

GEORGE THE CRANKY GUPPY - BOOK 1 SAMPLE

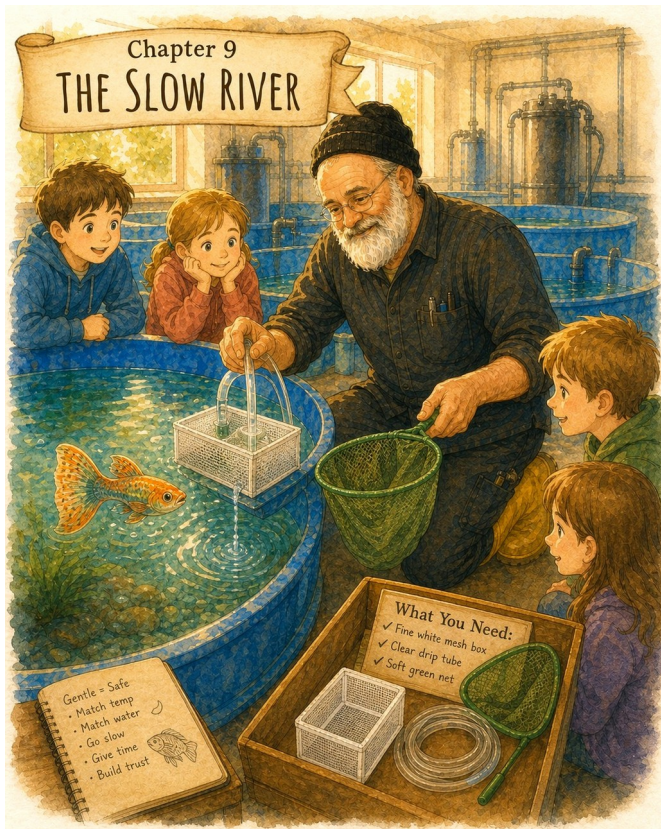
Yechiel's Fishery Farm Adventure

GEORGE THE CRANKY GUPPY

Book 1 Sample Chapter

Chapter 9: The Slow River

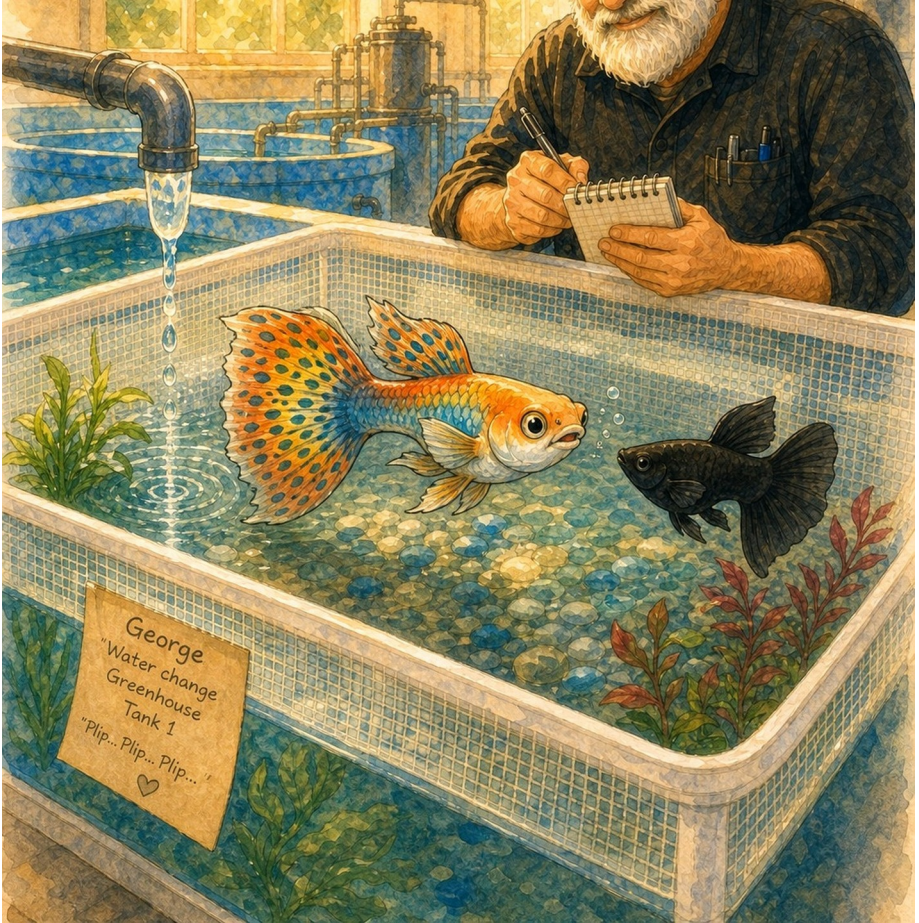
A dyslexia-friendly sample for parents, teachers, STEM educators, and young readers ages 7-10.



This sample is taken from Book 1: The Water Has Opinions.

CHAPTER 9

The Slow River



The slow river begins: a gentle bridge of mesh, tube, and patience.

