

## CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Travis let a string of cusswords fly, and Stumpy broke off a branch and hurled it at Viola's feet while Owen stood stiff with anger, meeting Viola's fly-eyed gaze with narrowed eyes.

"I know what that is," she said, wiping her nose with the palm of her hand and nodding toward the Water Wonder 4000.

"Go away!" Owen yelled.

"That's a submarine," Viola said, and then whipped a tissue out of her pocket and blew her nose.

"Mind your own business," Travis snapped.

"Yeah!" Stumpy hollered.

"A submersible," Viola said.

The boys looked at each other.

"Go away," Owen said again, knowing full well that Viola wasn't going anywhere.

"It came from Canada." Viola waved a jagged-edged piece of wood at them. "This is the shipping label that was on the crate."

Travis narrowed his eyes. "What crate?"

"The crate the submarine was in, dummy," Viola said.

"Let me see that." Owen yanked the piece of wood out of Viola's hand and studied it.

Sure enough, a label with two addresses was on the wood.

The submarine had come *from* Water Wonder Technologies, Inc., in British Columbia, Canada.

It had been going *to* Sun and Sand Tropical Resort in Miami, Florida.

Owen hated it when Viola figured things out before he did.

"So what?" he said.

"So, you've got to tell somebody about this submarine." Viola wiped at her watery eyes.

"No way!" Travis said.

"Then that's the same as stealing." Viola gestured

toward the little red submarine. "I bet that cost a lot of money. You can't just keep it."

"We can do anything we want to. Right, Owen?" Stumpy said.

Owen tossed the piece of wood into the bushes. Pete and Leroy trotted over and sniffed it.

"Who said we're keeping it?" Owen said.

Travis and Stumpy looked at each other, then stared at Owen, waiting.

"Then what are you going to do about it?" Viola said.

"We're, um, we're going to, um . . ." Owen shuffled the toe of his sneaker in the leaves, his mind racing. "We're going to call the railroad company and tell them all about it," he said. "So you can go on home now."

He smiled at Viola.

A big, fake smile.

"Yeah," Travis said. "You can go on home now." He pushed Viola. Not hard. But just enough to make her stumble a little and send her glasses sliding down her nose.

"I know all about submarines," she said. "I did my science fair project on submarines last year. I know *everything* about them."

"You do not," Owen said.

But he knew she was right.

Viola was always right.

Owen was certain that Viola *did* know everything about submarines.

Viola knew everything about everything.

Aggravation swirled around inside Owen like a tornado.

Viola folded her arms and lifted her chin. "That's an ambient-pressure submarine," she said.

"There ain't no such thing as that!" Travis said.

Owen kicked a piece of gravel in her direction. "Go away," he said.

Viola sneezed. "Okay," she said. "I'll go tell Earlene y'all need the phone number of the railroad company so you can call them and tell them about the submarine." She pushed past the boys and started up the slope toward the tracks.

"Wait!" Owen called after her.

Viola turned. Little red splotches had begun to appear on her neck.

"Look, Viola," Owen said. "We *are* going to call the railroad company. We just want to check this thing out first." He lifted his eyebrows and waited.

Viola scratched her neck.



"So, just don't say anything to anybody about it, okay?" he said.

"Well . . ." Viola looked over Owen's shoulder at the submarine. "Maybe."

"What's wrong with your neck?" Stumpy said.

Viola scratched. "I'm allergic to pine," she said. "And ragweed and pigweed and—"

"Then you better go home before you die," Travis said.

Stumpy snorted.

Owen grinned.

Viola tossed her hair over her shoulder and stomped off toward home. But she hadn't gotten far when she whirled around and said, "Something's wrong with that frog of yours, Owen." She blew her nose, wiped her eyes, and added, "I know everything about frogs."

Owen's tornado of aggravation was spinning so fast it took all the words right out of his head. All he could think of to say was "You do not."

Which is exactly what he said.

"You do not!"

Owen watched Viola disappear up the tracks. Then he turned to Travis and Stumpy and said, "Let's get that submarine in the pond before Viola ruins everything."

## CHAPTER SIXTEEN

This is impossible," Travis said, wiping sweat off his forehead.

Stumpy plopped down in the pine needles and shook his head. "We can't do this," he said.

Owen examined the knot in the rope they had tied around the submarine. "Maybe we should bring the tractor down here," he said.

"There's too many trees and stuff in the way," Travis said. "Besides, you don't even know how to drive that tractor."

"I do so," Owen said. "Well, sort of." He had ridden on his grandfather's tractor a few times when his dad mowed the field behind the barn. He could probably figure out how to drive it. But Travis was right about

the trees. It would be impossible to drive the tractor from the barn to the train tracks.

The boys had worked all afternoon.

First, they had searched inside the submarine for some kind of instructions about how to run it. They had looked under the seats and in the back between the scuba tanks and even in the bushes and weeds on the slope beside the tracks.

But they hadn't found a thing.

Owen had used his most convincing voice to assure Travis and Stumpy that they *would* figure out how to run the Water Wonder 4000, but they had to get it down to the pond first.

So they set to work tying rope around the submarine and trying to move it. They had actually managed to drag it a couple of feet, but it was obvious that the Water Wonder 4000 was just too heavy for them to get it all the way to the pond. And even if they could pull it, they were going to have to cut down some trees and bushes to clear a path first.

"Okay," Owen said, "here's what we've got to do." He snapped a couple of branches off a scraggly pine tree. "We've got to get some saws and clippers and stuff and start clearing a path."

"That'll take forever," Travis said.

"No, it won't." Owen pulled at a tangle of vines. "There's three of us. We just have to find some good tools."

"What about my dad's Weedwhacker?" Stumpy said.

Owen shook his head. "Naw. Earlene'll hear that. We just need saws and hedge clippers and stuff like that."

The boys bumped their fists together while agreeing to meet in the barn later that day. Then they raced home to see what tools they could find to clear a path.

Owen stashed some tools in the corner of the barn and then headed down to the pond to check on Tooley. He sat on the rotting dock and stared glumly out across the water. The air was thick with heat. A shiny black turtle was sunning on a log at the edge of the pond. A bullfrog floated among a cluster of leaves nearby. Owen could just make out its bulging yellow eyes and the top of its green head.

Maybe he should try to catch that frog so Tooley would have a friend.

Owen sighed.

His niggle came back.

The niggle had started as a tiny seed of a thought.

Then it had begun to grow, bigger and bigger, until it became a full-grown thought.

*Maybe he should let Tooley go.*

Owen looked down into the cage. Tooley floated in the dirty water, nestled up against the side, one webbed foot resting on the chicken wire.

He looked terrible.

Owen felt terrible.

He had worked so hard to catch that frog. He had stalked him for weeks, scanning the edges of the pond, searching the leaves and logs. It had been so much fun, trying to figure out if the frog he spotted was *his* frog. The one with the heart-shaped red spot between his eyes.

And then, when he had finally caught him, he had figured Tooley Graham would be his forever.

But now Owen was starting to think maybe he had made a mistake.

He reached into the water and touched Tooley's foot. The frog swam lazily to the other side of the cage . . .

. . . away from Owen.

"Tooley Graham," Owen whispered.

The frog nestled down into the slimy mud on the bottom of the pond and closed his eyes.

Owen let out a sigh so big and so loud that the turtle scampered off the log and into the pond, sending little ripples across the surface of the water.

