**My Life as a River**

The river Nile. Soul of Africa. My village Algreaf in Sudan lies on the plain beside you. You are the longest river, the strongest river. The most complicated thing I have ever known. I used to talk to you when I was a child. I heard you. I felt you. I studied you to find out your secret.

You are not one river but two. In the farm season you are flat and calm. Kind and generous. A place for people to swim. To fish. To grow their crops and feed their animals. Your water is so sweet I can drink it straight from my hands. You look after everybody. Protect us from harm.

But you are also a different river. When the rains come you gather power from the Ethiopian highlands, crushing everything on your path, raging through my country towards Egypt and the sea. The people who live here know this side of you. When your waters become red it is time to get ready. They build a wall of sandbags in front of their houses. Everyone helping each other, racing against the hungry flood. You are not kind any more. You are frightening and dangerous. You take back the rich land that you gave us.

I wished I had this power. When my situation got so bad I had to leave the plains of my childhood and find somewhere new, I made a journey like you. But where you cross mountains and countries to make them alive, I crossed them just to survive. Climbing over rocks. Sheltering under thorn bushes. Trying to follow the stars in the black night sky. I was hungry and thirsty. I felt weak and small. I thought I might lie down and not wake up.

Then one day I heard the sound of water. I followed it, climbing higher through the sharp rocks and prickly grass. My mouth so dry it was cracking. At the top of the mountain I found a little stream. This stream was no wider than my arm, but it was cutting a path in the rock. Turning the dusty rocks around it green with life.

That was my motivation. When I felt like I could not carry on, that I would never be strong enough. You were small too once. But that trickle of water held the power for what you would become. I had the power inside me. The seeds of the man I would grow to be. I would cross borders and find new lands however long it took. And one day I will change the world around me.