The man came back ten minutes later carrying three things.

He carried, in his left hand, a small clear box made of fine white mesh—the sort of box that looks like a tiny lantern with no candle inside. He carried, in his right hand, a thin clear tube the length of his arm. And he carried, tucked under one elbow, a soft green net on a long handle, the kind of net that looks more like a question being asked than a tool being wielded.

He set them all down at the edge of the bog.

George—who had spent the last ten minutes hanging in the water with his clamped fin still clamped and Pinchy still beside him and Madame Molly still drifting in slow polite circles a respectful distance away—felt his small heart do something unusual.

It did not, exactly, jump. It did not, exactly, sink. It simply—waited.

The man unrolled the thin clear tube. He fastened one end of it, with a small silver clip, to a bag of water hanging from a wooden hook. The bag was full of clean, clear, yellow-lit water—the kind of water George had been thinking about all morning. His water. Greenhouse water.

The other end of the tube, he hung over the edge of the small mesh box. He clipped it. He set the drip—plip... plip... plip...—to a slow, steady rhythm, no faster than a sleeping heart.

Then he picked up the soft green net.

George knew, the way fish always know these things, that it was time.

"Easy now, little fellow," murmured the man, kneeling at the bog's edge again.

"Easy. Easy. Nothing's going to hurt you. We're going to do this the slow way. The right way. You and me."

The net came down through the water as gently as a leaf. George flicked, by old habit, away from it—but the net did not chase. The net simply waited, the way a hand waits for a small frightened animal to come on its own. After a moment, George—too tired to argue with anything—let his small bright body drift into it.

Up he went.

For a wobbly second the world above the water roared at him. The light went huge. The sky went enormous. The face of the kind old man—beard like a cloud, glasses like two small moons—filled his whole horizon, and one large soft hand came up under the net, supporting the bottom, the way you support a baby.

Then plip—he was lowered. Down into the small mesh box.

Down into a shallow pool of bog water—the same bog water he had been in all morning—but with the slow steady drip of his old yellow Greenhouse water entering it, drop by drop, plip, plip, plip, an unhurried river of home.

"There you are, friend," murmured the man. "There you are. Slow does it. Slow and slow and slow."

He did not pat the box. He did not tap on it the way clumsy people tap on aquariums. He only nodded once, to himself, and stood up, and walked a few paces away, and busied himself, very deliberately, with something else, so that the bog could go back to being the bog and George could go back to being George.

George hung in the box.

For a long moment he did not move at all.

Then—slowly—he felt something inside him ease.

It was not a big easing. It was a small easing. It was the easing of a single thread that had been pulled tight all morning and was now allowed, at last, to be a little slack. Then another thread. Then another. Plip came another drop of his old water into the box. Plip. Plip. The salt that had been pinching his gills was, with each drop, becoming the smallest fraction less salty. His body—his tired, small, lemon-pebble-faced body—could feel the change.

"...ohhh," breathed George.

It was, in his short and indignant life, the first sound he had ever made that was not a complaint.

Outside the mesh box, the bog had drifted quietly closer.

Madame Molly was the nearest. She hung a polite fin's-width from the wall of the box, her gills moving with their patient metronome rhythm, her gray eye gentle. Behind her, Pinchy stood on a little ridge of mud with his eyestalks fully up, watching with the seriousness of a crab attending a small private ceremony. Behind Pinchy, Groovy did what Groovy always did, which was nothing at all, except that the nothing today felt like the right kind of nothing—the nothing of an old tree standing watch.

And behind all of them, in the deeper water, two huge unblinking eyes hovered—Archie, taking it all in, refraction and all.

"Fresh, salty, in-between," murmured Madame Molly, very quietly, through the mesh. "Breathe first."

This time she did not say it to soothe him. She did not say it to dismiss him. She said it the way an old prayer is said by a person who has finally understood it—slowly, with weight, as if for the first time she could hear her own words.

George looked up at her through the mesh.

His gills moved—fwip, fwip—slower now. Slower. The accordion was tired. The accordion was, perhaps, going to rest.

"I'm sorry, dear," said Madame Molly suddenly. The words came out of her in a small puff, as if she had been holding them.

"For what," said George. "For not seeing you."

"You saw me."

"I looked at you. That isn't the same."

George thought about this. The drip went plip, plip, plip.

"No," he agreed quietly. "It isn't."

"I assumed," said Madame Molly. "That is the worst thing a peacekeeper can do, you know. We assume the peace is what everyone wants. Sometimes the peace is what we want, and what the other fish wants is to be believed."

"Mmm-mmm-mmm," hummed Groovy, who agreed with this very deeply, in the slow root-and- mud way that mangroves agree with things.

George let his fan-tail open, just a little. Just the tiniest unfolding, like a fan beginning to remember it was a fan.

A spot of orange. A spot of cobalt. A spot of emerald. "It's a beautiful tail," said Madame Molly softly.

"Yes," said George.

He did not, this time, say it cranky. He did not say it proud. He said it the way a fish says a true thing about himself, when his body is finally allowed, after a long bad morning, to be itself again.

