



## A Monstrosity of Science

THE BULLFROG WAS ONLY HALF DEAD, WHICH WAS PERFECT.

He hunkered in the dark culvert under the driveway and gazed at Gertie Reece Foy with a tragical gleam in his eye, as if he knew that her face was the last lovely thing he would ever see.

Gertie stuck her head and shoulders in the culvert and grabbed the frog. His fat legs dangled over her fingers.

She ran into the house and pushed the kitchen door open with her back. Laying the frog on the counter, she ripped open the drawer that held all the unusual and exciting kitchen equipment. She rummaged through cheese graters, bottle openers, and tongs, glancing up every other second to make sure the frog hadn't moved or, worse, *died*.

“What’s going on in there?” Aunt Rae yelled from the living room.

“Nothing!” Gertie whipped out the turkey baster.

She wiggled her index finger between the frog’s lips—if you could call them lips—and poked the pipette into his mouth. Then she squeezed the blue bulb at the other end, forcing oxygen into his lungs.

The air must have revived him quickly, or maybe he was a little less dead than Gertie had hoped, because he sprang for the edge of the counter. Gertie lunged sideways and cupped her hands over him.

“There, there,” she said. “You’re safe now.”

She peeked at him through her fingers, and he peeked back at her, his eyeballs quivering with gratitude. Or maybe they quivered with rage. It was hard to tell.

She wrapped her hands around the frog’s middle, turned on her heel, and crashed into a soft, flowery stomach.

“*Oof*,” said Aunt Rae. She blinked at the frog in Gertie’s hands. “What in the Sam Hill are you doing?”

“I resuscitated him.” Gertie held the frog closer.

Aunt Rae moved to stand over the air vent in the kitchen floor, and her housedress ballooned around her legs. “You what?”

*“Resuscitated,”* said Gertie. “It means I brought him back to life.”

“I *know* what it means.” Aunt Rae swayed her weight from foot to foot. “*Why’d* you resuscitate a ugly old bull-frog? That’s what I don’t know.”

Gertie sighed. She spent a lot of time explaining things that should have been obvious to people. “I did it so he could become a miracle of science,” she said.

“Huh.” Aunt Rae wrinkled her nose at the frog. “Looks more like a monstrosity of science to me.”

Gertie gasped. “Oh my Lord.”

“What?”

“Aunt Rae, that’s even better!”

The monstrosity of science wriggled in her hands, and Gertie tried to hold him tighter but not so much tighter that his eyes would pop right out of his head and fall on the floor.

“I’ve got to get him in his box, Aunt Rae,” Gertie said, “before his eyes roll around on the floor and we have to stick them back.”

“Why would—” Aunt Rae began.

“Oh my Lord! I don’t have time to explain every little detail!”

“All right, all right.” Aunt Rae patted down her skirt.

“But I want you to use bleach on my counter when you’re done, you hear me?”

After she’d put the frog in a shoe box, rubber-banded on the lid, and bleached the counter, Gertie went out to the porch. The Zapper-2000, a bug zapper big enough to fry baby dragons, hung from the rafters.

Phase One of the mission was off to a good start.

Gertie always had at least one mission in the works, and she never, *ever* failed to complete her missions. It didn’t matter that she wasn’t the fastest or the smartest or the tallest, because what made Gertie a force to be reckoned with was the fact that she never gave up. Not ever. Her father liked to say that she was a bulldog with its jaws locked on a car tire.

Gertie was thinking about having that printed on business cards she could hand out to people.

She crouched in the fluorescent blue beam of light beneath the Zapper-2000 and collected a handful of the mosquito bodies that littered the ground. As she worked, the cicadas and crickets started sawing their night song. Gertie stood and watched the sun set on the last day of summer vacation.

With these tasty mosquitoes, the bullfrog was sure to be fat and croaky tomorrow. And with a fat and croaky bullfrog to take with her, Gertie was sure to have the best summer speech of any student at Carroll Elementary. She curled her toes over the edge of the porch boards.

She, Gertie Reece Foy, was going to be the greatest fifth grader in the whole school, world, and universe!

And that was just Phase One.