

The father grabs the net and runs to the boy. "Pull it up before it lets go."

The boy yanks the pole up. The blue crab drops, but the father swings the net and catches it.

The mother cries, "Good teamwork!"

Lu eats another crayfish and another.

The father tells the boy, "Bring the bucket over here. I'll get this crab out of the net." The crab clacks its claws as it struggles to get free.

When the boy turns, he sees Lu. "Hey, Dad — there's something —"

"— I don't care," the father says. He watches the crab. "Just get me the bucket."

The boy sees Lu dive into the river with a crayfish in her mouth. He carries the bucket to his father. The father shakes the crab loose from the net, and it falls into the bucket. Beneath the pier, Lu eats the crayfish.

"I can't believe the size of this crab," the father says.

"It's probably all we'll catch tonight," the boy says.

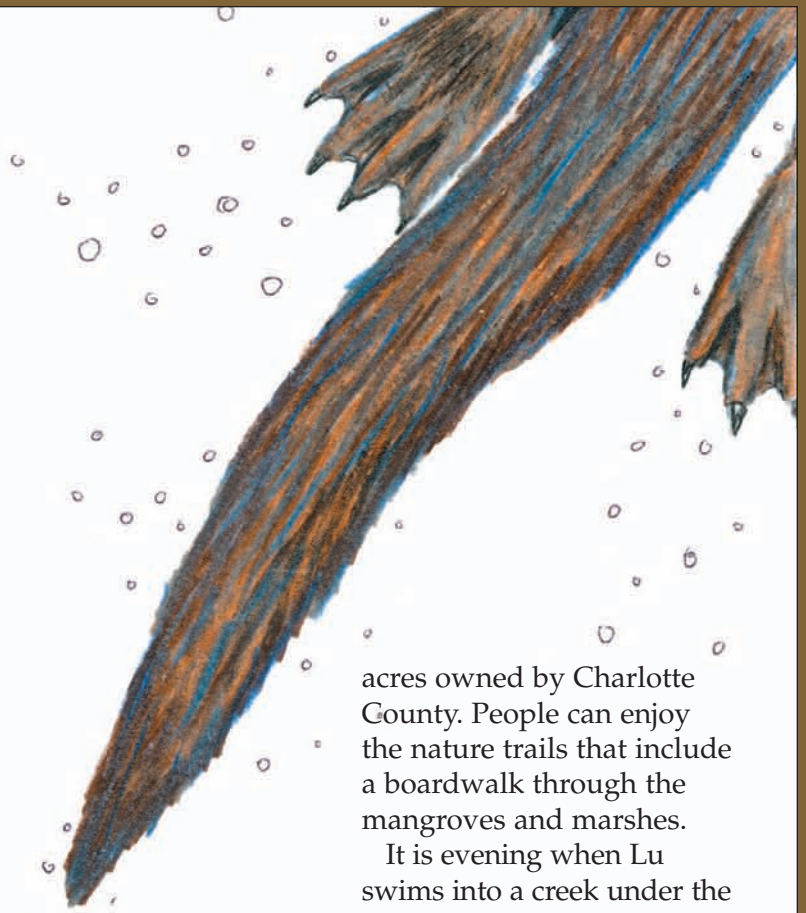
"Why is that?" the mother asks. "Because something ate all the bait," the boy says.

"You're kidding! What was it?" the mother asks.

The boy says, "I don't know. It was brown, had whiskers like a cat and a long, thick tail."

The father says, "Sounds like an otter. Other fishermen have complained about otters stealing bait and fish."

Lu swims under the pier and the bridge for S.R. 776.



Section 12: Tippecanoe Bay

On the eastern shore, Lu sees mangroves. A fox squirrel sits on a branch and a reddish egret wades near the roots.

She turns away from the shore and swims into deep water. She can feel the push of the current. Then she sees a sawfish swimming toward her. Using her strong tail, she steers into Tippecanoe Bay. The sawfish does not chase her as she swims into the shallow water at the mouth of Sam Knight Creek.

On the bay is Tippecanoe Environmental Park, 380

acres owned by Charlotte County. People can enjoy the nature trails that include a boardwalk through the mangroves and marshes.

It is evening when Lu swims into a creek under the oaks. She hears buzzing and sees a wasp. It flies to a nest hanging from a limb.

Grapevines curl through the branches. Near the ground, the vines are as thick as an otter's tail. Cabbage palms stand together and among the oaks.

A strangler fig grows around one tree as if it were hugging it. Lu hears tapping and sees a red-bellied woodpecker pecking at the trunk. Underneath, a skunk digs in the leaf mold for a palmetto bug. A centipede runs past a raccoon holding a crayfish. Crayfish is Lu's favorite food, so maybe Lu has found a home.