Owen whispered "Tooley Graham" one more time before trudging slowly back up the path to meet Travis and Stumpy in the barn.

## CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

Owen and Travis and Stumpy sawed and clipped and dug and hacked.

They sawed down scruffy little pine trees.

They clipped overhanging branches.

They dug up clumps of thorny bushes.

They hacked at tangled vines.

Pete and Leroy joined them from time to time, chewing on twigs, rooting their noses in the freshly dug dirt, then scampering back through the woods toward home again.

Inch by inch, the three boys were clearing a path from the submarine to the pond. By the time the afternoon sun had begun to sink, the backs of their necks were burned and they were only halfway there.

Travis tossed a saw onto a clump of vines. "That's it," he said. "I'm sick of doing this."

"Me, too," Stumpy said, leaning on the garden hoe he had been using to hack up the roots of a bush.

"We can't stop now," Owen said. "We're almost halfway there."

"It's too hot," Travis said. "We can work on it some more in the morning, when it's cooler." He picked up the saw and tossed it into the wheelbarrow with a clang. "Besides," he added, "we don't even know how we're going to get that sub down to the pond, anyways."

Stumpy nodded in agreement.

"And," Travis went on, "even if we do get it to the pond, we don't even know how to drive it." He tossed another tool into the wheelbarrow. "I'm going home."

"Me, too," Stumpy said.

Quitters, Owen thought.

But he wasn't about to say it out loud. If he did, they were liable to quit for good.

All he could do was let out a big, heavy sigh and help them load the tools into the wheelbarrow and head back to the barn.

But just as they had finished stashing the tools



under a tarp in the corner of the barn, Owen's mood went from bad to worse.

Viola stepped through the barn door and said, "So, what are y'all gonna do about that submarine?"

Owen pushed past her and stormed out, followed by Travis and Stumpy.

Viola hurried after them. "I know what y'all are doing," she said.

Owen whirled around. "You want a trophy, Viola?"

Much to Owen's surprise, Viola blushed. "What do you mean?" she said.

"I mean, a trophy for being Genius of the World or something," Owen snapped.

Travis and Stumpy slapped their knees, sputtering with laughter.

"You said you were going to call the railroad company and tell them about that submarine," Viola said.

"I *am*," Owen said, and marched off toward the back porch and sat on the bottom step. Travis and Stumpy did the same.

Viola stood in the middle of the yard with her hands on her hips while the three boys tried to ignore her.

"Y'all are clearing trees and stuff so you can get that submarine down to the pond," she called over to them.

Owen jumped up and hissed, "Shhhhh!"

He shot a quick look up at the back door, hoping like anything that Earlene wasn't standing there.

She wasn't.

Owen moved closer to Viola and whispered, "Look, Viola, somebody's gonna have to come get that submarine, right?" He glanced up at the back door again. "I mean, after I call the railroad company and tell them about it," he added.

Viola shot a look at Travis, then Stumpy, then back at Owen. "So, why are you clearing stuff out of the woods?"

"We're just trying to help."

"I'm not stupid, Owen," she said.

"No, you're just dumb," Stumpy called from the back steps. He and Travis pushed each other and roared with laughter.

"Don't worry," Owen said. "Me and Travis and Stumpy are taking care of everything, okay?"

Viola narrowed her eyes and cocked her head. "Just

admit it, Owen," she said. "Y'all are going to put that submarine in the pond, aren't you?"

Silence.

Viola whirled around and stomped off toward the hedge, calling over her shoulder, "I'm telling on y'all!"

"Wait!" Owen hollered.

Viola stopped.

Owen ran over to her, his mind racing. He had to think of some way to keep Viola from ruining everything with the submarine.

"Look, Viola," Owen said. "We *are* going to call the railroad company. I swear." He held his hand up and looked solemnly at Viola.

"But you're going to put it in the pond first, aren't you?" she said.

Owen glanced over at Travis and Stumpy, then he said, "Yes."

Travis stamped his foot. "Dang, Owen!" he said.

"I knew it!" Viola gave Owen one of her smug faces.

"Trust me, Viola," Owen said. "We're going to take care of everything." He wiggled his eyebrows at her. "Okay?"

The silence hung thick and heavy in the summer air. Owen studied Viola's freckled face, her glasses

perched down on the end of her nose. He had an uneasy feeling about her. She was liable to tell somebody about the submarine before he had a chance to get it in the pond.

Owen made an instant decision to take a gamble. "You can help us if you want to," he said. "Get some tools and meet us down there tomorrow."

Travis and Stumpy stopped laughing and stared at Owen, wide-eyed and openmouthed. Owen shot them a look that said, *Trust me, I know what I'm doing.*

Viola flapped her hand at Owen. "Yeah, right," she said. "Like I want to spend my day cutting down trees. Besides," she added, "you don't even know if that submarine works. Y'all are stupid to do all that work cutting down trees and stuff before you even *test* it."

"Aw, heck," Owen said. "That's a piece of cake. We got all that stuff figured out."

"Well, good luck," Viola said, turning to leave.

Owen tried not to look too relieved.

"If you change your mind, just come on down," he called after her.

As soon as Viola disappeared through the opening into her yard, Travis and Stumpy hurried over to Owen.

"What the heck did you do *that* for?" Travis said.

"Do what?" Owen said.

"Tell her she could help us."

"Because . . ." Owen beamed at Travis and Stumpy. "If she thinks she's in on our plan, she'll keep her yap shut and won't tell on us." Owen said this with an air of confidence, but on the inside, he had some big worries about trusting Viola. "Besides," he added, "I know Viola better than anybody. There is no way she's going to go down there in those woods and help us."

## CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

I got Jarvis's hacksaw," Viola said when she stepped out of the woods into the clearing. "I decided to come help y'all, after all."

Owen's stomach sank clear down to his feet.

Travis and Stumpy stared at Viola with their mouths hanging open.

Then Travis's face turned red and he stomped over to Owen. "Way to go, Owen!" he hollered. "*Now* what are we gonna do?"

Owen looked down at his feet, his mind racing. His sneakers were coated with dirt, his legs scraped and bruised. He looked at his hands, red and blistered. Sawing and clipping and digging and hacking was hard work. Much harder than he had thought it would be.

He and Travis and Stumpy had gotten to the

clearing early that morning, when the dew was still clinging to the wildflowers and ferns. But they hadn't made much progress. The ground was hard and full of rocks and roots. Some of the bushes pulled right up, but others had to be dug and chopped and yanked. Even the smallest trees required sawing and hacking. Branches had to be hauled off to the side. Large rocks had to be rolled away.

"I got Jarvis's hacksaw," Viola repeated, waving it in the air. She was wearing garden gloves that were way too big and a khaki canvas hat pulled down over her ears.

"Great," Owen said glumly. He flung his arm in the direction of one of the larger pine trees. "Then cut that down."

"Okay." Viola ran over to the tree and started sawing.

"Closer to the bottom," Owen said. "You can't leave a big ole stump there."

Owen looked at Travis and shrugged. What else could he do? Besides, they *could* use Viola's help. Why not let her do all the hard work with the larger trees and bushes? Maybe inviting Viola to help really *had* been a good idea.

But Travis and Stumpy didn't look like they thought Viola helping was a good idea. They looked like they were mad as all get-out.

