

Nanny

X

Returns

**Nanny
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Madelyn Rosenberg

*illustrations by
Karen Donnelly*

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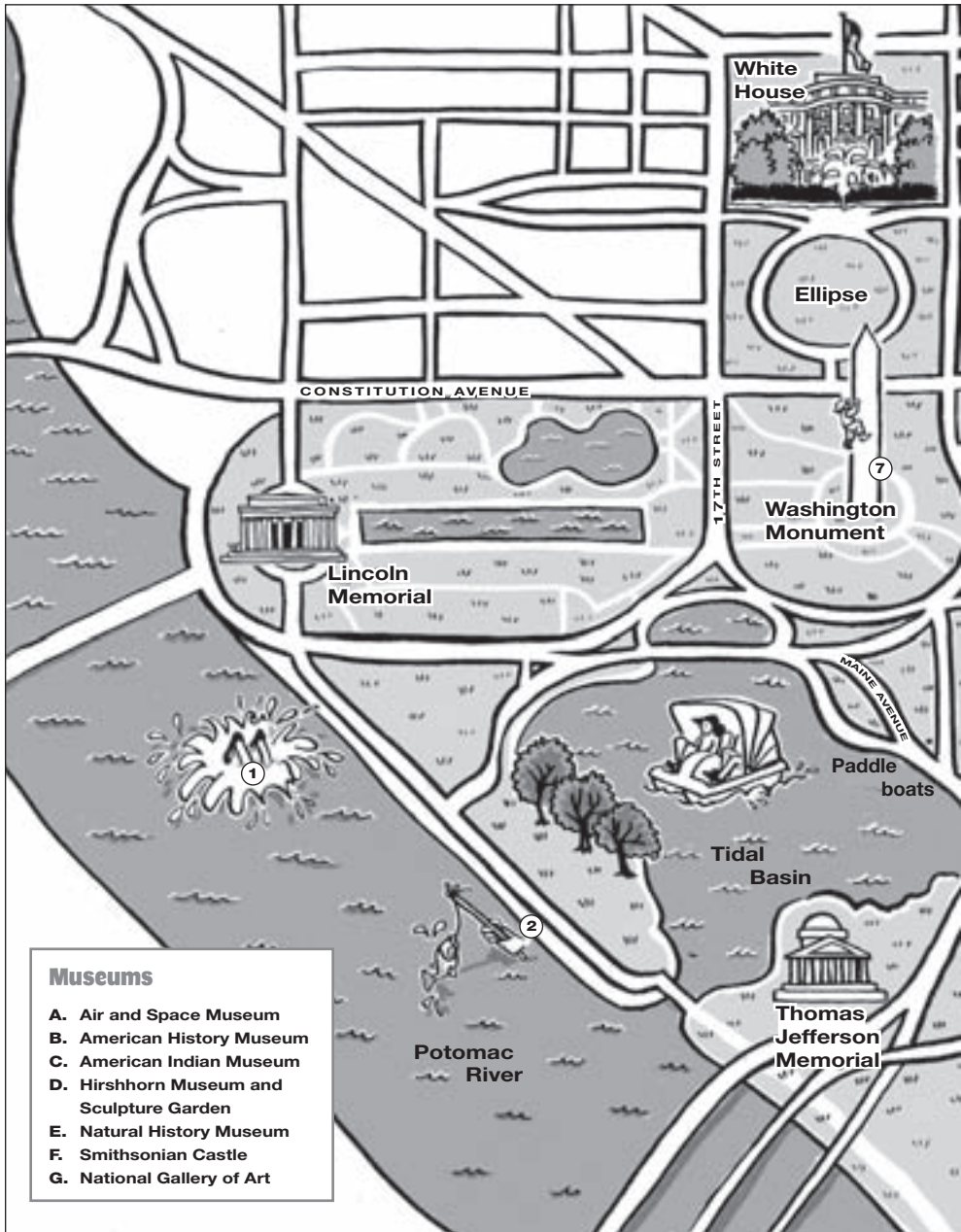
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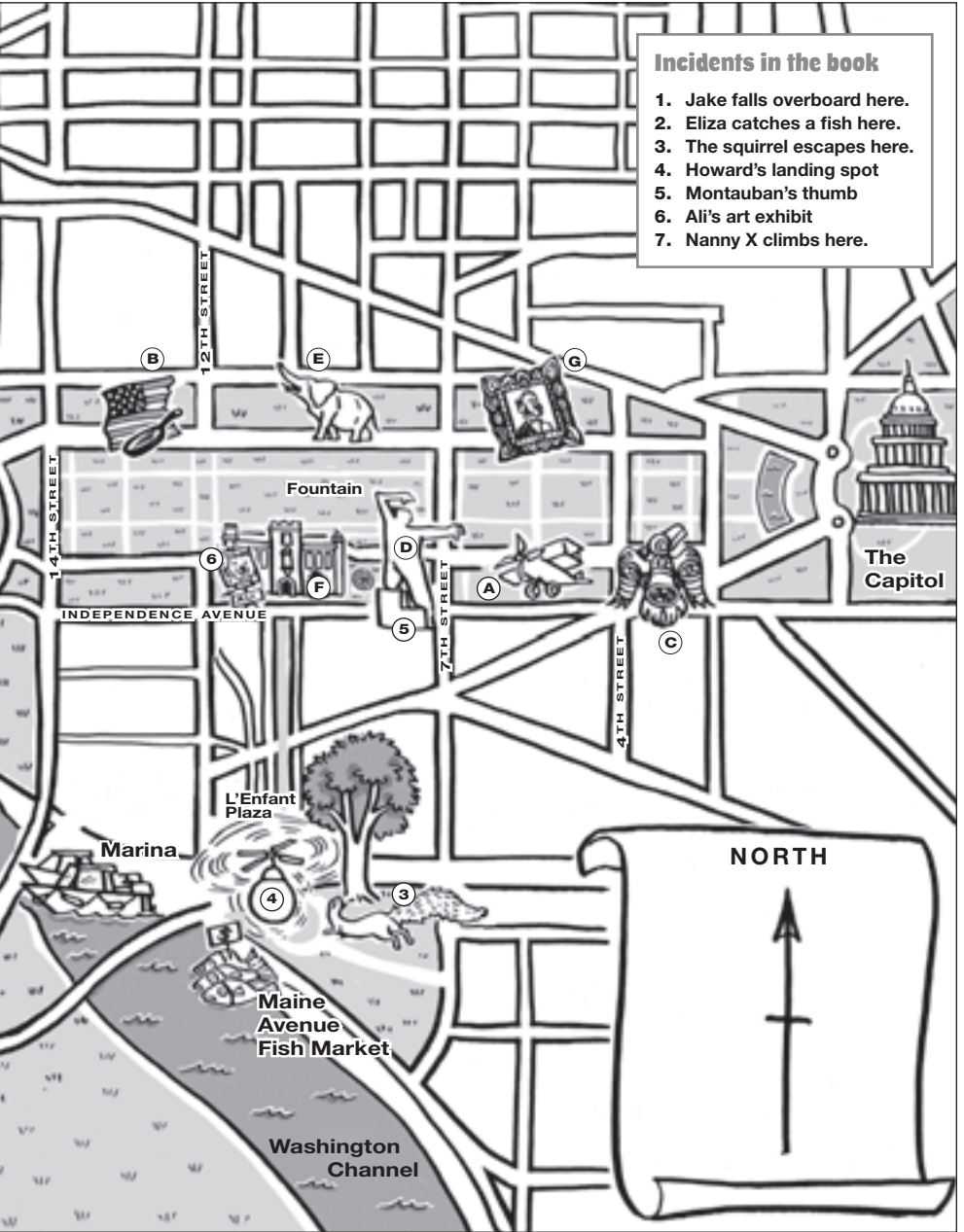
Strategic Planning and Vehicular Operations: Butch Lazorchak

