

Just Around the River Bend by Jessie Tussing

Special Merit—Staff Pick

“Everyone quiet, please!” shouted Mr.Schauermann. “We're going to be heading out onto the river in just a second, but first, let's cover some ground rules.” Ignoring his speech, I imagined the rushing white water in my mind. The thrill of the image made my heart race and caused my hands to become hot and sweaty. I prepared myself for what was supposed to be the ride of my life. I felt as if I, a seventh grader, could take on Mother Nature herself with only an oar at hand. Impossible was nothing to me.

Unfortunately, the Deschutes River was calm and smooth the entire time. My expectations weren't being met on any level; frustration was beginning to swell up inside me. The scorching sun beat against my back, which only added to my frustration. An uncomfortable, leisurely, and dreadfully boring rafting trip was not what I had in mind. I wanted a battle with nature, a challenge, but instead I was stuck in the “kiddie section” of the river. I heard nothing but chattering people and squawking birds.

Suddenly, a new sound entered my earshot, rushing water. Excitement began to fill my eyes again. “Guys! Let's go that way! We'll be fine without them!” I pointed to the leaders raft. “Didn't we, after all, come here to raft? I don't know about you guys, but I'm sick of being a sitting duck!” My speech seemed to really speak to my companions because we were now going for the rapids. The sound of the rushing water got louder as we approached the new side of the river. My hands were shaking with adrenaline as the raft charged forth to come head to head with nature. The raft was picking up speed quickly, and we were getting tossed left and right as we hit colossal boulders and were caught in swirling currents. Paddling took all my strength when all of a sudden, my oar was snatched away from my grasp by the current. I looked up and saw that we were headed straight towards the largest boulder we had encountered yet. “Hang on!” I shrieked from the top of my lungs. At that moment, we collided

with the vast boulder and capsized. I burst up and out of the water choking for air. Scared and disoriented, I couldn't find anything to grab a hold of, and I was sucked into the mighty river. Freezing water entered my lungs as I tried to swim out of the current, but I failed every time. My head was pounding with pain as less and less oxygen filled my system. My body became numb from the ice cold water, but I still clearly felt the sharp pain in my lungs as I began to suffocate. I no longer had the strength to try to pull myself out. I floated beneath the surface praying, "God, if I die, just please don't let it hurt." That second, a hand from the surface swooped down and pulled me onto land. I gasped as air filled my sore lungs. Gravel and dirt have never felt so comforting.

"Jess, are you okay?" Mr. Schauermann asked, sighing with relief. "We almost lost you." I listened to the chaotic chatter around me. "Thank God she's okay." I heard someone say. Then I prayed, "Yeah, thank you, God for giving me the encounter I so longingly desired."

I learned the hard way that you really should be careful what you wish for. Nature is beautiful of course, but she is not one to be teased.