

River

The car's engine hums in the background as I steer along the winding road. I open the window, and wind blasts through my hair, instantly tangling it. Birdsong nearly drowns out the fierce whistling of the breeze. Dappled green light breaks through the canopy of leaves that form a tunnel over the road.

Finally, I reach the parking lot. Only one other car is there, and I park a few spaces down. I get my bike off the rack mounted to the back, strap my backpack to the rack, and soon I'm speeding down a rocky path next to the river, pedaling up and down hills and weaving through the trees.

I slow down as I pass a pond with one, two, three turtles sitting on a log. Little plants with big leaves cover the ground around it like a thick green carpet, with splashes of colorful flowers here and there.

After a while, I slow down again as I cross a bridge, old grey planks of wood set into a frame of rusting steel and chipped stone, slowly being overtaken by moss. Several of the planks have already been replaced with pale yellow ones. Several feet below, the stream surges over a bed of smooth, flat stone. The sun glints off the ripples, disrupting the shadowed reflection with flashes of bright white.

As I ride on, I pass countless tall brown and grey tree trunks, stretching to the sky and then exploding into a canopy of green leaves. Old leaves create a carpet of every shade of brown, with flashes of green peeking up through the layer of decaying foliage.

Rocks crunch under my brakes as I grind to a stop, having finally found my destination. A shallow river stretches out in front of me, with large rocks scattered throughout. They stick out of the water and create tiny rapids in the current that sweeps through the middle of the river. I lock my bike to a tree to stop it from falling into the river and undo the straps holding my backpack to the rack. I peel off my shirt, revealing a swim top, and sling on the backpack. My

final destination lies across the river. Without a bridge in sight, I'm going to wade across, and I've never yet made it without falling at least once.

I step into the cool, sparkling water, and immediately stumble on loose pebbles. I grin as I catch myself, and look across the river to the boulder that I'm wading towards. It towers above all the other rocks that cover the shore, and moss creeps across the rough grey surface like ivy creeps up a wall. Balancing on a stone that peeks out of the water, I hop to the next stone, and the next, until the stones are too far apart and I'm wading through waist-deep water in a current fast enough to pull me downstream with the slightest misstep. I tread carefully, feeling the current tugging at me, slamming against my legs in the way that air pushes against your hand when you stick it out of the window of a car, except much stronger.

Picking my way from stone to stone, I make my way almost two-thirds of the way across the river when I finally hit a rock that wasn't quite as stable as I assumed, and I fall forward, arms flailing in a useless attempt to catch myself. The knee-deep water rushes up towards me, and I scrape my palms trying not to plunge into the river. I fail spectacularly on that account and haul myself out of the water thoroughly soaked. An orangey brown chunk of rock peeks out of the river just a few feet away, and I collapse onto it to wring out my hair a little bit and enjoy the warm sunshine on my face.

After I manage to beat most of the water out of my hair, I slide back off the rock and continue making my way to the other side of the river. I have a few close calls, but I don't slip again, and at last I stand dripping on the shore. The boulder finally looms next to me, rough and tall. I pick my way behind it and find where it slants back to meet the rising ground. I walk up the boulder and sit down at the top, where it overlooks the river. I take off my backpack and fish out the waterproof box inside, and from that I extract a salami sandwich, cucumber slices, and a water bottle. I take a bite out of the sandwich as I watch the sun glinting off the water. Nothing beats a picnic lunch in a beautiful place like this one.