While Viola happily sawed away at the tree, Owen whispered to Travis and Stumpy, explaining to them why Viola helping them was a good idea.

"... and *then*," he whispered, "we'll only have to work on these puny little bushes while she does all the hard stuff."

He grinned.

Stumpy looked convinced, but Travis was still red-faced, glaring over at Viola and looking like he was ready to storm out of there.

"... and *then*," Owen whispered, "we'll tell her we changed our minds about putting the submarine in the pond and that the railroad company is sending someone to pick it up in a couple of days, so she doesn't need to come back down here. And *then*"—he glanced over at Viola, who had paused from her sawing to blow her nose—"we can figure out how to get the submarine into the pond and go for a ride!"

Owen watched Travis's face change ever so slowly from mad-as-all-get-out to maybe-that-will-work.



So the boys picked up their tools and set to work sawing and clipping and digging and hacking again.

That night after dinner, Owen sat by his grandfather's bed and told him some more about Tooley.

He told him about how Tooley wasn't quite as green as he used to be.

How his throat wasn't quite as yellow and the heart-shaped spot wasn't quite as red.

He told him about how Tooley didn't seem to be eating the water bugs and crickets in the cage and how he didn't swim very much anymore.

"And last night," Owen said, "I heard some other bullfrogs down there in the pond and, well, um, I felt kind of bad."

Owen's grandfather raised his bushy white eyebrows.

"I mean, you know . . ." Owen picked at the dirt under his fingernails. "'Cause those other frogs were free, but, um, Tooley's in a cage."

His grandfather's mouth was a little droopy on one side. He nodded at Owen.

Owen could hear his mother out in the hall putting

sheets and pillowcases in the linen closet. He leaned toward his grandfather's bed and said in a low voice, "I'm thinking maybe I should let him go."

There.

He had said it.

The thought that had been niggling at him for so long.

And now that he had said it, he felt better.

That night, the train clattered down the tracks behind the house.

The *clatter, clatter, clatter* started low and got louder and louder until it became a *whoosh* and then trailed off to a faint *clatter, clatter, clatter* again.

And then it was gone.

As Owen sat in the window of his bedroom, breathing in the scent of honeysuckle and new-mown grass, listening to the crickets and bullfrogs, he knew he had to do two things.

He had to let Tooley go . . .

. . . and . . .

. . . he had to get that submarine into the pond.

## CHAPTER NINETEEN

Owen had begged and pleaded and begged and pleaded to stay home from church.

Begging and pleading almost never worked.

But today a miracle had happened.

His mother had said yes!

So he and Travis and Stumpy had worked all morning, sawing and clipping and digging and hacking.

Viola had come down there to tell them she had to go over to Macon with her cousin but they could use Jarvis's hacksaw if they wanted to.

Travis had told her they didn't need her and they definitely didn't need anything that belonged to her loser brother, Jarvis.

After a while, they had gotten tired of sawing and clipping and digging and hacking, so they gathered

around the Water Wonder 4000 to figure out how they were going to get it down to the pond once they were finished clearing the trees and bushes.

"Maybe we could take the wheels off a wagon, tie 'em on the sides, and just roll it," Stumpy said.

"That's dumb," Travis said. He slapped the side of the submarine, making a hollow, clanging noise that echoed through the trees.

"Yeah," Owen said, "that *is* pretty dumb, Stumpy."

Stumpy shrugged.

"Maybe we could pull it behind our bikes," Owen said.

Travis rolled his eyes.

"What if we got some more kids to help us pull it?" Travis said.

Owen shook his head. "Naw, this is our secret," he said. "Other kids'll just mess things up."

"Like Viola?" Travis said.

Owen blushed. He *had* messed things up by letting Viola get involved, but Travis didn't have to keep reminding him.

Stumpy pushed on the submarine with his foot. "It's just too heavy," he said. "We'll never do it."

"Yes, we will," Owen said.

"And then you're just going to drive it all around the pond like you know all about driving a submarine, right, Owen?" Travis asked as he hurled a stick over the top of the Water Wonder 4000.

"Look," Owen snapped, "if y'all don't want to help me anymore, then go on home. *I'm* the one that found this submarine and *I'm* going to get it in the pond and *I'm* going to take it for a ride with or without y'all." He stomped through the weeds and scrambled up the slope toward the train tracks.

"Wait!" Travis called after him.

Owen stopped.

"Okay," Travis said, "we'll help. But we've got to figure out how to do it."

"*We will*," Owen said, stamping his foot.

Travis and Stumpy joined Owen up by the tracks. They stood in silence, looking down at the submarine, so red and shiny and fantastic. The silver dolphin sparkled in the sun that filtered through the trees.

"Let's go up to the hayloft and think of some more ideas," Owen said.

So they headed to the barn and climbed up the ladder to the hayloft. They took out the list of ideas they had made earlier and sat on the dusty wooden floor and

studied them. They talked about them and added to them and argued about them until they were all just plain sick of it.

"I'm sick of this," Travis said.

"Me, too," Stumpy said.

Owen had to admit, he was sick of it, too. He didn't want to keep *talking* about getting the submarine into the pond.

He wanted to *get* the submarine into the pond.

"Let's go check on Tooley," he said.

So the boys climbed down out of the hayloft, tucked the wrinkled notebook paper with their list of ideas under the tarp with the tools, and headed to the pond.

Owen lifted Tooley out of the cage and set him on his lap. The bullfrog settled down in the folds of Owen's shorts and closed his eyes.

"Do you think he's sick?" Owen said.

"Naw." Travis nudged Tooley gently with his finger. "He's just tired."

"Let's make the cage bigger," Stumpy said.

"Yeah," Travis said. "We could make it go all the way around the dock."

But Owen kept quiet.

He knew that Tooley didn't need a bigger cage.

He knew that Tooley needed to be free.

He needed to swim around Graham Pond with the other frogs.

He needed to climb on the logs and float on the leaves and nestle in the mud and eat the bugs . . .

. . . but not in a cage.

"We could catch more frogs and have a whole frog town!" Stumpy said.

"Yeah!" Travis tossed a rock into the middle of the pond.

*Ploink.*

Tooley opened one eye . . .

. . . and then closed it.

Travis and Stumpy went on and on about the frog town they could make and how it could have little froggy apartments made out of logs and froggy restaurants where the bugs would be and there could even be a froggy mayor.

"Tooley!" Stumpy said. "Tooley could be the mayor."

But Owen kept quiet.

He knew that Tooley didn't want to be the mayor of Frog Town.

Tooley wanted to be free.

## CHAPTER TWENTY

Eat your squash," Earlene snapped.

Owen looked down at the blob of yellow mush on the plate in front of him.

Earlene rattled pans and clanged spoons and mumbled to herself while she huffed around the kitchen.

She was annoyed that Owen had managed to beg and plead his way out of church that morning.

She was annoyed that he had stayed gone all day without telling anybody where he was.

And she was annoyed that he didn't want to eat that blob of nasty squash.

"We're leaving for church in five minutes," Owen's mother called from upstairs.

The Jesters always went to church twice on Sundays. Once in the morning and once in the evening. Owen



was still amazed that his begging and pleading had worked that morning, but he knew there was no way he was going to get out of going to church that evening.

"Eat your squash," Earlene snapped again.

Owen dipped the tip of his fork into the yellow mush and then dabbed it onto his tongue.

