

SWAMP

A yellow and red swamp boat with a large propeller is shown on a river. The boat is viewed from behind, showing a person in a white shirt and a black cap at the helm. The boat is surrounded by tall grasses and a dense forest in the background. The water is dark and reflects the surrounding greenery.

T H E H E I G H T S

A white picket fence runs across the bottom of the page, partially obscuring the text below it. The fence is made of vertical slats and has a classic, decorative appearance.

Chapter 1



The sky was gray. It was going to rain soon. Jake Woods didn't want to go outside. But he didn't have a choice. Jake was in jail. And he had work duty. He had to go outside.

Jake lined up for the prison bus. He was on trash detail. All the men wore orange jumpsuits. They all looked alike.

Jake sat alone. He looked out the

window. He had just turned 21. And his life was a mess. He hadn't done anything too bad. Not bad enough to be in jail.

Jake's father left. Jake dropped out of school. Jake started stealing animals in the Everglades. Alligators sold for \$200 on the black market.

This was illegal. But he made a living. Because he knew the swamp, Jake was good at stealing.

But Jake didn't get arrested for stealing. He was in jail for something he didn't do. He was innocent.

The trouble started one night. Jake stopped in a store for bread. It was 3 o'clock in the morning. Jake had been out stealing. The store was empty. A clerk was behind the

counter. He read the newspaper.

Jake went to the back of the store. He got the bread. As he turned around he saw Rip Poole. Rip wasn't a good friend. But Jake knew him. Rip was a bad guy.

"Hey, Rip, what's going on?" Jake asked.

Rip smiled. But Jake thought he looked strange.

"Nothing, yet," Rip answered.

Jake turned around. He walked to the counter. Rip followed him. Jake put the bread on the counter.

Rip pulled out a gun! He pointed it at the clerk.

"Open the cash register! Make it fast!" Rip yelled.

Jake was shocked.

“Put the gun away, Rip!” Jake yelled. “What are you doing?”

“Shut up, Jake!” was all Rip said.

The clerk froze. Then he stepped on a silent alarm. The silent alarm called the police.

“I can’t open the drawer,” the clerk said.

“Come on, Rip. Stop this!” Jake yelled.

“I told you to shut up!” yelled Rip.

Then Rip grabbed the clerk by the shirt. He pushed the gun into his chest.

“Get the money now!” Rip ordered.

The clerk opened the cash drawer. Rip jumped over the counter. He pushed the clerk aside. He grabbed the money. Just then, two police cars

pulled up.

Jake and Rip saw the flashing lights. Rip was mad.

“You called the cops!” yelled Rip.

Then Rip raised the gun. He pointed it at the clerk. Then he fired.

Two police officers ran into the store.

“Don’t shoot!” Jake yelled.

He raised his hands. Rip ran out the back door. But two more officers were waiting for him. They told Rip to drop his gun. He didn’t drop it. He shot at the officers. They shot back. Rip fell to the ground. He was dead.

The police arrested Jake. They didn’t believe his story. Jake was a known thief. They thought he was with Rip. The clerk couldn’t help

him. He was in a coma. The EMT said he wouldn't last the night.

Jake was sentenced to 20 years. The court thought Jake aided in an armed robbery. That made him as guilty as Rip. At the time, Jake was only 18.

Three years passed. Jake knew he couldn't last 17 more years. He thought of all kinds of escape plans. But only one made sense. Jake knew the Everglades very well. All he had to do was get close. Then he could run. They'd never find him.

Rafael and Ana sat on the beach. They watched Antonio and Lilia play in the ocean. Franco was with his friends for spring break this year.

It was the third day of their vacation in Florida. But Rafael was bored.

“Aren’t you tired of just sitting on the beach?” Rafael asked.

“No,” answered Ana. “It’s great. But I know you’re tired of the beach. This is just like being in the Heights. Only warmer. What do you want to do?”

“How about taking an airboat ride in the Everglades? It should be a lot of fun,” Rafael said.

“Go find out more about it,” said Ana.

Rafael made a few calls. Alvarez Airboat Tours had an opening the next day. Rafael booked the tour.

“Don’t worry about lunch. It’s included. I’ll bring lunch for you

and your family. See you tomorrow morning, 8 o'clock," Chris Alvarez said.

At dinner, Rafael told Lilia and Antonio about the airboat. They were both excited.

"Will we see any alligators?" Antonio asked.

"I think we will," said Rafael. "There are a lot of them in the Everglades. We have to get up very early tomorrow. It's an hour away. It's an all-day trip!"

Ana smiled at her family. She knew her kids and Rafael couldn't wait! They loved adventure. She liked to relax. That's why she liked the Heights. A Silva family adventure often went to pieces.

Chapter 2



Jake Woods got out of bed. He was in a bad mood. Every day was the same in jail. Today would be different for Jake. But he didn't know that yet.

Jake boarded the prison bus. Time for work detail. He closed his eyes. And he tried to sleep. A guard woke him up an hour later.

Jake knew exactly where he

was. This was the swamp where he caught alligators.

His mind was racing. They were on the edge of the Everglades. He was sure he could escape.

It was close to noon. Jake moved to the edge of the swamp. The guards weren't watching him. He ran into the swamp.

Jake ran deep into the swamp. Soon he heard a lot of noise. The guards discovered he was missing!

A lot of people would be looking for him. Jake had to get out of his orange jumpsuit.

Jake remembered a small marina. He could steal an airboat. Jake ran toward Alvarez's Airboat Tours.

He ran to the swamp. The water

was deep. The air was hot. He was sweating.

It was dangerous in the Everglades. There were alligators and snakes. But Jake wasn't afraid of them. He was afraid of getting caught.

Jake watched Chris Alvarez fill up his boat with gas. He swam to the dock. Then got out of the water. Chris didn't hear him. Jake picked up a hammer. He wrapped it in a rag. Then he slammed it down on Chris's head.

Jake dragged Chris to the boathouse. Then he changed into Chris's clothes. He tied him up with strong rope. He gagged him.

Tomorrow's date was circled on

Chris's calendar. It read: 8 *a.m.*, *day tour—the Silva family.*

“What a great cover!” Jake thought. “I’ll pretend to be Chris Alvarez. I’ll take the Silvas on a tour of the Everglades.”

Jake found a small gun in a drawer. It was loaded. He put the gun in his pocket. All he had to do was wait for the Silvas.

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