



CHAPTER 8

“Grab the lifebuoy,” I told the four guys in the water.

“Why?” one guy who’d been underwater asked.

“You’re drowning?” I replied.

“What gave you that idea?”

“I saw two of you go underwater, stay for a bit, then return to the top,” I answered.

“We were noodling,” one guy informed.

“Doodling? In the water?” I asked.

“Not doodling. Noodling,” another said. “Catching catfish with our hands.”

“Don’t you have a rod and reel?” I asked.

“Yes, but the point of noodling is to catch the fish with our hands.” Chloe arrived and listened.

“You could be bitten by snakes, turtles, and who knows what else!” I exclaimed.

“You could snag your clothes on a limb and get stuck underwater,” Chloe added. “Is that even legal?”

“Noodling’s legal in Kentucky, but it’s dangerous” one guy admitted. “Kids should never do it. We’re experienced swimmers, but a novice should never attempt it. Promise me you won’t try noodling.”

“I’ll stick to doodling,” I said. “Besides, Mom would never let us noodle. Speaking of Mom, we better return to the boat.” We said goodbye, grabbed the lifebuoy and dog paddled to the riverboat. Mom and Dad kissed us and dried us off.

“Woody, I’m proud of you for helping,” Dad said putting the lifebuoy in its spot.

“Me too,” Mom agreed. “But if I ever catch either of you trying to catch a fish with your bare paws, you’ll be in serious trouble,” Mom said, smiling. “C’mon. Let’s get on the road.”

While Dad drove, I opened the map and found Kentucky Lake. “We could head west to the Green River, but if we go south we’d see the Rockcastle, Laurel, Cumberland Rivers - and Lake Cumberland.”

Chloe opened her book and read. “The Cumberland River is 688 miles long and its headwaters are...

“What are headwaters?” I asked, apologizing first for interrupting.

“Where the river begins,” Dad answered.

“Its headwaters are,” Chloe continued, “Martin’s Fork, Clover Fork, and Poor Fork. The forks start in Eastern Kentucky and converge to form Cumberland River. It flows into Lake Cumberland, snakes into Tennessee and meanders back to Kentucky to join the Ohio. Cumberland Falls is one of the biggest waterfalls in the Southeast. At night, the moonlight hits the water and produces a moonbow!”

“Let’s go!”

“We don’t have time, but we’ll take a trip soon,” Dad promised. “Besides, we’re almost at Green River.”

“Is the water green?” I asked Chloe as Dad parked.

“No,” Chloe answered. “The water’s so healthy that some of the rarest species on earth live in the Green River. Some of the river flows through Mammoth Cave Park and drains the cave. Once it leaves the park, it picks up the Nolin River, the Barren River and empties into...

“The Ohio,” I shouted.

“Correct,” Chloe giggled.

Perklunk

Clang

Hissss

The car stopped. Mom, Chloe and I stayed inside while Dad went and looked under the hood.

“It’s the fuel pump. We’ll have to be towed. Grab everything you’ll need for the next few days,” Dad instructed. “We’ll take the canoe and travel downstream. Maybe we can find help. Besides, we should enjoy the river while we’re here.”

Once we were in the Green River, Chloe and I paddled. We reached a spot where the water was completely still.

“Let’s stop here, enjoy the sights and sounds of nature,” Dad suggested.

“What does nature sound like,” I asked.

“Listen and you’ll learn.”

I didn’t hear anything at first, but then I heard rustling. I saw an otter scurrying around the riverbank. I heard frogs croaking, crickets chirping, and a robin singing.

“Look at the mama doe and her fawn drinking from the spring,” Mom said softly.

“Where?” I whispered.

“See that water bubbling to the surface? That’s a spring,” Mom explained. A few minutes later the water started moving and the deer turned and ran.

“The current’s picked up. Let’s paddle,” Dad said.

“Current?” I asked.

“The speed of the water flow,” Mom explained. “The water’s moving fast, but it’s not too dangerous. If we don’t have any other delays, we should be able to make it to Kentucky Lake in time.”

Chloe and I paddled on the same side, trying to make a large curve. We rounded the bend and saw enormous, flat-bottom boats with towboats attached. They were lined up along the riverbank.

“Are those yachts?” I asked.

“They’re barges,” Dad answered. “They use the waterways to transport goods.”

“They’re gigantic,” I exclaimed.

“It’s the size of two football fields,” a voice said. He must’ve heard my comment. “I’m Jack, a deckhand on this barge. You folks fishing today?”

I told him about the fishing tournament, the car breaking down, and how we needed to get to Kentucky Lake. Jack listened quietly. When he finally spoke, he asked the strangest question.

“How are you at digging, Woody?”

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