That seemed to annoy Earlene even more. She yanked the plate off the table, muttering about starving children somewhere in the world, and dumped the squash into the dog bowl.

"Go get ready for church," she said.

While Mrs. Suttles put a smiley-face sticker on his Bible-passage work sheet, Owen stared out the window and thought about Tooley.

He had been thinking and thinking and thinking and, somewhere between listening to Travis and Stumpy talk about Frog Town and swirling his fork around in Earlene's mushy yellow squash, he had made a decision.

As soon as he got home from church, he was going to go down to the pond and let Tooley go.

So now he was sitting on a metal chair in the basement of Fork Creek Baptist Church, wishing Mrs. Suttles would hurry up with those smiley-face stickers and

hoping, hoping, hoping that his parents didn't want to stay for Bible Bingo.

Sometimes they did.

If they stayed for Bible Bingo, it would be dark when they got home and he wouldn't be allowed to go down to the pond.

Owen stood in a circle with the other kids as they said some prayers and sang some songs and then they were finally done. He raced upstairs to find his parents, hoping, hoping, hoping they were not sitting at the Bible Bingo table.

They weren't.

Owen said a silent *yahoo* in his head and raced out to the car.

As the sun sank lower in the sky, the pond seemed to be settling in for the night.

The moss-covered logs along the edges were empty. No turtles basking in the summer sun.

The water was still and smooth as glass. No water bugs leaving ripples across the surface.

Not a single pair of yellow bullfrog eyes peering out from the floating leaves that gathered in clumps in the shadows.

The low hum of crickets was starting, interrupted from time to time by the buzz of a mosquito.

Owen lifted the lid of the perfect cage.

He reached in and scooped Tooley up. Then he sat on the end of the dock and had a little chat with the big green bullfrog.

He told him about how much fun it had been to come down to the pond every day and look for him.

He praised him for his ability to avoid being captured for so long. The way he had darted out of the net quick as lightning. The way he had shot out from under the colander.

And then he apologized for a few things.

"I'm sorry I made you stay in that cage so long," Owen said to Tooley. "Viola said you never wanted to be Tooley Graham and that you just want to be a frog," Owen said. "So, well, if that's true, and, um, I guess maybe it is 'cause Viola's almost always right even though she's so dumb, well, anyway, I'm sorry about that."

The frog moved a little in Owen's lap.

"And, um . . ." Owen stroked Tooley's back. "I'm sorry if I made you sad."

Owen leaned over the edge of the dock and lowered Tooley into the water.

“Goodbye, Tooley,” he said.

Then he let go of the most beautiful bullfrog in Carter, Georgia, and watched as it pushed its long froggy legs and disappeared into the pond without so much as a splash.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

Owen knew Travis and Stumpy would be mad as hornets that he had let Tooley go.

But he didn't care.

Tooley had been *his* frog, not theirs.

Travis stomped around the dock muttering "Dang it!" and "No fair!" and Stumpy glared and repeated everything Travis said.

"And then we spent half the dern summer building that cage!" Travis hollered.

"Yeah!" Stumpy hollered.

Owen looked at the perfect cage attached to the edge of the dock.

The *empty* perfect cage.

Then he gazed out across the pond, wishing he could

see into the murky water and catch a glimpse of Tooley, swimming happily with the other frogs, resting peacefully among the rotting leaves on the muddy bottom. Maybe enjoying a snack, chomping on a juicy cricket.

"You think your stupid girlfriend, Viola, is right about everything," Travis snapped.

"She's not my girlfriend," Owen said.

"She is, too," Stumpy said.

"She is not!"

Back and forth and on and on they went, arguing and hollering and snapping and accusing until they all just ran out of steam and fell silent.

A dragonfly hovered in the air in front of them, then flitted off to the other side of the pond.

"So, um, are y'all still going to help me with the submarine?" Owen said.

"Get your girlfriend to help you," Travis said. Then he stormed past Owen and headed up the path into the woods.

Stumpy stood there for a minute, looking down at his feet, then said, "Uh, see ya," before heading off up the path after Travis.

Owen looked for the biggest rock he could find and

hurled it with all his might into the pond. It hit with a loud *ploink*, sending a spray of water into the air.

*Now* what was he going to do?

How was he ever going to get that submarine into the pond?

Owen sawed and clipped and dug and hacked all by himself. He hummed as he worked. And with each branch he sawed and each thorny bush he dug up, he began to feel better . . .

. . . until Viola stepped out of the woods and said, "I'm here!"

Owen groaned.

"Y'all got a lot done yesterday," Viola said, glancing around her.

Owen tossed a tangle of branches onto a pile of brush at the edge of the clearing. "Look, Viola," he said. "If you want to help, then help, but don't talk."

"Why are you so mean?" Viola said, putting on her dirty work gloves.

Owen didn't answer.

In fact, Owen didn't answer any of the gazillion questions Viola asked.

He didn't answer when she asked where Travis and Stumpy were.

He didn't answer when she asked if he had called the railroad company yet.

And he didn't answer when she asked if he was going to the pond to visit that sad old frog of his later that day.

Owen wasn't going to say one word to Viola.

But then . . .

. . . she went and said something that made him change his plans.

"I know how to get that submarine down to the pond."

Owen stopped his sawing.

He studied Viola.

Her big fly-eyes peering at him through her thick glasses.

Her freckly white legs.

Her know-it-all face.

"How?" he said.



## CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

Owen sat on a patch of moss beside the Water Wonder 4000 and listened to Viola going on and on in her school-teacher voice.

About the ancient Egyptians.

About pyramids.

About simple machines.

Blah.

Blah.

Blah.

“Are you even *listening* to me, Owen?” she said, jabbing a finger at him. Her eyes were red and watery. Every few minutes, she wiped at her nose with a balled-up tissue.

“Look, Viola,” he said. “I don’t even know what the

heck you're talking about. What do Egyptians have to do with anything?"

So Viola explained it again.

"Some people think that the Egyptians moved those big stones for their pyramids by rolling them on logs." She went to the front of the submarine and squatted down. "See, we get some logs and we put them under the front." She patted the ground. "*Then*, we pull the submarine over the logs, which will be easy because the logs will roll."

She stood up and brushed dirt off her knees. "Then, as it rolls along, we take logs from behind it and move them back up to the front again . . . until we get to the pond."

A lightbulb went on.

Owen got it.

He snapped his fingers. "*Roll* it to the pond! Yeah!" He jumped up and ran over to the submarine. "And the pond is downhill from here, so that'll make it even easier."

Owen couldn't control himself.

He beamed at Viola.

Viola beamed back.

Owen sure was glad Travis and Stumpy weren't here to see all this beaming.

"Now we just have to get some logs," Viola said, rubbing her watery eyes and scratching at the pink rash that had appeared on her neck.

Owen's beam disappeared in a snap.

"How are we supposed to do that?" he said.

"Well, um . . ." Viola looked up into the trees. "We could . . . um . . . well . . . let's see . . ."

Owen never would have believed this day would come . . .

. . . the day Viola didn't know everything.

It figured.

All those times she had irritated the heck out of him by knowing everything and now here was the one time he *needed* her to know everything and she didn't.

And then, a lightbulb went on again.

"Pipes!" he said.

Viola stared at him through her thick glasses. "Pipes?"

"Yeah, you know, pipes. Like water pipes." Owen jerked his head in the direction of the new subdivision out by the main highway. "They're putting in a water line over on Sycamore Road and there's tons of PVC pipes just laying there in the ditch."

