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When I came into this world,
into this city
of the peaks,
you were all darkness,
my country,
and human kindness
was a lament,
long, blind and silent.

My elders,
sad and grave
as an ashen landscape,
had accustomed
their lives to silence
and would not speak
unless sure of
being absolutely alone.

I remember one afternoon
by the cherry tree
that was planted
in the patio of the old house,
an old uncle of mine
crying piteously
because of the death of his dog.

A long time afterwards, I
found out
that on that day many people
had died in the city,
murdered by cold
and hunger.
But the dearest thing
my uncle had, they say,
was his animal,
a three-year-old police dog
that went everywhere
with him.
My uncle died soon after
of deep grief,
and his pain must have been
genuine and sincere
for it to have burned so deeply.

I remember him
by the old cherry tree,
his weeping singing
in the tree of his eyes.

And when much later I
learned
that on that day so many people
had died,
young and naive as I was,
I asked my aunts,
then pure and rich,
if the dog was worth more tears
than so many dead people.
I remember their anger,
as if I had slapped
the memory of their brother.

Through many Julys
I remembered with confusion
that bitter family incident.
I tried to put it
out of my mind forever.
I perhaps would have
if not for today
when I read in the newspaper
that a man was beaten to death
for stealing food
from a well-fed police dog.

So I have told myself
that you are more sombre
than ever, motherland,
and surely that is why
those with wealth
are still so evil.

by
**Otto René
Castillo**

(Guatemala)

-translated by Tina Alvarez Robles