

THE RIVER SPEAKS

CHAPTER 5 - BY KAY HIVELY

Tired and full of good food, Toby fell asleep as soon as he reached the little bed that was nailed to the wall. Sound asleep, he did not hear the gentle lap of the water slapping against the boat.

Because the water was low, the captain did not run at night. The river was always full of danger which could not easily be seen. The most dangerous things were old tree trunks that were stuck in the riverbed. These were called snags. Many snags lay just below the surface of the water. If a boat passed over them, the snags could tear a hole in the hull of the boat.

To avoid this, the captain did not travel at night unless it was absolutely necessary. Most passengers on the *Arabia* didn't mind. Evenings were fun for passengers, who got together to share a meal and visit. Often there was

entertainment or dancing. Many of the men played cards and smoked cigars.

Eventually all was quiet on the *Arabia* as people went to bed. But just at midnight, Toby was awakened by a loud noise. Sitting up in bed, he heard the noise again. It seemed to come from just outside the little room where he and his father were sleeping.

Quietly, he slipped out of bed and walked out onto the deck. Nothing was moving except the water. It was beautiful out on the water. Toby sat down in an old chair to watch the river. But just as he got comfortable, Toby heard footsteps coming in his direction.

Looking into a dark passageway, he saw a figure walking toward him. As the figure stepped out into the moonlight, Toby recognized the fancy riverboat gambler.

Without a word, the man sat down by Toby and began to talk. Toby was not afraid of the man as he had been earlier. He listened as the man talked about life on the river. He said he had ridden riverboats to New Orleans, St. Louis, Memphis, Cincinnati and even far out west.

As the gambler was talking, Toby saw his father come out on deck to join them. The two men introduced themselves. The gambler said his name was Johnny Waters.

In the beauty of the night, while the river floated by, Toby and his father listened to some exciting stories. A fine storyteller, Johnny told about pirates and gunfights. It was easy to see that Johnny loved being on the river. But Toby was surprised when Johnny said that the river could talk.

The river speaks, he said. Toby remembered that his father had said the same thing.

Finally, Johnny talked about going west in the gold rush to California.

Taking his pouch from his pocket, the gambler showed a handful of gold nuggets. Each one had been cut so it would weigh exactly 1 ounce. This, he said, was his gambling money.

Toby thought the leather pouch was beautiful. It was decorated with red, white and blue beads, and was full of gold nuggets.

NEXT WEEK:

CHAPTER 6 - TOURING THE TOWN

Things to Think About and Do

1. On riverboats, passengers ate, danced and had fun. How do you think music was provided for dancing? Make a poster to show the kinds of musical instruments that you think would be on a riverboat.
2. Draw a map connecting New Orleans, St. Louis, Memphis, City of Kansas and Cincinnati by water. On your map, name the rivers that go in and out of these cities. Also on your map, list the distance between the cities.
3. Evenings on the riverboat were filled with entertainment. Using your newspaper, make a list of things you can do in your community in the evenings for fun.

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