"That's perfect!" Viola said.

They beamed at each other again.

"There's only one problem," Viola said.

Owen rolled his eyes. Here was Miss Know-It-All again.

"We can't do it by ourselves," she said.

"Why not?"

"Look, Owen," she said. "Even if we could get enough pipes down here, we'd need help pulling that thing." She flung her arm in the direction of the submarine. "We'd need two people pulling and two people moving the pipes from the back to the front."

Dang it!

Viola was right again.

"We need Travis and Stumpy," she said.

"No way," Owen said. "They're quitters."

"Then we'll have to find somebody else." Viola squeezed her lips together and came close to making that smug face that Owen hated.

He shook his head. "If we tell anybody else, some grownup is gonna find out, for sure, and then everything'll be messed up."

"Then we need Travis and Stumpy," Viola said.

Owen sighed.

Then, as if Viola hadn't irritated him enough, she said, "You *are* going to make sure that submarine works before you try to move it, right?"

"Well, um, yeah, um, sure," he said.

Viola lifted her eyebrows and looked at Owen with her fly-eyes.

"Then do it now," she said. "Go on in there and start that thing up."

Owen looked over at the Water Wonder 4000. He had crawled up inside it lots of times now. He had studied the switches, examined the gauges, fiddled with the joystick. But could he actually *start* that submarine? Could he really make it run? Maybe he was just going to have to float around inside the submarine in the pond and not actually drive it.

"I will," Owen said. "As soon as we get Travis and Stumpy back down here."

Owen wasn't in the mood for Earlene's grumpiness.

When she snapped at him about the dirt he had tracked into the house, he shrugged.

When she lectured him about the dangers of the rotting floorboards in the hayloft, he nodded.

And when she gave him the evil eye for spilling milk on the kitchen table, he just said, "Heh."

Then he wiped up the milk, swept up the dirt, motioned for Pete and Leroy, and went outside to sit on the back steps and hope that Viola stayed away.

But Owen only sat on the back steps for about a minute. His insides were just too wound up to sit still.

It had been more than a week since he had first heard the thud, the crack of wood, the tumble, tumble, tumble sound.

The sound of the submarine falling off the train.

Somebody was going to be looking for that submarine. Owen was sure of it.

If he was going to get the Water Wonder 4000 into Graham Pond, he was going to have to do it soon.

But there were so many problems.

How was he going to convince Travis and Stumpy to help him when they were so mad at him for letting Tooley go?

And even if they agreed to help, could the four of them actually get the submarine to the pond?

And if they *did* get the submarine to the pond, would he really be able to drive it?

Problems.

Problems.

Problems.

But Owen was determined.

If he didn't do this now, when would he ever have another chance to drive a little submarine around in a pond?

Never.

He would never have a chance to do something like that ever again.

Owen strolled around the yard, kicking at dirt and tossing sticks for Pete and Leroy to chase.

Then he headed down to the woods and made his way along the path toward the train tracks. Pete and Leroy darted in and out of the woods, eager to chase anything Owen happened to throw, pinecones, sticks, even rocks.

Then, just as Owen neared the fork in the path, Leroy came leaping out of the woods with something in his mouth.

Not a pinecone.

Not a stick.

Not a rock.

But something made of paper.

"What's that?" Owen said, clapping his hands for Leroy to come to him.

The dog trotted happily over and sat in front of Owen, his tail swishing back and forth in the pine needles on the path.

"Let me see that, fella," Owen said.

Leroy had brought Owen a warped and wrinkled paperback book.

Owen brushed dirt off the book and examined it.

On the cover was a picture.

A picture of the Water Wonder 4000.

Above the picture were two words that made Owen let out a whoop that echoed through the trees.

The two words were

## **OPERATOR'S MANUAL**



## CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

Owen lay on his stomach in the hayloft and read the operator's manual for the submarine . . .

. . . starting with "Chapter 1: Getting to Know Your Water Wonder 4000" . . .

. . . and ending with "Chapter 6: Safety Tips and Troubleshooting."

Owen didn't understand some of the stuff.

Actually, Owen didn't understand a *lot* of the stuff.

There were sections on ambient pressure and buoyancy and ballasts and lots of other things he had never heard of. But there was plenty of stuff that seemed easy enough and made Owen think he really could do this.

He *could* drive the submarine around Graham Pond.

He tucked the manual under his shirt, climbed down out of the hayloft, jumped on his bike, and raced over to Tupelo Road.

Travis and Stumpy were building a skateboard ramp in the middle of the road while Joleen Berkus hollered at them.

"I'm gonna call the police," she hollered from her front porch.

Stumpy looked a little nervous, but Travis just hammered away without even a glance in her direction.

Owen's bike skidded to a stop, sending gravel and dirt flying.

Travis stopped hammering.

"Hey," Owen said.

Travis just lifted his eyebrows.

"Guess what?" Owen grinned at them.

"What?" Stumpy said.

"Leroy found the operator's manual for the submarine." Owen took the wrinkled book out from under his shirt and held it up for them to see.

Stumpy tossed his hammer aside and said, "Cool!"

But Travis stayed quiet.

So Owen took a deep breath and went to work on Travis.

He told him how the submarine only needed three feet of water to float.

How those air tanks were already filled and ready to go.

How there were just three switches to flip on the control panel.

Owen sort of hurried over some of the stuff, like about flooding the ballasts and adjusting the buoyancy control, since he didn't really get that part yet, and then he slowed down so he could be real dramatic when he told the part about using the joystick to go up and down and forward and back.

"It's easy!" Owen said. "*And*," he added, jabbing his thumbs at himself, "I figured out how to get the sub down to the pond."

Travis kept his mouth set tight and his eyes narrowed.

Owen waited.

Stumpy looked from Travis to Owen and back to Travis.

"So . . ." Owen said. "You in or you out?"

"I'm in," Stumpy said.

Then Owen and Stumpy looked at Travis and waited.

Joleen Berkus hollered something from her front porch, but the three boys just ignored her.

“What about Viola?” Travis said.

“Oh, yeah,” Stumpy said. “What about Viola?”

“Look,” Owen said. “We need her to help us. It’s gonna take four people. Besides . . .” Owen looked down at the operator’s manual in his hand. “She *does* know a lot about some of this stuff.”

Then Owen tossed in a heartfelt “Come on, Travis,” and waited.

A dog barked.

A fly buzzed.

Joleen Berkus slammed her front door.

And Travis said, “Okay.”

That night, the train rumbled along the tracks behind the house, while Owen stared up at the ceiling of his bedroom.

His grandfather’s rhythmic snores drifted through the dimly lit hallway outside his door.

And from way down at the pond came the low, steady *r-u-u-u-m-m-m* of a bullfrog.

Tooley.

Owen was sure of it.

Then he took a flashlight out of the drawer of his bedside table and studied the operator's manual for the Water Wonder 4000 late into the night.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

Owen and Travis sat inside the Water Wonder 4000, while Viola and Stumpy stood beside it, peering in the window.

Viola read from the operator's manual. "Before launching your Water Wonder 4000," she read, "there are a few simple tests to perform."

"Just get to the directions," Owen called through the window.

"Turn on the two breakers," Viola said.

Owen found the switches labeled BREAKER and pushed them on.

*Click.*

"Now flip the switch marked CONTROL PANEL."

