

Something Strange in Grandpa's Woods

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My feet race up the trail back to Grandpa's yard as fast as I can make them go. Grandpa's dog, Bandit, is at my heels. Our breath makes puffy clouds in the cold. My grandpa is scratching the ground with a hoe. "Grandpa, I heard something strange in your woods!" I tell him.

"Let's go find out what it is," he says. He takes my hand. Grandpa's big hand feels warm and safe.

My grandpa lives at the top of a mountain all by himself. There are no other children here, so sometimes I go into the woods with Bandit and pretend that I am Alex the Adventurer. I must stay near the trail and I can't go past the big rock. This way, Grandpa can always see me from the yard.

As we hike toward the big rock, I squeeze Grandpa's hand tighter.

Cack-cack-cack-cack! There's that sound! I grab Grandpa's leg. "What is that, Grandpa?" I whisper.

"It's the first sign of spring," he says. "How 'bout you go past the big rock a bit. See if you can find out what it is."

"By myself?" I ask.



“I promise it’s safe,” he tells me. “And I’ll stay here by the big rock where you can see me.”

“No,” I start to say. I look at Grandpa. His whole face seems to be smiling, even his eyes. I wonder what an adventurer would do. I stand up straighter and make a brave face. “Grandpa,” I say, “I think I can do it.”

Cack-cack-cack! The sound is even louder on the other side of the rock. I stop and look back. My face must not look so brave, because Grandpa says, “It’s all right, just a little further.”

Crunch! Crunch! My feet trample the dead leaves as I get closer. Suddenly there is silence. I hear Grandpa whisper, “Just sit down and watch.”

I sit, holding on to my knees. I am like a tree stump in the forest. My heart is beating fast. I do not see any animals. You can see a long way into the forest when there are no leaves. I look up. The trees look like skeletons against the sky. Nothing there. Just ahead of me there is a big puddle.





Cack-cack-cack! The sound explodes in front of me. My eyes zoom to the puddle. Several pairs of golden eyes are sticking up out of the water! Long brown legs float behind. “Frogs!” I yell.

Grandpa sits down beside me. “These are wood frogs,” he explains. “They’re calling to each other because it’s time for them to lay eggs.” He points at a big mound of frog eggs in the puddle. They look like jelly bubbles. “When you come back in a few weeks, we’ll check for tadpoles,” he tells me.

On my next visit, I hike down to the big puddle right away with Grandpa. Grandpa's woods are quiet now, except for the birds singing.

"The frogs are hiding," Grandpa explains. "They hide all year, except for the short time when they come out to lay eggs."

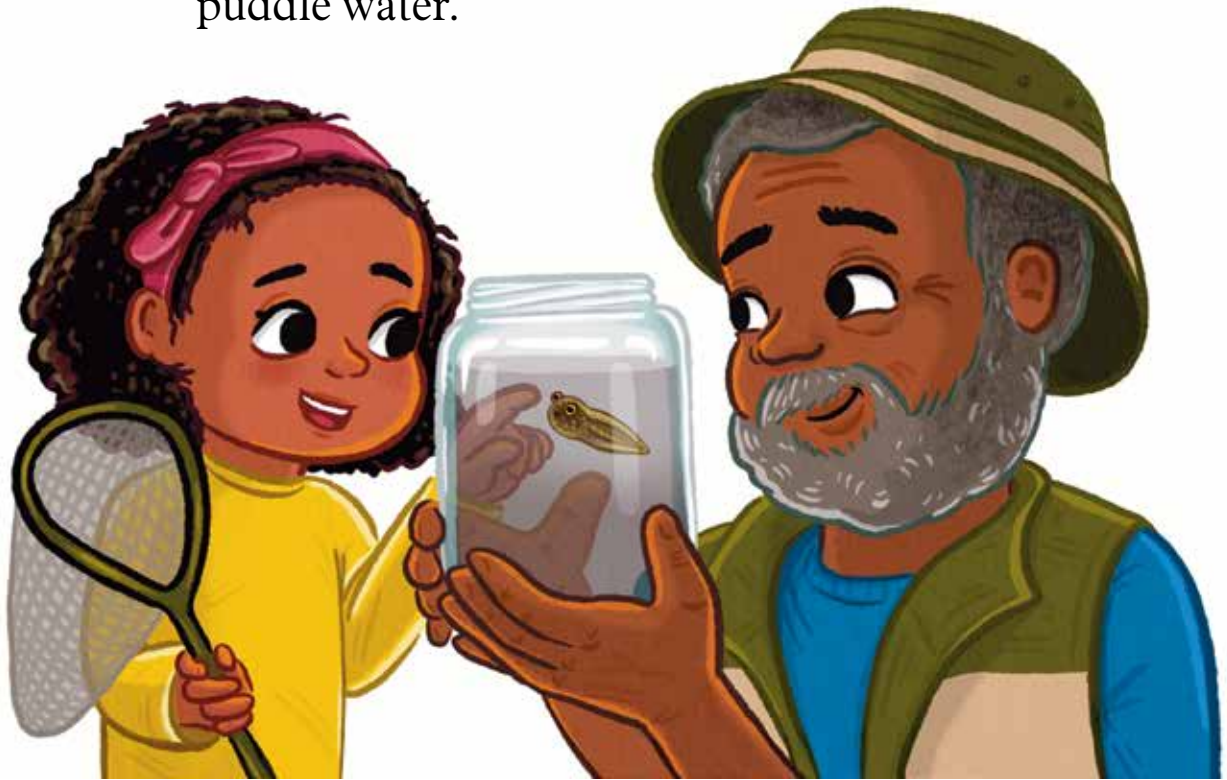
And I got to discover them, I think. I step closer to the puddle.

Suddenly, I smell something awful. "Grandpa," I say, "something stinks in your woods! And I'm sinking. My shoes are covered with mud!"

"Keep going, Alex, just a little further," Grandpa says.



I stand up straighter and take a big step forward. I'm Alex the Adventurer! *Squish!* goes the stinky mud when I lift up my shoes. Brown tadpoles are squirming at the edge of the puddle. Grandpa hands me a net. I scoop up a tadpole, and we put it in a jar of puddle water.



Grandpa helps me boil lettuce and spinach leaves in the microwave to feed my little brown tadpole. Each time I come back to Grandpa's house, the tadpole is bigger. First, its back legs come in. Then, one day, my tadpole has front legs. Grandpa says it's called a "froglet" now, and it's time for it to return to its puddle home.



On this trip to the big puddle, I am brave enough to go ahead of Grandpa. I even smile at the stinky mud when it creeps into my shoes. I reach into the jar and get the little froglet on my finger. I hold it out to the water's edge. It won't budge. "It's all right, just a little further," I say. I touch the stub of its shrinking tail, and *plip!* its body makes a tiny ripple in the water.

As I head back up the trail, holding Grandpa's hand, I look back and smile. There's something special in Grandpa's woods. 🐛

