



## Manny Manatee and the Mystery of the Murky Water

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For the Rainforest Alliance

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**B**oink! Manny Manatee smacked his head.

"Watch where you're going, Manatee," Sea Turtle said.

"You swam right into me."

"How can I watch where I'm going?" Manny complained.

"I can't see a thing in this dirty water."

"Well maybe you should open your eyes, sea cow," Turtle snapped.

"What are you boys fighting about?" asked Grandma Dolphin, who had been swimming by.

"Manatee swam into me," Turtle complained.

"It was an accident," Manny said. "I didn't see him."

"I'm not surprised," said Grandma Dolphin. "I can hardly see my own flippers. Why is it so murky around here?"

"It's from the Deep River," said Sapper, swimming out of a cave in the reef. "That river gets dirtier every day."

"It's a disaster!" Stone Crab shouted from atop a rock.

"The mud is killing the coral."

Sea Turtle said, "Even the sea grass tastes mucky."

"Where is all the dirt coming from?" asked Grandma Dolphin.

Turtle looked at Crab, who looked at Snapper, who looked back at Crab. "It's a mystery," Crab said.

"Well, maybe someone should solve it," said Grandma Dolphin. "One of you boys should swim up that river and find out what the problem is."

Crab looked at Snapper, who looked at Turtle, who looked at Manny Manatee.

"I'll do it," said Manny.

"Good boy!" said Grandma Dolphin. "Come back and tell us what you find."



As Manny swam into the Deep River, the sun warmed his back. He passed through a big school of mullet. He could hear the popping of shrimp snapping their claws between the mangrove roots. A pelican dove into the water nearby. "Drat!" the bird mumbled. "Missed again!"

The farther Manny went up river, the harder it was to see. Soon he had to hold his face out of the water to see where he was going. A shiny blue butterfly was flying up river just ahead of him. He flapped his tail flipper harder to keep up with it.

The river grew narrower. The trees that lined it became taller. It looked like he was swimming between two high green walls. Tree branches high above him began blocking out the sun. Manny started to feel scared. He had never been in a rainforest before.



"Groooooaaawwll," a horrible roar filled the air. It sounded like the whole jungle was growling. Was it a jaguar coming to eat him?! Manny looked up into the branches. He spotted a dark brown monkey, then another and another. They were all howling at him, but he wasn't scared anymore. They didn't look big enough to eat his lunch.

"What's all the howling about?" he shouted.

The monkeys grew silent. The biggest one climbed down a branch. "We're howler monkeys," he said. "It's what we do."

"Well it's no way to welcome a manatee," Manny complained.

"I'm sorry," offered the monkey. "We thought you were a crocodile,"

"We've never seen a Manatee before," said another.

"What are you doing here?"

"I came to find out why the river is so dirty," Manny said.

"Do you know?"

The monkeys looked at each other. Finally the big one spoke: "Good question."

"Well, I'm going to find the answer," said Manny. He continued to swim up river.

"Groooooaaawwll!" Monkey howls filled the air again.

"Now what are you howling about?" asked Manny.

"We're howler monkeys," the big one said. "It's what we do."



The river grew even narrower. The current grew stronger. It became harder for Manny to swim. Finally he reached a fork in the river. To the right, the water was murky. To the left, it was clear. The problem had to be somewhere up the right branch. Manny tried to swim up it, but the water was too shallow. His tail flipper kept hitting the bottom, and he bumped his head on a fallen tree. "Oh no!" he cried. "I'll never solve this mystery."

"Mystery?" a voice croaked high above him. "What mystery?" Manny looked up into the branches. A toucan was staring down at him.

"Um, the mystery of the murky river," he said.

"I love a mystery," croaked Toucan.

"Would you help me solve it?" Manny asked.

"He can't solve anything!" squawked a voice from across the river. It was a scarlet macaw perched on a dead branch.

"I can so," Toucan cried out. "And I will too, you bossy girl."

"If you need help," Macaw said to Manny, "you should ask me. I'm a genius!"

"Maybe you could both help me," Manny said. "I want to know why one branch of this river has murky water and why the other branch has clear water."

"That is a mystery," Macaw squawked. "Maybe I should fly up river and find out."

"Maybe I should fly up river and find out," Toucan croaked.

"I know!" said Manny "Toucan can fly up the murky branch and Macaw can fly up the clear one. Then we can compare what you see."

The birds agreed. They each flew up a branch, leaving Manny alone. He watched a river turtle climb onto a log and go to sleep. He listened to a cicada buzzing in the forest. After awhile, the buzzing put Manny to sleep too. He dreamt he was flying over the rainforest with Macaw and Toucan.



Toucan's croaking woke him up. "It's a mess up there," he said. "There's a village where people are cutting down trees to plant corn and vegetables. They've even cut trees along the river. No wonder the water is so muddy!" Macaw landed on a nearby branch. She explained that there was a village along the clear branch that was surrounded by farms and trees. She had watched people picking oranges and papayas. She'd also seen several tourists in a canoe who looked at her through their binoculars.



"I guess they thought I was pretty cute!" Macaw squawked. "I talked to a parrot who lives with a family there. She said the village is working with a group called TIDE. She said TIDE helps people plant trees and sends tourists there to visit the rainforest."

"TIDE? I know TIDE," Manny said. "They patrol the ocean where I live, and keep people from hurting us manatees."

"I saw a truck with TIDE written on it," Toucan croaked.

"The man driving it told the farmers they shouldn't cut trees near the riverbank."

"Maybe TIDE can stop them from making the river so muddy," said Manny.

"You bet," Macaw squawked. "My friend Parrot said TIDE is even working to prevent forest fires."

Toucan shuddered. "Forest fires, how horrible!"

"I hate fires!" Macaw agreed.

"Fires?" asked Manny. "What are fires?"



Manny was sorry to leave Macaw and Toucan, but he had to get back to the sea. It was a long trip. He swam as fast as he could. Swimming with the current made it easier. Still, the sun was setting by the time he told his friends what he had learned from the two birds.

"Do you think the TIDE people can make the river clean again?" Snapper asked.

"I think so," said Grandma Dolphin. "Look at all the things they've done here in the marine reserve. They've stopped fishermen from using those nasty nets. They've even stopped them from dropping their anchors on the coral."

"I hope you're right," said Snapper. "I'm getting tired of this murky water."

"Me too," said Manny. "I don't want to bump into Turtle anymore."

"Me three," said Turtle. "I don't want to be bumped into."

