

CHAPTER 3: MYAKKA RIVER

Section 1: Myakka Head

Two otters explore a dead hollow tree. Half its trunk is on the shore; the other half is in Myakka River. They swim into the hollow from underneath. Inside, they climb above the water. The space is dry, and air comes through holes made by woodpeckers. It is a perfect den, and the mother gives birth to three kits.

Three weeks later, the mother and father begin teaching them to swim and to catch food. At three months old, the otters could live without their parents, but the children may stay with their parents for two years.

One day in June, it rains, and the otters play. Leaves and sticks are slick with wetness, so the otters make a slide on the riverbank. Crayfish scuttle from the rising river. The otters make a game of catching and eating them.

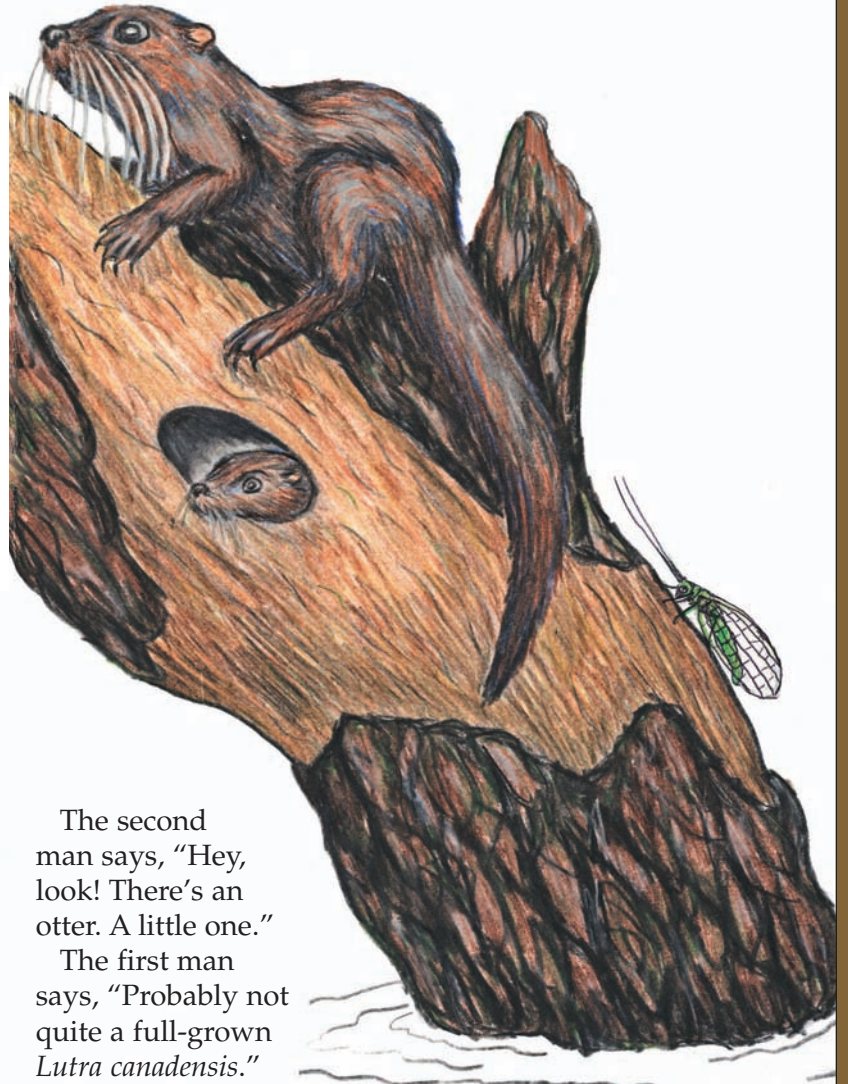
It rains and rains. Their den is flooded inside, so the otters sit outside. A young otter dives for a fish, and the father scolds. Otters are good swimmers, but the current is too strong, and it carries the otter downstream.

Dressed in rain slickers, two men stand near a pickup truck. They watch the Myakka River flow over S.R. 64. The otter hears them talking.

"I can't remember flooding like this," a man says.

"Summer of 1992, it was so bad that they closed S.R. 70," a second man says.

The first man says, "I'm worried about the phosphate mine north of here. It sends clean water into the river, but I hope it stops while the water is this high."



The second man says, "Hey, look! There's an otter. A little one."

The first man says, "Probably not quite a full-grown *Lutra canadensis*."

"A what?" the second man asks.

"*Lutra canadensis* is the scientific name for the North American river otter," the first man says.

"I'll call her Lu, for short." The second man tugs on his cap. "Hey, Lu. You'd better go under rather than over the highway."

Even as the man speaks, Lu dives into the current. It rushes her under the highway. She surfaces on the other side.

The man claps his hands. "Nice going, Lu. Enjoy your swim!"