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## Black River Ritual

Sheree Renee Thomas

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Sheree Renée Thomas  
**Black River Ritual**

She fought the river all her life.  
It cracked her walls, dug in its tongue  
split them apart, swallowed her land whole.

She rebuilt them stronger, thicker  
but it bit her ramparts at their base  
spat lime-aged bricks as far as Somerville.

She dug deeper, lined up fresh river stones  
poured concrete crossed with bone and shell.  
Now she sits on her porch  
with watchful eyes, waiting.

I was ten years old when she carried me  
to the mouth of the river  
her hand—knotty fingers and a ring of gold—  
hard on my arm, my shoulder.  
It is always like this with families—  
everyone involved in sacrifice.

She held me there  
down past where the water turned  
from brown to black to green  
down through the rows of weathered weeds  
the low branches of murdered trees  
then up, wringing me back  
*one, two, three* until I gasp  
in the name of the father  
until I am lost  
in the name of the holy

found in this black river ritual  
drowned then reborn in the lushness  
of black river women.