

Adrift

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The wooden paddle plunges into the frigid water, pulling back through the river with little resistance. My hand resting on the end of the paddle is slick with sweat and I quickly wipe my palm on my shorts before performing another stroke, my arms aching with the effort.

The water is as still and clear as glass, though the image is distorted as our canoe slices cleanly through it, sending ripples out from every angle toward the shore. I stop paddling for a moment to let my fingertips glide over the top of the water, creating dainty ripples of my own on the surface.

I submerge my hand completely in the river, the muscles in my hand seizing up slightly from the shock of the cool water. My fingers swirl lazily in the cool river and I draw my hand out, dumping some water on the back of my warm neck. A sigh escapes my lips as the excess water glides down my back and underneath my tank top, leaving a trail of goosebumps in its wake.

“Getting tired already?” I hear my mother tease from the back of the boat. She’s there working as sternman and hardly paddling at all, might I add. I rest the paddle across my lap and lean back into one of the rails on the canoe, shifting slightly when the metal digs uncomfortably into my back.

“No,” I say eventually, tilting my face up toward the sun, “Just enjoying the view.” We’re both silent after that, taking everything in.

Birds sing to each other in the trees, the river gurgles over rocks, and a drum beat quietly spills through our speaker. A lone cloud cloaks the sun and the area is cast in gentle shadows, making every edge seem less sharp. Everything is so serene and perfect that I almost want to pause the moment and live in it forever.

Eventually the moment comes to an end, as all good things must, and we’re back to paddling, our strokes in sync. The sun beats down on my neck as the tip of the canoe turns around a bend in the river and we’re soon shrouded in the shade of the trees surrounding the riverbank.

The relief is immediate. A small sigh sounds from behind me and our paddling becomes sluggish—an obvious sign of our reluctance to go back into the sun.

“How about we stop for a bit and have some lunch?” My mom suggests. I look up and squint at the muted sunlight filtering through the trees then nod, laying my paddle down and rolling my shoulders.

“Sounds good to me.”

A little further around the bend is a stretch of white sand protected by the shade of the dense trees. In silent agreement we set our course toward it. As we get closer to shore there’s a flash from the water and I peer over the side to see fish and water striders skimming the surface of the water. My paddle digs into the river bottom, making the water murky with loose sand, and the gleaming fish darts out of the way as the river gets shallower.

The tip of the canoe drives into the sand with a lurch and I jump out quickly as the back end begins to get pulled downstream with the current. Lifting the front slightly, I start to haul it

up the sandbar, the canoe scraping against the bottom of the river as I go. Once I'm sure our transportation won't float away I wipe sweat from my eyes and look around, my hands on my hips.

Pop and beer cans litter the area, but the sand is soft and fine between my toes and the cool shade is wholeheartedly welcome. Dragging the small cooler behind us, we begin to trek to the middle of the sandbar. Once we find a suitable spot I drop down into the sand. I roll onto my back and take a deep breath in through my nose, smiling at the earthy aroma the river provides.

"See," my mom says, smiling as a bright red cardinal flies over her head, "Isn't this better than sitting around and watching TV?"

I stop a moment to take everything in, knowing I will be able to think back to this moment, these sounds and this deep sense of peace. I know this calm can't be found in a phone app or my favorite television series. This sense of relaxation is rooted in nature and in sharing nature with another human being.

I soak in the sun shining in the cloudless sky, the overgrown trees filled with noisy wildlife, the clear river lapping against the sandbar. I smile at my mother, knowing this is one memory I'll keep forever.

"Definitely."