

# The River is the Sea

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Whenever I walk along a city's river at night,  
I am reminded of a man whose name I never knew.  
I remember his face, a sharp, shadowed thing,  
not because I desired him, or because the moon  
shone on the river in a way I'll never forget—  
I did forget it—but because this man desired me  
with violence and ugliness. I was in a European city  
for the first time, but I had spent my life  
walking along flowing water. The creek  
behind my childhood home marked my kingdom,  
and though I waded to my knees, played  
with pieces of trash, and crossed the gully  
on fallen trees, I never broke a bone or bled.  
But the man by the river in that city pushed me  
against the railing, shoved his hand beneath my shirt,  
and would not let me go. For three seconds. Statues  
on the nearby bridge looked in other directions,  
and somehow, no people passed. Those seconds  
were a lifetime, or, I thought, the end of mine.  
I said no in every language I knew.  
He was small, but so strong that when I moved,  
I did not move. I didn't know when I screamed  
he'd let me go. Never underestimate the music  
of a woman's scream: the sound the river would make  
if it did not wish to go to the sea, if every current  
resisted and turned around. Running back to my room  
down the cobble-stoned street, I promised  
to get to where I wanted to go, to what the girl  
dangling her feet above the creek dreamed of.  
The river does want to go to the sea  
because the river is the sea. Rushing past buildings  
that late hour, and even now, I am the river:  
a gathering of water made beautiful,  
not by the moon, but by how I will not stop.