



CHAPTER 9

“Chloe and I were born to dig,” I replied, wondering why Jack asked. “We can dig potatoes, ditches, and even badgers.”

“That won’t be necessary,” Jack laughed. “Our barge is hauling coal from West Virginia to New Orleans. When the Captain was doing a final safety check, he bent over and the keys that start the barge fell in the vat of coal. Our crew dug, but came up empty. I thought you pups could dig and see if you could find the keys, but if you don’t have time, I understand.”

I looked at Mom and Dad. I wanted to make the fishing tournament, but helping someone was more important. Besides, maybe we could find the keys quickly and be on our way.

“I thought semi-trucks carried coal,” I said, as Jack helped us climb aboard.

“They do, but transporting freight on barges is cheaper, although it takes longer. And barges can haul bigger loads. This barge holds 22,000 tons,” Jack answered as we walked to the deck. The walkway was narrow and we had to watch our step. When we arrived, Jack introduced us to other deckhands, the captain, pilot, and cook. They lived and worked on the barge for one month straight, then went home for one month.

“I’m Captain Donahue but call me Cap. I appreciate your help,” he informed. “We dug some tunnels, but we need someone small to get through them.” Dad hoisted Chloe and me into the vat. We took different sections and worked our magic. Halfway through a second tunnel, I came face to face with a solid black dog I’d never seen. I needed to warn Chloe.

“Chloe!” I yelled.

“Yes, Woody?” the solid black dog answered. She was so filthy I didn’t recognize her.

Digging through the third tunnel, I felt something jingle underneath my paw. I grabbed it with my teeth and Chloe and I exited the trench.

“Hip, Hip Hooray,” the crew cheered.

“You pups had so much dust flying that we thought the captain had blown his stack,” Jack said, making the crew roar with laughter.

“Jack, instead of trying to be funny, put their canoe and supplies on the barge,” the captain laughed. “We’re giving our heroes a lift to Kentucky Lake.”

I jumped up to hug the captain. Before I could reach him, Mom intervened. “Hold it, you cute little dirt bag,” she laughed. “It’s bath time.”

“Now?” I answered. “But I didn’t bring my Freshen Up Fido shampoo.”

“We’ve got showers in the living quarters,” Cap replied. “And Jack uses Freshen Up Fido shampoo too!” Jack laughed. Obviously the crew like teasing each other.

“When you’re finished, meet me in the wheelhouse,” Cap said as he took his keys and left. After two showers, I was clean as a whistle. Chloe had to take three showers before she returned to her normal color.

“The Green River’s wider here,” I commented, once we were in the wheelhouse.

“This is the Ohio River. Here’s some trivia for you,” Cap said, as he steered. “The river’s 981 miles long. It borders or flows through 6 states and provides drinking water to 3 million people. For centuries, this river has been a major artery for shipping cargo. Barges, fishing boats, speed boats, and even canoes use the Ohio,” Cap replied with a smile. “We have to be just as careful rowing down the river as we are driving down the highway.”

“Why’s there a barricade in the river?” I asked, pointing ahead.

“That’s a lock a dam.”

“Why do they lock boats out?” I asked.

Cap chuckled. “The water on the river is at different levels. For instance, traveling downstream the water elevation descends. At the Falls of the Ohio, the water level drops 24 feet! It’d be dangerous and would damage the cargo. The lock and dam system was designed to help us move from one water level – or pool – to another.”

Captain Donahue concentrated as we approached the lock. The boat traffic light was red, so we stopped. Finally, the gates opened, and the light changed to green. Cap steered the boat inside the chamber and the gates closed behind us.

“The lockmaster is opening a valve and letting water drain,” the captain explained. “When they open the locks – or gates - the water will be the same level and it’ll be smooth sailing.” Our boat swayed back and forth and made a loud racket, but then the gates opened and we rolled down the Ohio. Before long, we went through another lock.

“That was the last lock on the Ohio River,” Cap explained. “We’ll be on the Tennessee River soon and next stop will be Kentucky...”

SCHREECH!

The boat came to an abrupt halt. We watched as the captain pushed the intercom button and said, “Emergency Situation – Need all hands on deck.”

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