Map of the National Mall



Incidents in the book

1. Jake falls overboard here.
2. Eliza catches a fish here.
3. The squirrel escapes here.
4. Howard's landing spot
5. Montauban's thumb
6. Ali's art exhibit
7. Nanny X climbs here.



ALSO BY *Madelyn Rosenberg*

Nanny X

Contents

1. Alison: Nanny X Returns	1
2. Jake: Nanny X Tries on a New Hat	5
3. Alison: Nanny X Has a Man Overboard	10
4. Jake: Nanny X Gets Some Help from a Purple Minnow	15
5. Alison: Nanny X Reels One In	20
6. Jake: Nanny X Gets Held Up by a Squirrel	24
7. Alison: Nanny X Grabs the Remote	30
8. Jake: Nanny X Gets Some Help from a Chimp	34
9. Alison: Nanny X Takes a Nap	38
10. Jake: Nanny X Heads for the White House	43
11. Alison: Nanny X Is Out of the Picture	48
12. Jake: Nanny X Reads Some Poetry	53
13. Alison: Nanny X Knows Her Alphabet	57
14. Jake: Nanny X Holds the Bag	61
15. Alison: Nanny X Skates Right By	65
16. Jake: Nanny X Learns Some History	72
17. Alison: Nanny X Sets the Trap	76
18. Jake: Something's Bugging Nanny X	80
19. Alison: Nanny X Learns About Insect Digestion	84
20. Jake: Nanny X Goes Rock Climbing	89
21. Alison: Nanny X Puts a Fork in it	96
Name the Artwork	98
Nanny X's Skating Tip No. 12: How to Stop	99

1. Alison

Nanny X Returns



I thought we'd get a new case the second Nanny X walked back into our living room wearing her motorcycle jacket and mirrored sunglasses. But she didn't say anything about a new case. She didn't even say anything about an old case. Instead, she acted like it was just a normal day and like she was a normal nanny, instead of an agent for NAP—Nanny Action Patrol.

I went for the direct approach, which is one of my specialties. "Do you have a new case we can help you with?"

"You may help me set the table," said Nanny X. "You may also help solve The Case of the Dog Who Needed to Be Walked."

Our dog's name is Yeti, after the abominable snowman, but he's not even a little abominable. I walked him, super fast, and when I came back inside, my brother had taken over The Case of the Ordinary Nanny.

"When are you going to get a new hat?" Jake asked her.

“I didn’t know you were interested in fashion, Jake Z,” said Nanny X.

On her first and best day of work, Nanny X had worn a straw gardening hat with pink flowers that served as antennas or radar or something. But she’d given it away to a chimp. You’d think she would have replaced it, if there was more work to do.

Maybe all of the crimes in Lovett, Virginia, had been solved and the only work Nanny X had left was taking care of me, Jake and our baby sister, Eliza. Or maybe there was something Nanny X wasn’t telling us.

“Nanny X?” I said Friday morning after our parents had rushed off to work, gulping coffee like it was oxygen.

“Yes, Alison?”

“What’s going on?”

“Life is going on,” she said. “Electrical currents are usually on. The toaster, as it happens, is also on.” Nanny X grabbed a piece of toast and added a thin layer of jam.

“That’s not what I meant,” I said. “I meant when are we going to *do* something?”

“We are going to catch the school bus in seven minutes.”

“That’s not what I meant, either,” I grumbled.

Nanny X looked at me like she had no idea what I was talking about. My parents had given me the same look when I told them everything we’d done with Nanny X that first afternoon. I thought it was best to tell them the truth: that we’d spent the day chasing a diamond smuggler. And when they didn’t quite believe me? I thought that was for the best, too.

Jake and I grabbed our backpacks while Nanny X put Eliza into the stroller. Then our nanny grabbed a diaper. I searched for the familiar silver buttons, hoping that it was

a secret phone, but it wasn't. Nanny X stuck the diaper into her bag.

"Ready for your math test?" she asked me. I hadn't told her I had one; she just knew. At first I thought it was spooky that she knew so much about us. Now I wanted her to know more, like how much we wanted a new assignment.

"Make sure you reread problem No. 7," she said. "And don't forget: Your grandmother's coming tonight and you need to straighten your room when you come home. Throwing dirty clothes in the closet does not count as straightening."

The bus hissed up. "I'll see you at 3:41," Nanny X said. "On the nose."

Stinky Malloy was already on the bus, wearing his yellow safety-patrol belt. "How's Nanny X?" he asked. His nanny, Boris, was a member of NAP, too.

"Normal," I told him.

"Normal-normal or normal for Nanny X?"

"Normal-normal," I said.

"Oh," said Stinky. "That's too bad."

School was just as ordinary as home was. The only almost interesting thing that happened was during my math test. I went back to double-check problem No. 7 like Nanny X had suggested. Sure enough, my brain had burped on that question. I blew away eraser dust and fixed my answer just as Ms. Bertram called, "Time."

