

THE RIVER SPEAKS

CHAPTER 3 - BY KAY HIVELY

Right away, Toby and his father went to work, carrying wood. Two other members of the crew were working as firemen. Toby was surprised at how much wood was needed to run the boat. He had never seen anything use so much firewood.

Finally, things were going at full speed and there was time for a break.

Toby was tired. He and his father sat down on some of the wood they had stacked.

As Toby and his father rested, the engineer explained how steam was used to power the boat. He said it took 30 cords of wood each day to keep the boat moving. Toby was amazed. Thirty cords of wood was enough to heat their cabin for an entire winter.

As the engineer and his father talked, Toby walked

out onto the deck. While he stood watching the river, he saw a familiar face. It was Mike, the cabin boy.

Mike was on an errand for the captain. He invited Toby to go with him. Toby asked his father for permission. But his request was answered by the engineer, who told him he could go with the cabin boy for a while.

As Toby followed his new friend through the ship, he saw many large crates and barrels of freight. Each container had big black words on it. The words told what was inside: Words such as “Boots,” “Lamps,” “Nails” or “Coffee Beans” were on every piece of freight.

The Arabia’s store of supplies was a hundred times bigger than what Toby had seen in the general store back home. The crates and barrels looked like a big mountain.

He wondered why the boat didn’t sink with all the weight on board.

As Mike led the way through the maze of freight, he suddenly turned around and put his finger to his lips. Both boys stopped, and then Toby heard voices. Looking between two

stacks of freight, he saw five men sitting on boxes. Looking more closely, Toby saw the men were playing cards.

Mike whispered to Toby, telling him these were riverboat gamblers.

Toby had heard tales of men like this. Now there they were, right in front of his eyes. Four of the gamblers were dressed like the crewmen on the boat, but one was dressed in fine clothes. He had a silk suit and a broad-rimmed hat with a tiny feather stuck in the

band. On his hands were big flashy rings, and his boots were shiny.

Toby had heard that riverboat gamblers carried guns and often got into fights. He hoped a fight didn’t break out now.

As the two boys watched from behind a stack of barrels, the well-dressed man suddenly turned and looked at the two boys. As the man turned to the boys, Toby could see a pistol in his belt.

Toby swallowed hard, not knowing what the gambler was going to do.

NEXT WEEK: CHAPTER 4 - A LITTLE BIT OF GOLD

Things to Think About and Do

1. The engineer told Toby that steam is what powered the boat. How did a riverboat make steam and how did the steam make the boat move?
2. The ARABIA used about 30 cords of wood each day. Which is bigger—a rick or a cord of wood? What are the dimensions of a rick of wood? What are the dimensions of a cord of wood?
3. Look in the Classified section of your newspaper for advertisements for firewood for sale. Figure the cost of running the ARABIA each day.

Standards: G1:2; G1:3; S:1; S:2; S:8; M:2; M:4
GLE: R3A, MG1A, S1(2)a

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