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De Robertis, Carolina. Perla

De Robertis?s second novel (after *The Invisible Mountain*, 2009) tackles head-on the lingering traumas left behind by Argentina?s state-sponsored regime of terror during the 1970s and ?80s. In the opening pages, 22-year-old college student Perla, left home alone by vacationing parents, finds a naked man in her living room. He is dripping wet, smelling of rotting fish and seawater, and she can find no possible way he could have entered the home. Oddly, she is unafraid, though she knows perhaps she should be. As the rest of the novel unfolds, Perla and the naked man both reflect on their lives up to this point. Perla?s father, a man she loves with all the loyalty an only daughter can muster, is also a Naval officer and thus, one of the men responsible for the kidnappings and torture Argentina?s government perpetrated against its own citizens. She knows she should hate him, but cannot quite bring herself to do so. Her lover, an investigative journalist, has recently broached to her the idea that she herself was stolen as an infant from one of *los desaparecidos-?*the disappeared. Rejecting the idea, she fled his arms and retreated home?only to be confronted by the naked wet man. That man, meanwhile, is finding his own memories returned to him slowly. In life, he was himself one of *los desaparecidos*, taken from his pregnant young wife and tortured mercilessly before being thrown from a plane into the ocean along with countless others. Why he has returned from the waters now, and why he has arrived in this home with this young woman, is something they must discover together.

With *Perla*, De Robertis has fully embraced the tradition of magical realism so representative of Central and South American literature. Lyrical even when describing the most horrific of torments endured by *los desaparecidos*, De Robertis?s novel is powerful and affecting in its clear-eyed examination of the lasting impacts of the dictatorship upon both the victims and also the perpetrators of its many horrors.

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