



MAIDA RYAN

Grade 8

Mandela International Magnet School, Santa Fe

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River Medicine

With shadows from your canyon over our backs we rise,
raiding the silence of this place
with breakfast making and breaking down tents,
the drone of river all night, second to our conversation.
Wishing for sun, we climb high. Under our feet,
rivers of erosion tumble.
You carry it all.
And we trust you to carry us home.

My Chama. My house of memories, water hemlock, angelica,
hot springs and ryegrass. Dinosaur footprints.
Watercolor paintings that collect sand in drying.
Straining dishwater on your bank, our kitchens of folding tables.
The camps of my childhood in the rain,
when flooding turned you dirty, River.
Poems I find in books,
as my mother strings timelines of leaves into crowns on the mountains.
Run and I will follow, River,
learning the names of each plant you collect in these hills,
the ones reaching for you as I do.
Maybe one day I will sing like you, in harmonies, in light,
in the rolling of time, season following season.
Maybe, words will be my kindling to set to flame, to ash, to stars
as fires light in the trees in fall.
Our beginning was summer, dipping oars,
whirlpools from the spinning of our fingers,
steam on water, woodsmoke in our mouths.
When old souls gathered around a hissing leak
of escaping air from a raft, scraped raw by rocks.
Bailing water to water.

My San Juan. You stole my chapstick, sunhat,
breath when I fought your washing machine current,
but that was years ago and I have long since forgiven
and the water that held me has passed.
It has been forgotten.
We spent sandy nights below constellations,
only the river, a melody,
a space of deep stolen sunbeam acceptance.
Only when we listen under the surface do we hear you clearly,
not the roar of daytime rapids. Now, you are all life and silence.
Still, we resent the shallows that hold our boats, the sunburns behind the brims of our hats.
Emerge, river, from those high walls you carve yourself into.
Follow cut bends.
Find me on the long road home.

My Green River,
a morning when airships of caterpillar pilgrims drifted
into our campsite and tangled their web crafts in the cottonwood trees.
We hate to leave you, returning to the personalities of home,
walls that are not earth, floors not water.
Where we do not measure days in sunrises
and sleep with you in our dreams.
We are seduced, skipping stones to the far bank.
Twice I almost had brothers when we moved down your length.
But I lost them in the miles I am away from you, River.
You are the space between us that lets our thoughts go unspoken.

We will return down that carsick dirt road
to wonder what plants shove their way through desert rock,
what herons pump wings across the sky, brush clouds,
lead us through gooseneck bends, again and again.
Take me to where you hoard your collections
of sunglasses and high sided boats.
And release me like the breath I lost in rising,
like the song you sing below the surface
in fields of crumble, erosion, mountainsides.
The voices of bullfrogs and Canada geese and river otters,
big horned sheep and cutthroat trout, they empty from your mouth.
Their song is yours.
They are yours, River. As I am.

When we visit, on your silk road of runoff and dishwater and desert,
when we drift under your influence, and under the sun,
take to our lips your remedy, your chorus,
and remember me river green, sunburned, wet haired, healed.