The bus dropped us off at precisely 3:41. We were walking home with Nanny X when her phone rang—her regular phone, not her diaper phone, which had actually blown up on our last assignment.

"Hello, Mrs. P." She didn't call our mother "Gloria" or

“Mrs. Pringle” like everybody else. “What? That’s terrible. How did it happen?”

With her mirrored sunglasses, I couldn’t see enough of Nanny X’s face to know if the news was somebody-just-died terrible or we’re-having-fish-for-dinner terrible. She must have seen me watching her, because she held up her hand like a crossing guard: *Wait*.

“No,” she said. “Nothing that can’t be changed. Yes. Abso-tootly. I’ll let them know right away.”

She hung up. “Your grandmother,” she began, and I held my breath until she finished, “broke her leg in Zumba class.

“She’ll be fine,” Nanny X continued, “but she’s in the hospital for observation. Your parents are going to Newport News to check on her. So instead of your grandmother coming to your house for the weekend, you’re stuck with me instead.”

Jake grinned. Apparently he had forgotten how boring the last few days with Nanny X had been.

“Tut!” said Eliza, which is her word for “stuck.” She’s not so good with the “*st*” or “*k*” sounds yet.

Our parents hurried home and packed their bags while Nanny X went to her own apartment to “gather a few necessities.”

She came back with a small plaid suitcase and a pair of pink bunny slippers. Even I grinned when I saw what else she’d brought with her: a brand-new hat. I hoped there would be a new adventure to go along with it.

2. Jake

Nanny X Tries on a New Hat



I don't pay attention to clothes, but I would have noticed Nanny X's new hat no matter what. It was a fishing hat with lots of hooks and feathers, plus some lures that were shaped like minnows. Also, the hat was bright orange. That's good if you are trying to blend in with an orange grove. It's not so good if you are trying to be inconspicuous, which was one of my old reading-connection words. It means "not noticeable," and it's an important thing to be if you're a special agent.

Nanny X wasn't worried about being inconspicuous in our living room. She plunked down her suitcase and the bunny slippers.

"Arf," Yeti said. "Arf-arf-arf-arf-arf."

Nanny X took off her mirrored sunglasses and gave him a look. Ali says that Nanny X must have taken dog-training classes. I think she took classes in mind control instead,

because Yeti stopped barking and lifted a paw to give Nanny X a high five.

“Here’s my mother’s room number at the hospital,” my mom was saying. “And here’s our cell phone number, and the pediatrician, the dentist and Jake’s baseball coach. And here’s a list of people you can call if there’s an emergency.” I bet Nanny X had her own list of people to call in case of an emergency, but I didn’t say anything.

“They’ll be fine, Gloria,” my dad said. “Right, team?”

He waved from the passenger seat while my mom, who is a better driver, backed out of the driveway.

“What next?” I asked Nanny X.

“Dinner and then bed.”

“*Bed?*” That was not the answer Ali and I were looking for. But sure enough, right after dinner that’s where Nanny X sent us.

“But it’s a Friday night!” Ali said. She had a growl in her voice, but she’d been growly all week so it was hard to tell if this was a new mad or just a leftover.

“The early bird catches the worm,” Nanny X said, and turned out the lights.

She wasn’t kidding—about being early birds or about the worms. It was darkish when she woke us up, but in the light of the kitchen she showed us a tub that said Weinrib’s Premium Quality Canadian Night Crawlers. I wondered if it was one of her special gadgets. But when I opened the lid, I saw a bunch of worms wriggling around in a handful of dirt.

“That,” said Ali, “is disgusting.”

“Then we won’t count baiting hooks among your many talents,” Nanny X said. She seemed cheerful, which made me realize that she’d been a little growly all week, too.

The dark had turned to gray when we climbed into Nanny X's van, which was nothing like the kind of van a special agent would drive. She had some fuzzy dice hanging from the rearview mirror, and a canoe on the roof.

"Where are we going?" Ali asked as Nanny X buckled Eliza into a car seat.

"Downtown," said Nanny X.

"Downtown" is what people around here call Washington, D.C., which is only about ten minutes away from our house in Lovett, as long as there aren't a bunch of other cars on the road. At that time of the morning, there weren't any. Soon we were standing on the bank of the Potomac River with our canoe beside us. I wondered how sturdy it was.

"Don't worry," Nanny X said. "You'll be wearing a life jacket."

