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## Riparian County

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Pleiades: Literature in Context, Volume 38, Issue 2, Summer 2018, pp.  
65-66 (Article)

Published by University of Central Missouri, Department of English  
and Philosophy

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/plc.2018.0119>



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## Alicia Mountain

### Riparian County

Once when I sat by the tracks on lunch break  
the Empire Builder, running late, kicked up  
some shred of a green bottle broken over its  
rails like a christened ship. The glass barely  
caught me beneath the eye, but it cut enough to bleed.  
My boss clocked me out when I got back, wrote  
*bleeding face* by my name, so I went to the river.

They came around the bend, ripples at their waists  
wading the incongruous current, bare-breasted,  
bare as a parking lot. I knew their faces  
from a photograph buried in my wallet: you and I  
had climbed a water tower to see the city behind us,  
your brother (wrapped in secrets of his own) told us  
to press closer together to fit the bridge in the frame, too.

The twins of us here hold hands in the river,  
their hair longer than it's ever been. What am I to do  
but pry off my boots, slide the folded picture  
from its hiding place and hold it out of the water's reach?

In the current, in the middle of town, in disbelief I call out,  
"I still keep this!" The worn image thrust out in front of me  
like some boarding papers, like some permission.  
The twin of me comes close, minnows around our ankles,  
takes the hat from my head and puts it on her own,  
sun making plain my face. "I keep it, too," she says.  
Her voice is the sound of my message machine  
if my message machine was in love.



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The twin of you takes my chin in her wet hands, turns  
my cheek to look at the gash. She presses her thumb to  
the cut and my nerves howl a train track through my skin.

Of course she draws my blood across  
her own face, an imitation wound.  
Of course it is the sign for *even now we hurt the same*.  
But I've forgotten how your talking sounds,  
so the twin of you says nothing. Wades toward the riverbank  
like stepping out of a skirt and leaving it on the floor.