Owen flipped the switch, and the control panel lit

up, filling the little compartment inside the submarine with a soft orange glow.

Owen and Travis high-fived each other.

Stumpy danced around in a circle, chanting, "It works! It works! It works!"

"Now flip on the Auto Depth Control and the Electronic Buoyancy Control switches," Viola said.

Owen did each thing that Viola read from the operator's manual.

He pushed the joystick forward, making the little propeller on the back of the submarine spin.

He pushed the thumb switch on the joystick, making the little propellers on the wings spin.

The soft hum of the motor made Owen's stomach flip with excitement.

Next, he opened the valves in the air tanks, while Viola continued to read.

"Now you have to open the ballast blow valves," she said.

Travis turned the valves, and both boys jumped as a blast of air entered the tanks.

"Turn on the flow meter so air for breathing flows into the cockpit," Viola called through the window.

Owen and Travis studied the labels on the switches and valves on the control panel.

"Here," Travis said, flipping a switch. There was a soft hissing noise.

Viola held the wrinkled operator's manual close to her glasses and read, "You are now ready to experience an amazing underwater world, safe inside your Water Wonder 4000."

"Okay, on the count of three," Owen said as he gripped one end of the water pipe. "One, two, three."

He and Viola lifted the pipe out of the ditch and made their way along the side of the road toward the train tracks.

"Hurry up," he snapped at Viola. If anyone saw them taking these pipes, they'd be in big trouble.

Travis and Stumpy huffed and puffed as they struggled with a pipe ahead of them.

They had all decided that four pipes should be enough to roll the submarine down to the pond.

When they turned off the main road and entered the woods, Viola whined, "Stop, Owen. I've got to rest."

Viola was so aggravating.



But Owen was trying to be patient.

Because no matter how many times he read the operator's manual, Owen was never going to understand half the stuff that Viola knew about submarines. He had let her read the manual, and she had tried and tried to explain things to him and Travis and Stumpy. But they had stared at her with openmouthed confusion until she just flapped her hand at them and said, "Oh, never mind."

By the time they finally got the last water pipe down to the submarine, Travis and Stumpy were checking the knots in the ropes they had tied to the stubby wings on both sides of the Water Wonder 4000.

They had played Rock, Paper, Scissors to see who would pull the ropes and who would move the pipes.

Owen and Stumpy would pull the ropes.

Travis and Viola would move the pipes.

"There!" Owen said, dropping his end of the pipe and lining it up with the others. He wiped his hands on his shorts. "Now how do we get the pipes under the sub?"

"Easy," Viola said. "Y'all push down on the back end and make the front end go up. Then I'll roll the pipes up under it."

So that's what they did.

On the count of three, the boys pushed on the back end of the submarine.

The front end lifted slightly off the ground.

Viola grunted as she scrambled to roll one of the water pipes up under the submarine.

It took a few tries.

Counting.

Pushing.

Rolling.

First one pipe. Then two.

Then they all had to pull on the ropes to move the submarine forward a bit.

Then more counting and pushing and rolling.

Finally, the little red submarine was perched on top of the water pipes.

Owen's head was spinning with excitement. "Okay, let's do it!" he hollered, racing to the front of the submarine and grabbing one of the ropes.

And so it began.

Owen and Travis and Stumpy and Viola maneuvering the submarine down to the pond.

Owen and Stumpy pulling on the ropes while Travis yelled, "Slow down! Not so fast!"

Travis and Viola scrambling to the rear of the submarine to pull out a pipe and carry it back around to the front.

Every now and then, they had to stop to saw a tree stump that was too high or clip a branch that was in the way.

But inch by inch . . .

. . . foot by foot . . .

. . . yard by yard . . .

. . . they rolled the Water Wonder 4000 closer and closer to Graham Pond.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

On the count of three,” Owen said.

His heart pounded in his ears and his hands shook as he placed them against the back of the submarine.

“One.”

“Two.”

“Three!”

Owen and Travis and Stumpy and Viola pushed the submarine into the pond.

It glided into the water with barely a splash.

Owen and Travis scrambled to grab the ropes so the submarine wouldn’t float out into the middle. Then they all four stood on the bank of the pond in silence.

They had done it!

The little red submarine was floating in Graham

Pond, bobbing in the water, sending out ripples across the surface.

"Let's tie it to the pier," Owen said.

He and Travis tied the ropes to the pier while Viola and Stumpy watched. Then Viola whipped the wrinkled, rolled-up operator's manual out of her back pocket and said, "Okay, y'all promised."

Owen groaned.

Travis rolled his eyes.

Stumpy said, "Aw, shoot."

"Y'all promised," Viola repeated.

The boys had promised Viola that before they tried to take the submarine for a ride in the pond, they would go to the hayloft for a submarine lesson. She had nagged and nagged and nagged them about how they couldn't just climb in that thing and take off.

How they needed to understand how a submarine works.

How safety was the most important thing.

And how if they didn't agree to have a submarine lesson, she might just have to remove herself from the project and let somebody with a brain (like maybe Earlene) know what was going on.

So the boys had agreed.

With one last glance over his shoulder at the Water Wonder 4000 floating in Graham Pond, Owen followed the others up the path to the barn.

*Ahem.* Viola cleared her throat, adjusted her glasses, and began to read from the operator's manual. "The basic principle of the ambient-pressure submersible is the same as a diving bell," she read. "It's like taking a giant drinking cup and turning it upside down and pushing it underwater. The air trapped inside stays there as long as you don't tip it too far sideways. The bottom is open to the water, so the internal pressure and external pressure are always equal."

She paused and looked at the boys over the top of the manual. "Get it?" she said.

Owen looked at Travis and Travis looked at Stumpy and Stumpy looked at Owen.

"That's why there's no hatch for an opening," Viola said. "You have to go under the water and crawl up into it. There will be air trapped inside so you can breathe."

"So all you have to do to get out is just *swim* out, right?" Stumpy said.

“Right.”

Viola went on and on with the submarine lesson, pausing every now and then to sniff and sneeze. She explained how the scuba tanks would provide fresh air inside the sub. She explained how the dials and switches on the control panel kept the sub steady. She read to them the information about how there were tanks in the sub that would be flooded with water so the sub could go down.

“That’s called ballast,” she said.

Then she explained how the ballast tanks would be filled with air, pushing the water out so the sub could rise back up to the surface.

But the boys just looked at her.

Finally she showed them a picture of the joystick, pointing out how it was used to make the sub go up and down and forward and back.

Owen’s insides danced with excitement.

“Let’s go!” he hollered, hurrying to the ladder of the hayloft.

But before he had reached the floor of the barn, someone appeared in the doorway, casting a long, dark shadow over the wheelbarrow and tools and tractor parts.

Earlene.

"What are y'all doing in here?" she snapped.

Owen stepped down off the ladder and looked up at the others in the hayloft.

"Nothing," he said.

Then they all stood still as statues while Earlene ranted and raved about rotten floorboards and rats and sharp tools and all the other life-threatening dangers in the barn.

"Now get on out of here," she said, pointing toward the barn door. "And Owen Jester," she added, "you need to get in the house and visit your grandfather."

"And so I let him go," Owen told his grandfather. "Travis and Stumpy got real mad at me, but I didn't even care."

His grandfather nodded.

"Besides," Owen said, "that Frog Town idea was dumb."