I guess she knew swimming was not one of my special talents; sinking was. At the pool, I was still in the Tadpole Group. My friend Ethan was a Shark.

We strapped on our life jackets and helped Nanny X shove the canoe into the water. Yeti sat in the front like a mermaid statue on a pirate ship. Except his hair stuck out all over instead of just flowing out of his head. Plus, his tail did not have a fishy shape.

Nanny X loaded Eliza's stroller and dropped the diaper bag next to it. It made a *Moooooooooooooooo* when it landed. Ali smiled for the first time all morning when she heard it. The sound was from *Moo, Sweet Cow* the noisiest book ever written and one of Nanny X's secret weapons.

It was a sign.

"I knew it!" I said as Nanny X used a paddle to push us off. She handed the other paddle to Ali. "This is more than a fishing trip, isn't it?"

“There are fishing trips,” Nanny X said, “and there are *fishing* trips.”

“So we have a case?” asked Ali, who might have been holding her breath a little.

“We have a case,” said Nanny X. “We would have had it sooner, but HQ said they wanted a nanny who had more experience with fish. ‘I know fish,’ I told them. ‘Hoo boy, do I know fish.’ Then they said they wanted a nanny who could blend in. ‘I blend,’ I said. ‘Like a chameleon, I blend.’ Finally they said we could have the case. It’s a big one. It concerns the president.”

She gave us these details: Earlier in the week, someone going by the name of The Angler sent a note to the president with a fishhook inside it. The note came with a giant package, and in the package was a giant fish. A sculpted fish, not a real one.

“How big?” I asked.

“This big,” said Nanny X. She raised one arm over her head. Then she went back to paddling.

I used to think an angler was somebody who studied angles, until I found out from Ethan that it was someone who fishes. Plus, it could be someone who thinks up crazy schemes. Ethan does both of those things. I wondered if the new bad guy did, too.

“The sculpture is described as being nine feet tall and made out of copper,” Nanny X said. “The note contained instructions. And a threat.”

“What kind of instructions?” I asked. I knew we were in deeper water because I could see seaweed and things. What I couldn’t see was the bottom.

“What kind of threat?” asked Ali.

Nanny X answered both of us. “The Angler wants the sculpture to be installed on the White House lawn and

treated like a national treasure. If it's not installed by noon today..." She paused. "If it is not installed by noon, The Angler says that some of the nation's greatest treasures will be in jeopardy."

"Be in jeopardy how?" said Ali. "Jeopardy" is a reading-connection word that means "at risk or in danger."

Nanny X shrugged. "The note didn't say."

"Why don't they just put the sculpture on the lawn?" I asked. "They have lots of empty space." Plus, a fish sculpture would be a lot more interesting than a bunch of roses.

"The president must not succumb to threats," said Nanny X. "Otherwise, think of what other people will try to do. Blackmail. Extortion. Not to mention the fact that the White House lawn could end up looking like Lulu's Cement Garden." Lulu's was a shop in Lovett that sold fountains and birdbaths, plus twelve-foot chickens. I thought it was a very interesting shop. I guess the president didn't agree. Neither did Nanny X.

"Shouldn't we be guarding something?" Ali said. "Like the art museum or the Declaration of Independence?"

"Guards we have," said Nanny X. "It isn't noon yet. If he's calling himself The Angler, he may be fishing at this very moment. I'd like to catch him before he strikes." She steered the boat close to Roosevelt Island, where the current wasn't as strong. Then she put down her paddle and pulled out a night crawler. "As long as we're here," she said, "who wants to go first?"

3. Alison

Nanny X Has a Man Overboard



Be careful what you wish for.

That's what my parents always say. I'd wished and wished that we could be on a new assignment with Nanny X. And now here we were in a canoe on the Potomac, way earlier than I ever wake up on Saturday morning, staring into a tangle of pink worms.

At least we had a case. But why did it take NAP so long to give it to us? Maybe they had decided, like the CIA, that Nanny X was getting too old for the special-agent business. Maybe they'd decided Nanny X wasn't good enough. Or what if the problem wasn't Nanny X? What if it was us?

I didn't want to believe it, but the possibility stuck to me, like dog hair on a sweater. The only way to unstick it was to solve the case. Fast.

"Don't you think The Angler will be watching the White House?" I said. "To see if the president installs the statue?"