The man, somewhere outside, hummed quietly while he wrote in his small wet notebook.

The drip went plip, plip, plip.

And for the first time since waking, George the cranky guppy could breathe.



Yechiel teaches a class of children about the fishery and the water that goes round and round.

Later that afternoon, while the slow drip kept on doing its kind work, the bog heard a new sound.

It was the sound of a great many small voices at once.

A class of children had come to the fishery - about a dozen of them, ages seven to ten, in bright shirts, with backpacks on, with their teacher behind them and the kind old man in front. They walked in pairs. They clutched their water bottles. Their eyes were the very large eyes children have when they are about to see something they have never seen before.

"Welcome, friends," said the kind old man kindly.

"Welcome to the fishery." The children stared at the tanks.

"Wow," said one.

"Wow," said another.

"Wowwww," said a small girl in a yellow shirt, who had spotted Madame Molly drifting calmly past the polite glass. "She's so pretty - and so CALM."

"That is Madame Molly," said the kind old man. "She is what we call a peacekeeper. She is a molly. Her body can handle fresh water and salty water, both at once. Now - would you all gather here, please -" He led them, gently, through the room. He showed them, very simply, how the water went round and round through the whole fishery.

From the big tank, to the filter, to the smaller tanks, back to the filter, back to the big tank, all day, all night, every day, every night. Nothing was thrown away. "This," he told them, "is called a recirculating system. The water keeps going. We use almost nothing new. We use the same water - and we keep it clean."

The children nodded seriously. Two of them wrote things in small notebooks. In the middle of the tour, two of the children, a small boy in a red shirt and his friend in blue, were standing by one of the smaller tanks. The boy in the red shirt was looking, with the particular careful seriousness of a seven-year-old, at a small chrome faucet on top of the tank.

"You know," he said quietly to his friend, "my mom always says - when I leave a room, I have to turn off the light, and close the water."

"My mom says that too," said the friend.

"And there is a faucet here. With water running." "Yes."

The boy in the red shirt looked at the faucet, then at the room around him, then at the faucet again. Nobody else seemed to be using the faucet. The water seemed to be running for no reason. He was, he thought, doing the responsible thing. Saving water was good. Everybody said so. He was a good helper.

He reached up, with great seriousness, and turned the faucet off. His friend looked impressed.

Inside the tank, the fish noticed instantly.

The flow that had been coming back from the filter - the soft steady current that brought clean cool water back to them every minute of every day - stopped.

The bubbles slowed.

The water grew, very slightly, still. "...oh," said one fish in the tank.

"...oh dear," said another.

"The water has stopped, friends." "The water has stopped."

"Why has the water stopped?"

But none of the children had heard them, of course, because none of the children could. The fish hung in the water, breathing carefully, doing the small worried thing fish do when something has changed and they do not yet know whether it is a small change or a big one.

The class moved on.

The kind old man, in front, was talking about feeding times. Nobody in the room had seen the small boy turn the faucet.

After the class had gone - after the bus had pulled away, after the last small wave of small hands at the window, after Yechiel had stood at the gate for a moment smiling the small dry smile a man smiles when a busload of children has just discovered a tank of fish for the first time - he turned and walked, squelch, squelch, squelch, slowly back to the workshop.

He did what he always did after a tour. He walked the whole fishery. Tank by tank. Pump by pump. Valve by valve. Filter by filter. He looked at the numbers on the cards. He listened to the hum of each pump. He felt the temperature of each tank with the back of one large soft hand on the glass.

He paused at the small tank in the middle of the row. He listened.

He frowned. He looked up.

He saw, after a moment, the small chrome faucet on top of the tank - turned off. The flow back from the filter was not running.

The fish in the tank were hovering, calmly, but a little too quietly. "...ah," said the kind old man.

He reached up, very gently, and turned the faucet back on.

The water went whoosh. The bubbles came back. The current resumed. The fish, who had been holding their small worried postures for nearly half an hour, all opened their fins at the same time in a single sigh of relief that, if any of the children had still been there, the children would have been able to feel through the glass.

The kind old man stood, hand still on the faucet, looking at the fish. He shook his head, slowly.

"Mmm," he said, half to himself. "Mmm-mmm." He patted the side of the tank, gently.

"I should have told you, friends," he said. "I should have told the children. It is my fault for not explaining. The water in this tank goes round and round and back again. It is not used water. It is the same water, cleaned and returned. The little fellow turned it off because his mother taught him the right thing. He saw water running. He turned it off. He thought he was helping. He was, in fact, being a very good boy.

"He just didn't know."

He took out the small wet notebook. He wrote one short careful line. He tucked it back.

He patted the tank one more time.

"To make mistakes is legitimate," he said, almost to himself. "But you have to catch them, and learn from them. We all make mistakes. - Next time the children come, friends, I will tell them about the recirculating system before I show them the faucets."

He walked on, slowly, squelch, squelch, squelch, to check the next tank.

The fish, behind him, fanned their fins in the lovely returning current and went back to being themselves.

End of Sample Chapter