



**KATE MUIR**

Grade 7

Santa Fe Preparatory School, Santa Fe

Teacher: Sarah Stark

### **In the Presence of the Vulture**

I'm in the barrancas. It's almost time for dinner, but I'm not going back until I see an animal. Even though it's cold. It's beautiful here, the way floods have washed away the old debris, leaving new pieces of driftwood for birds and squirrels to find and use. The rocks in the water look colorful, like a rainbow. But only in the water. I used to take some of them home, thinking about how good they would look on my windowsill, how I could make a rock collection. But once they dry out, inside, away from their natural place in the world, the magic is lost. They go from jade green to green-brown, from a beautiful blue to slate-grey.

I almost miss it. I'm looking at the ground, hoping to see something else. But I look up at the sky, at a tree in front of me, remembering that the world extends beyond the ground we walk on. It launches out of a giant cottonwood, and for a split second, I mistake it for a hawk. Then everything slows down. It flies straight overhead, begging me to notice. It glides over the fifty yards of open air in a single wingbeat. Its wings tilt forward as it loses altitude and picks up speed. I'm sure it sees me. And I'm sure it doesn't care. It knows it's untouchable. And it's too beautiful, too perfect. It has a life I don't know about, and that I have no right to trespass on. It is everything mankind wishes to be, and it is what we will wish to be for another millenia yet.

The writer Joy Harjo says "It's possible to understand the world from studying a leaf. You can comprehend the laws of aerodynamics, mathematics, poetry and biology through the complex beauty of such a perfect structure. It's also possible to travel the whole globe and learn nothing." I know what she means. Humans learned everything from nature. We learned how we should build a plane, how to make simple structures, and mostly by observation. We learned to see the details, all the things we can't see until we look, too caught up in the world around us, which is moving too fast for any of us to keep up with. I realize that most of the people in the world have no idea something like this can happen. Aldo Leopold said "The last word in ignorance is the [person] who says of an animal or plant, 'What good is it?'" And this is what it means. It means that there is so much we, as humans, can learn from nature. We can learn patience, and grace, and everything we need to save our planet. We can learn if we just step outside. If we lie on the grass for half an hour, maybe you'll sit up to see a community of squirrels in the tree in your backyard. All you have to do is look. And sometimes wait.