“Possibly,” she said. “But let’s look at what we know. The Angler is an artist whose work features a fish. Artists like to be near the things that inspire them. You should know that, Alison.”

It was true. One of my paintings had just been chosen for an outdoor exhibit on the National Mall, which is not a place where people shop, by the way, but an open space in D.C. with lots of museums and monuments. I’d submitted a painting of Yeti for the exhibit. When I had to fill out the part about what inspired me, I wrote: “I am inspired by the people and animals that I see every day.” If The Angler was inspired by fish, maybe we *were* in the right place.

“My theory is that The Angler would want to stay close to the White House in order to carry out his threat,” Nanny X said. “The Potomac is a mile from the White House—and from museums that are stuffed with treasures. I believe The Angler is close by. Waiting.”

My mind was already making a list of treasures that could be at risk: The National Gallery of Art had paintings by loads of famous people. Abraham Lincoln’s hat and Kermit the Frog were in the Museum of American History. The books in the Library of Congress were treasures. So were the cherry trees near the Tidal Basin, and themselves the other monuments.

Nanny X pressed a night crawler onto her hook and cast her line into the water. She let it dangle there and handed the container to Jake, who baited his hook and handed the night crawlers to me.

“No, thanks,” I said.

“I know they’re not your cup of tea, Alison,” said Nanny X, which made me think about night crawlers squirming

around in a teacup, which was disgusting. “Why don’t you try tying some flies?”

Flies sounded even worse than worms. But instead of handing me a tub of flies, Nanny X reached into a tackle box and handed me a book: *Fly-Tying for Beginners* by Buzz Bachelder. Then she handed me a bag of feathers, a hook, a gripper-thingy and a spool of thick black thread. The idea was to tie the feathers to the hook and make it look like a real insect. Only none of the flies in the book looked like insects I’d seen before. They were fun to tie, though. I started with yellow and orange feathers, and wound the thread around them. It was a great way to practice my knot-tying, which is something I do to keep from biting my fingernails. Also, the flies were kind of cute.

Jake and I took turns helping Nanny X paddle. We paused on the other side of the island, and she reached into the diaper bag and pulled out a bottle of baby powder. When she turned the end with the holes in it, no puffs of powder came out. Instead, the bottom of the bottle opened to reveal a lens. A baby-powder spyglass. She peered into the trees of Roosevelt Island. Then she passed the glass to me. It was crystal clear—not like regular binoculars, where you can never get the focus right. I didn’t see anything suspicious, though.

The sky was brighter as we moved the canoe downstream toward the Tidal Basin and into deeper water. White clouds floated like marshmallows, toasted by the sun.

Nanny X took one of my flies, a blue one, and added it to her hat. It was like when my parents put one of my drawings on the refrigerator. Eliza sat on the bottom of the boat, babbling and scribbling in a coloring book.

“When I go fishing with Ethan,” Jake said, “I catch something.”

He had a point. I hadn’t even seen many ripples in the water. Oh, the water moved, and you could see the current and feel it as it tugged our boat downstream. But those little ripples you’re supposed to see when a fish comes up for air or a turtle ducks his head underwater? Nothing.

We spotted some boaters upstream and Nanny X held the spyglass to her sunglasses. I could tell even without the spyglass that they didn’t look like the sort of people who had just threatened the president with a nine-foot fish sculpture. It made me wonder if the White House got other strange threats, like: *Sign this law or I’ll hit you with a salami.*

Then I heard a *bloop*, like the sound the water drops make when the sink is leaking. I saw a ripple.

“There!” I pointed. “A fish.”

“I don’t see anything.” Jake moved to the front of the boat, where Yeti was perched, and stood up to get a better view.

Yeti must have seen something in the water, too, because his nose was pointed right at the ripple.

The canoe rocked back and forth. Jake held up his fishing rod like he was on a tightrope and that was the pole he needed for balance.

Then the canoe hit a rush of water. We bounced, like we were going over a speed bump. The canoe turned sideways.

“Weeeee,” yelled Eliza.

My brother yelled, too. He dropped his fishing pole and tumbled over the side of the canoe, right into the Potomac.

“Jake!” My brother swims about as well as a copper sculpture of a fish. “Jake!”

Yeti jumped in after him, because he’s pretty much the best dog in the world. But the current snatched them both, and they drifted down the middle of the river.