

Shi-shi-etko

by Nicola I. Campbell

With the first steps of sunrise
Shi-shi-etko skipped along the worn path
Through the cottonwood trees
All the way to the creek.

“My girl, we will not see each other
until the wild roses bloom in the spring
and the salmon have returned to our river.
I want you to remember our songs and our dances,
our laughter and our joy,
and I want you to remember our land.”

Then her mother began to sing.
Her voice traveled from tree to tree,
flowing through the valley,
caught by the wind,
carried on the wings of eagles in flight.

Shi-shi-etko could not help herself.
She looked at everything –

tall grass swaying to the rhythm of the breeze,
determined mosquitoes,
working bumblebees.

She memorized each shiny rock,
the sand beneath her feet,
crayfish and minnows and tadpoles
that squirmed between her toes
all at the bottom of the creek.