’s fingers
play over Clelia’s skin. She strokes
trapped memory of outraged muscles:
blood in the streets, blood on the face,
orchids under her skin,
a soldier’s gun, a husband’s fist.

Sinew and heart open in Clelia
like delicate blossoms as touch
unlocks the body’s nightmare.
History’s wound speaks secrets,
a glossalalia of doves,
grief fluttering through fingers
of the healer’s wounded hands.