

# THE CELESTIAL RIVER

By  
Grozdana Olujic

The rivers flowed, each as it should, some to the east, some to the west, and some from the mountains right down to the sea. Is there any other way? The Great Mother of Rivers placidly watched the birth of new rivers and chose each one a course. With rivers, there are no surprises, no worries. It's not often a fool is born like the one that wanted to flow under the ground.

The mother of all rivers smiled at a newborn daughter and was just raising her wand to the west when the stubborn little creature said,

“I don't to go west!”

“Then flow to the south. Or you can go north or east”, answered the patient mother, but the daughter wanted to run neither north nor south nor east, nor down from the mountain to the sea. All bright, all crystal clear, she tossed her head and cried,

“No and no and no!”

The Great Mother of Rivers sighed.

“The rivers can all hardly wait to get down to the sea”, she said, and stroked her daughter's cheek, but the little thing cut her off.

“Not me!”

“Then where will you go?”

The strong willed little river was still. The fate of rivers is to run into the valley, but she heard the call of the snow capped mountain peaks, of the sun-rose in the deep blue sky; the clouds and stars enchanted her.

“I want to be a river in the sky”, she murmured, and the Great Mother of Rivers shuddered with horror.

“That never was, it never will be, my daughter! No river has ever climbed up to the sky. You had better hurry so you can reach the valley before the winter frosts!” The Great Mother of Rivers spoke sternly and decided she would have to watch her newborn daughter.

From that moment, all the rivers and brooks, all springs and streams were on guard. The shores and banks watched out for the little river so she would not escape; rocks stood in her way, mountains stopped her. The little river froze for sorrow and the days fell away like kernels of corn. The

Great Mother of Rivers was already sure that her youngest daughter had forgotten her foolish wish when one night a storm broke out. The lightning leaped about the sky like fiery snakes, and the thunder ripped rocks off the mountainside. Huddled in their beds, the rivers listened in terror, not daring to budge.

But when the day broke, the Great Mother of Rivers noticed that the bed of the little river was empty, and began to worry. Where could she have gone?

“Hunt for her”, she ordered all the waters on the mountain, and a great hunt began, even though there was still a fine rain falling. Oh, how they looked for her, how they turned everything upside down, in the forest, among the rock fields, in the caves, but there wasn’t a trace of the little river. The Great Mother of Rivers was going to call for a new search when she felt the rain dying away and heard the excited cry of a bird.

“Look up!”

The Great Mother of Rivers raised her head, then said in a voice full of pain,

“You can stop looking for her!”

Across the sky in a glittering many-coloured arch flowed the little river. One end of the arch touched the top of the mountain, the other dipped gently into the sea. But the river was neither of the sea nor of the mountain. She was a celestial river. They called her Rainbow.

*Translated by G. G. Champe*

