

# THE RIVER SPEAKS

## CHAPTER 4 - BY KAY HIVELY

Toby shuddered when the gambler looked at him. But then the well-dressed card player flashed a big smile and spoke to the boys.

Mike answered back, but Toby was tongue tied. He just nodded his head at the stranger.

Without another word, the man turned away and continued with his card game.

Mike looked at Toby and motioned him to move along. Toby took one last glance at the gamblers before he followed Mike to the far end of the boat where the message from the captain was delivered.

With their errand completed, the boys started back to the front section of the ship. Mike explained that the forward end of the boat was called the bow. The rear end was the stern. He said

the *Arabia* was more than 170 feet from the bow to the stern. Toby's head was spinning as Mike talked about the boat. Listening to Mike was like hearing another language.

As the boys passed through the cargo area on their way back to the bow of the boat, the riverboat gamblers were still playing cards.

As he watched the game, Toby saw the fancy-dressed gambler take a small pouch from his pocket. Reaching inside the pouch, the man took out a small gold-colored rock and put it in the center of the table. Then the man said he was betting an ounce of gold on the next game. Toby could not take his eyes off the little gold nugget.

But suddenly he felt a tug on his shirt. Mike waved for him to move on, and soon the boys were back at the boiler room.

Mr. LePage was at work carrying firewood. Toby was embarrassed that he had been exploring while his father worked. But a smile on his father's face assured him that he was not in trouble.

For another hour, Toby and his father hauled wood to the boiler. The firemen could not use the

wood as fast as the two woodsmen could bring it. When there was no more room for the wood near the boiler, the engineer told Toby and his father their job was done for the day.

Since it would soon be dark, the engineer told them to take supper in the galley. That was another word in riverboat language that Toby did not understand. But he soon learned the galley was where the cooking was done.

Toby and his father found a place near the galley where they could wash up.

There was plenty of hot food on a long table, and it tasted good. Mr. LePage visited with some of the crewmen who were eating with them. But Toby was thinking about the riverboat gamblers and that little gold nugget.

He had never seen a gold nugget before, but he hoped some day he could go out west and look for gold. Maybe he would ride the *Arabia* out there and strike it rich.

Then he would have a pouch full of gold.

## NEXT WEEK: CHAPTER 5 - MIDNIGHT TALES

### Things to Think About and Do

1. The gambler said his gold nugget weighed 1 ounce. In 1856, what was the value of an ounce of gold? What would be the value of a pound of gold in 1856? What is the value of an ounce of gold today?
2. Why was Toby embarrassed when he found his father working? Write a paragraph telling how you think Toby felt about his father. Do you think Toby loves his father? Does Mr. LaPage love Toby?
3. What would an ounce of gold buy today? Cut pictures and words of items from the newspaper that you could buy with an ounce of gold.

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