

**A
RIVER
MEAS
URED
IN TIME**

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ALBERTO BANKS HAD BEEN SAVING ALL HIS LIFE. He wanted to buy a river.

As a child, he had been given a ribbon by his father. A blue ribbon. His father was always this strange man who would scrutinize his past much more spontaneously than he would do with his future. When he had brought the ribbon for his child, he would have seldom thought what the boy would do with a ribbon. The consequences of his actions were never quite as important as the precedence of the consequence itself. When he handed over the ribbon to little Alberto and noticed his confused expression, he wondered why he had bought it in the first place. He wondered whether he had done it subconsciously. He wondered what particular knack or interest had he noticed in little Alberto which could have prompted him into an action so decisive for the child.

“This is a magic ribbon,” he said at last, “if you spread it, it’d become as long as the river.”

His father’s words were just as unmindful or irrelevant as was his buying of the ribbon – once again, in total oblivion of the collective future of the child. But for little Alberto, it was the greatest of prophecies ever been foretold. He had no idea till then as to how long a river is, or for that matter, should be. It had never occurred to his little brain what a terrific mystery it might hold in itself. A river that could be measured in ribbons. The feeling itself was so big that little Alberto was too afraid to open the ribbon and roll it to be seen. “It is a great gift and must be dealt with lots

of responsibilities” – is what he realized. He just went and hugged his father, who watched with great amusement how his child’s confused expression changed to something immeasurable.

It was from that day that little Alberto slept with the ribbon under his pillow. And he dreamt all night long. He watched, in his dreams, a river which was more like a brook. At its center was a blue ribbon stretched from the misty infinity from where the river originated to an equally hazy eternity to which it went. The ribbon ran right from its middle as if dividing the two parts of the water, parallel to the flowing river. And that imagery was so intensely beautiful that every morning when little Alberto’s father would wake up he would find his child’s room fragrant with an aroma of his dreams. Sometimes it would rid him of his asthma, as he let his child sleep late into the morning. Slowly, it became the only medicine he would take for his ailment, and he had never been healthier.

One night in his dreams, little Alberto noticed that the two equal parts in which the ribbon had divided the river were of different colors. It was the setting sun. One of its parts was red like someone had mixed, with uncertain ease, the deepest of blood. The other part was yellow – a dirty yellow as if all its water was drenched in malaise before it was let into the river. For the first time, little Alberto was experiencing a nightmare. And a premonition. That morning when little Alberto’s father came to his room, he found his child sweating profusely as he lied trembling in a fever and there was a stench of rotting flesh in the room. At once, his attack of asthma returned. This was the moment when he should have run for some medicines left in his cupboard for such emergencies. This was the last chance he had of changing little Alberto’s life... But, as we said previously, his father was seldom concerned about the consequences. He didn’t want to leave the motherless child alone in his fever. And so, he let himself die, comfortably, as he watched his son still trembling in his nightmares. It was so cruel of him to leave his child alone in the very first of his nightmares, for even when little Alberto would break out of his sleep the nightmare would continue.

Alberto Banks doesn’t remember what happened in the next few days, but he recalls that it was in the womb of those dark hours that he lost the magic ribbon,

forever, without it being opened even for once.

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Alberto Banks had been saving all his life. He wanted to buy a river.

He had been to many rivers all throughout his life but had never found one that was much like the one in his childhood dreams. Alberto Banks was an old man now who lived with an equally aged wife. His children were married and lived in a far-off town. He had inherited the same asthma that had taken his father's life. He was sure it would take his too. But before he died he wanted to complete his dream. He wanted to buy a river. His wife wanted to buy gifts for their children with the money.

"We'd leave back the river as a gift for them," he told her.

"What would they do with a river?" she asked.

"The river I'm talking 'bout is the magical river. It is the healer of all diseases. It brings with itself the gifts of immortality."

"But don't you see you've spent all your life looking for it. How much longer do you wish to keep looking?"

"Till I die... and I cannot die till I find it."

And so Alberto Banks decided to do what he had never done throughout his life. He decided to buy ribbons of different shapes, colors, and sizes. Then, he spread them on his floor, hoping that they would give him some hint as to where he might find the river. The ribbons tangled with each other, forming a diverse shape, intermingling with one another.

"Perhaps, the river I'm looking for is a maze," it suddenly occurred to him, "maybe, that's why I couldn't find it in all these years."

"Or perhaps," It occurred to him subsequently, "we're living inside a maze, and the river is just outside. Maybe, the river is an object in time rather than in space. Perhaps, the river crosses itself so many times that even though we see it, we fail to notice it in our linear search. Maybe, the river in its actuality is cyclic."

And as he climbed the staircase of realizations, he found that the river

was slowly becoming visible to him. Yes, it was the magic river with the blue ribbon flowing from its center. He wanted to get down in the river and leave all his money into its sacred waters. He wanted to scream “you’re mine.” He wanted to go and touch the ribbon that divided the water... but before he could do any of these, he woke up.

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When he woke up, little Alberto found the corpse of his father lying on the floor. He put his hand under the pillow on which he slept and found the blue ribbon that he had never opened, still there, intact. Exhaling a deep breath of relief, he smiled.