Owen thought his grandfather looked better today. His face wasn't as pale and his eyes weren't as dull. He sat propped up against the pillows, studying Owen's face while Owen told him about letting Tooley go.

"I bet he's happy as anything now," Owen said. "I



bet he's swimming all around the pond, eating bugs and playing with the other frogs."

Owen looked out the window. Dark clouds had begun to roll in.

Good, he thought. It was going to rain.

Travis, Stumpy, and Viola had promised they wouldn't get in the submarine without him, but Owen still worried that they just might do it anyway. Travis, especially, could be sneaky like that. But if it rained, they probably wouldn't. They would have to wait until tomorrow, like they had promised.

Owen sat by the bed, waiting for tomorrow and listening to the sounds in the room.

His grandfather's raspy breathing.

The *tick, tick, tick* of the clock on the dresser.

The soft patter of rain on the roof.

And the *r-u-u-u-m-m-m* of a bullfrog down in the pond.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

No way!" Owen yelled.

There was no way he was going to agree to play Rock, Paper, Scissors to see who got to go in the submarine first.

*He* had been the one who had heard the thud.

The crack of wood.

The tumble, tumble, tumble sound.

*He* had been the one who had found the submarine.

So *he* was going to be the first one to drive the Water Wonder 4000.

Travis put up a good fight, arguing and cussing and hurling rocks into the pond, but finally he agreed.

"Then we'll do Rock, Paper, Scissors to see who goes with you," he said.

But Owen shook his head. "No way," he said again.

Travis glared at him. "Who made you boss of the world?" he said.

"Yeah," Stumpy said. "Who made you boss of the world?"

Viola sneezed.

Owen hesitated. He knew that what he was about to say was risky. He was setting himself up to be teased for the rest of his life.

But he took a deep breath and said it.

"Viola should be the one to go."

Travis's mouth dropped open. Stumpy's eyes widened.

Viola grinned.

Now that he had said it, Owen was ready to throw caution to the wind and just get it all out.

"Look," he said. "*She's* the one who figured out how to get that sub down here to the pond."

Viola blushed.

"And *she's* the one who figured out that stuff about ambient pressure and ballast and all," Owen continued.

"Viola should be the one to go with me."

"Okay then," Travis said. "Let's see Miss Know-It-All get in that water." He whirled around and jabbed a

finger at Viola. "I hope a water moccasin don't bite you," he said.

Viola's face grew instantly pale. She looked at the pond, her red-rimmed, watery eyes wide with worry. Then she tossed her hair back, lifted her chin, and said, "Shut up, Travis."

So Owen and Viola waded into the pond. The water was warm. The bottom squishy with mud.

Owen swam out to the submarine tied to the end of the dock. Then he took a deep breath, ducked under the water, and crawled into the opening in the bottom of the sub. When he came up out of the water, he was inside the little compartment, looking out of the bubble-shaped window at Travis and Stumpy standing on the dock. Just as he settled into one of the little seats, Viola appeared beside him, sputtering and gasping and pushing at her glasses. She brushed a soggy leaf off her blue-striped bathing suit and climbed up into the seat next to Owen.

Owen beamed at Viola.

Viola beamed at Owen.

There they were beaming at each other again and Owen didn't even care if Travis and Stumpy saw them.

"Okay," he said. "Let's do it." He looked out the window and gave Travis and Stumpy the signal to untie the rope from the dock.

Viola took the operator's manual out of the plastic sandwich bag she had tucked into the strap of her bathing suit. She flipped to the page with the heading

## **READY, SET, GO:**

### **Starting Your Water Wonder 4000**

As Viola read, Owen flipped the switches.

"Now open the forward and aft flood valves," Viola read.

"Here goes," Owen said. He turned the valves and heard the *whoosh* of water inside the tanks and the *blurb, blurb, blurb* of bubbles outside the window.

"Now push down on the thumb switch on top of the joystick," Viola said.

Owen's heart raced and his hands trembled.

He counted to three.

*One.*

*Two.*

*Three.*

The little propellers on the stubby wings began  
to spin . . .

. . . and the Water Wonder 4000 went down . . .

. . . down . . .

. . . down . . .

. . . under the water in Graham Pond.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

Owen had to admit that when they first sank below the surface of the pond, his stomach did a major somersault and he considered for a blip of a millisecond scrambling through the opening in the bottom of the sub and getting the heck out of there.

But once that blip of a millisecond passed, his somersaulting stomach settled down and he was able to take in the magnificent awesomeness of what he was doing.

He was riding in a submarine under the water in Graham Pond.

Viola pointed to the drawing in the manual to show Owen how the joystick worked to make the submarine go up and down, back and forth, left and right.

"Okay," he said. "Here goes."

He pushed the joystick forward, and the little submarine began to move.

Slowly, slowly, slowly away from the dock and out into the middle of the pond.

All Owen could see out of the windows was the murky water. But gradually, his eyes began to adjust and he could see more clearly. He saw little silver minnows darting through the water.

He saw turtles. The same shiny black turtles that he used to see sunning on logs on hot afternoons.

He saw a rotten tree stump and a rusty soda can.

A fishing lure, an old shoe, a broken bottle.

And then . . .

. . . he saw a frog!

A bullfrog.

A big, green bullfrog.

But it wasn't Tooley.

He knew it wasn't Tooley because it didn't have the heart-shaped red spot between its eyes.

Owen had been so absorbed in the magnificent awesomeness of the submarine ride that he had forgotten all about Viola sitting next to him until she said, "Let's look for that frog of yours."

Of course!



That's what they would do!

They would ride around Graham Pond and look for Tooley.

So that's what they did.

At first, Owen wasn't very good at maneuvering the Water Wonder 4000 around the pond. But before long, he got the hang of it. He was able to move the little submarine forward and back. He could turn it right and turn it left.

So he and Viola looked for frogs.

"There's one!"

"There's another one!"

But none of them were Tooley.

Until . . .

"There he is!" Owen shouted.

Sure enough, swimming along outside the bubble-shaped window was the biggest, greenest, slimiest, most beautiful bullfrog ever to be seen in Carter, Georgia . . .

. . . with a heart-shaped red spot between its bulging yellow eyes.

Owen guided the submarine along beside Tooley.

He put his hand on the window.

Tooley stopped swimming and bumped his nose against the glass.

Owen looked right into those bulging froggy eyes and he knew . . .

. . . that frog was happy.

"We better head back," Viola said.

They had read in the operator's manual that the air supply of the Water Wonder 4000 was only good for about two hours. The air supply gauge on the control panel was almost at the halfway mark. They had better head back so Travis and Stumpy could have a turn.

Owen had some trouble maneuvering the submarine close to the dock without crashing into it, but eventually, he got close enough. Using the joystick, Owen brought the submarine up toward the surface of the water.

"Turn on the forward and aft blow valves," Viola read from the manual.

Owen turned the valves. There was a hissing sound as air filled the tanks, forcing the water out.

The little submarine began to rise slowly up out of the pond.

They had done it! They had taken the Water Wonder 4000 for a ride in Graham Pond!

But then . . .

. . . Owen looked out the front window and felt a blanket of doom settle over him.

There on the dock was a cluster of frantic-looking grownups, waving and yelling and gesturing, with Travis and Stumpy standing droopy-faced and slump-shouldered beside them.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

Owen's father had been furious.

His mother had been livid.

