

American River

Nick DePascal

2023

Walking along the river's edge,
The water level low this year
The receded river reveals

.

A lifetime's worth of accumulated
Garbage. A bicycle straddles
A burned out, gutted blue

.

Sofa, spilling its soggy innards
To a sun close and ragged.
I step through tall grasses

.

And reeds and feel the ground
Give as my right foot crushes
The jellied chest of a rabbit,

.

Left eye still open, intact, surveying
The world's turning over and into
The future, ceaseless, to the caress

.

And applause of a mourning mass
Of flies gorging on the stink. I gaze
Over the water, color of childhood's

.

Chocolate milk we chugged to build
Our bones strong enough to labor cheaply,
Consume greatly, or die in war. The water

.

Barely moves it seems, swirls lazily on
Occasion, bubbles and froths in small
Whirlpools, passes under bridges

.

Where homes are made, carrying hypodermics,
Shredded clothing, condoms, flowers,
Down the river far away, the city's dirty

·
Valentine delivered daily on the open
Veins of the river, low this year, yet somehow
still praiseworthy in its tattered beauty.

·
A cool flag, dissecting the city's body
and teeming still with life in the midst
Of the ongoing 21st century death parade.
Nick DePascal is a poet and high school teacher in Albuquerque.

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