Earlene had been outraged.

And the three men from the railroad company had been all of those things but mostly relieved to see the Water Wonder 4000 safe and sound and floating in the pond. They had been looking for it for a long time. When they had finally found the splintered wooden crate beside the train tracks and seen the trees and bushes cleared all the way to the pond, they had put two and two together.

Now Owen was sitting in his bedroom, where he was going to have to stay for one whole week.

He hadn't been allowed to go down to the pond to watch the flatbed tow truck pull the Water Wonder

4000 out of the pond and drive up the side of the tracks to take the submarine away.

Travis and Stumpy and Viola hadn't been allowed to go either.

He hadn't been allowed to go down to the dock when his father had dismantled the perfect frog cage and tossed it into the junk heap behind the shed.

Travis and Stumpy and Viola hadn't been allowed to go either.

Owen stared glumly out of his bedroom window and watched Pete and Leroy romping in the yard below.

He let out a big, heaving sigh.

The telephone rang.

Earlene marched down the hallway, her heavy shoes making a *clomp, clomp* noise on the wooden floor that echoed up the stairs.

Owen tiptoed to his bedroom door to listen.

Earlene answered the phone.

"Hello?"

Pause.

"Owen *Jester*?"

Owen opened the door a crack and stood still and quiet.

"Who is this?" Earlene snapped.

Pause.

"Well . . . he . . . yes . . . just a minute."

Earlene clomped up the stairs, and Owen scurried over to his bed, pretending to read his book of Bible stories.

Earlene pushed the bedroom door open and thrust the phone toward Owen. "Some man is on the phone for you."

Owen set the book aside. "Who?"

Earlene's mouth was set in that harsh way of hers. "Some man from that submarine company."

*Water Wonder Technologies?*

Owen's heart raced.

As if he hadn't gotten into enough trouble already, now that submarine guy was probably mad as all get-out. He was probably going to yell at Owen. Maybe he was going to call the police. Maybe he had *already* called the police. Maybe Owen would have to go to jail.

Owen didn't feel too good.

Earlene shook the phone at him.

Owen's hand trembled a little as he reached to take it.

"Hello?" His voice came out kind of wobbly.

Owen listened.

And then his heavy heart lightened and his worried stomach settled.

This man wasn't mad.

This man wanted to shake his hand!

This man thought it was wonderful that Owen and Viola had managed to take the Water Wonder 4000 down under the water in Graham Pond and drive around and look at frogs and turtles and come back up to the surface and right on over to the dock, where all those angry folks had been waiting for them.

This man wanted to come to Owen's house and meet him and Viola and even Travis and Stumpy.

After Owen hung up, he raced past grumpy old Earlene and ran downstairs to tell his parents.

"He's the *owner* of Water Wonder Technologies!" Owen said, beaming at his father.

"He's coming all the way from Canada to meet me." Owen grinned at his mother.

"Can I go tell Viola?" Owen hopped from one foot to the other.

*Please. Please. Please.*

He could feel Earlene's disapproving glare behind him.

His father chuckled and flapped his hand. "Aw, go on," he said. "But come right back."

Owen was out the door before Earlene could blink.



## CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

Owen and Travis and Stumpy and Viola sat on Owen's front porch and stared up the road.

Waiting.

Waiting.

Waiting.

Owen had been allowed out of the house for one day and one day only. But what a day it was going to be!

That man from Water Wonder Technologies would be arriving any minute.

His name was Ron.

He was bringing a reporter from the Macon *Telegraph* to interview them.

They were going to tell the reporter how Owen had found the submarine and how they had cleared the way to the pond. They were going to explain how they had

used water pipes the way the Egyptians had used logs to move the stones when they built the pyramids. (And Owen would be sure to tell the reporter that they had taken the water pipes back to Sycamore Road. But he would probably leave out the part about how much his father had hollered at him about those pipes.)

After a little arguing, Owen and Travis and Stumpy had agreed that they would tell the reporter that Viola was the one who figured out how to drive the submarine.

And *then*, they were all going over to the railroad freight yard to have their picture taken with the Water Wonder 4000.

Owen raced up the stairs, waving the newspaper. He burst into his grandfather's room and hurried over to the bed.

"Look!" He held the paper in front of his grandfather and jabbed a finger at the photograph.

There he was, Owen Jester, standing stiff and proud beside the Water Wonder 4000, his hand resting on the bubble-shaped window.

Viola posed on the other side of the submarine, grinning, her eyes looking big and wide through her thick

glasses. Travis and Stumpy stood slightly behind her, Stumpy making a peace sign and Travis looking a little irritated to be standing in the back.

Printed in big bold letters above the photograph was the headline

## **CHILDREN TOUR LOCAL POND IN SUBMARINE**

Beside the photograph was an article all about Owen and Viola (and a little bit about Travis and Stumpy).

Owen read the article to his grandfather—the whole story, right there in the Macon *Telegraph* . . .

Starting with the night Owen had heard the thud.

The crack of wood.

The tumble, tumble, tumble sound . . .

And ending when he and Viola had maneuvered the little submarine through the murky water of Graham Pond and then had managed to get safely back up to the surface.

“A spokesman for the railroad reported that the Water Wonder 4000 is once again on its way to the Sun and Sand Tropical Resort in Miami, Florida,” Owen read.

He folded the newspaper and grinned at his grandfather. He felt a little guilty that he hadn't told him about the submarine when he had first found it. Owen hoped his grandfather wouldn't be mad that he had kept such a fantastic secret from him.

Owen's grandfather lifted a hand off the bed and gave Owen a shaky thumbs-up.

## CHAPTER THIRTY

When his week of punishment was finally over, Owen raced downstairs and burst through the screen door with Earlene hollering after him about staying away from the hayloft and the train tracks and the pond.

Owen went straight down to the pond and sat on the dock. The morning sun felt warm on his arms. A dragonfly flitted around in front of him and then settled on the dock beside him. Owen rested his chin on his knees and waited.

And waited.

And waited.

Each time he saw a bullfrog poke its head out of the water or climb onto a log, Owen didn't move a muscle. He squinted over at the frog to look for the heart-shaped red spot.

Finally . . .

. . . it happened.

A green frog head poked up through a cluster of rotting oak leaves near the edge of the pond.

And right between the bulging yellow eyes was a heart-shaped red spot.

Owen's insides flipped with excitement.

He lifted his chin slowly, slowly, slowly off his knees so he could get a better look.

Yep.

That was a heart-shaped red spot, all right.

The frog swam lazily toward the dock and stopped, floating on the surface of the water with its long froggy legs stretched out behind it.

That frog was happy.

Owen was sure of it.

That frog didn't want to live in a perfect cage.

That frog didn't want to be mayor of Frog Town.

That frog didn't want to be Tooley Graham.

The short, sad life of Tooley Graham was over.

That night, Owen sat by the window and took a deep breath of the summer night air. It smelled like pine and grass and honeysuckle.

Far off in the distance, the train whistle blew. Owen waited, listening for the faint clatter of the train on the tracks to get louder and louder as it got closer to Carter.

In a blink, the train was whooshing down the tracks behind the house.

*Clatter, clatter, clatter.*

Then the *clatter, clatter, clatter* grew fainter and fainter until the only sound left was the chirp of the crickets in the garden beneath the window . . .

. . . and the *r-u-u-u-m-m-m* of the bullfrogs down in the pond.