



by **Barbara O'Connor**

FRANCES FOSTER BOOKS

FARRAR STRAUS GIROUX | NEW YORK

Special thanks to Ron Leonard, Vice-President of International VentureCraft Corporation, the maker of SportSubs, for his expert advice and information about those amazing little submarines. Viola couldn't have done it better.

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Distributed in Canada by D&M Publishers, Inc.

Printed in July 2010 in the United States of America

by RR Donnelley & Sons Company, Harrisonburg, Virginia

Designed by Natalie Zanecchia

First edition, 2010

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

www.fsgkidsbooks.com

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

O'Connor, Barbara.

The fantastic secret of Owen Jester / Barbara O'Connor.— 1st ed.

p. cm.

Summary: After Owen captures an enormous bullfrog, names it Tooley Graham, then has to release it, he and two friends try to use a small submarine that fell from a passing train to search for Tooley in the Carter, Georgia, pond it came from, while avoiding nosy neighbor Viola.

ISBN: 978-0-374-36850-0

[1. Adventure and adventurers—Fiction. 2. Submersibles—Fiction.
3. Bullfrog—Fiction. 4. Frogs—Fiction. 5. Family life—Georgia—Fiction.
6. Georgia—Fiction.] I. Title.

PZ7.O217Fan 2010

[Fic]—dc22

2009019249



CHAPTER ONE

Owen Jester tiptoed across the gleaming linoleum floor and slipped the frog into the soup.

It swam gracefully under the potatoes, pushing its froggy legs through the pale yellow broth. It circled the carrots and bumped into the celery and finally settled beside a parsnip, its bulging eyes staring unblinkingly up at Owen.

“See, Tooley? I told you,” Owen said. “It’s not hot.”

He plucked a carrot out of the soup and popped it into his mouth.

Still cold.

Not yet heated up for his grandfather’s supper.

Owen scurried into the pantry and hunkered down on the floor among the sacks of potatoes and jars of pickled okra and waited for Earlene.

When he heard the *clomp, clomp* of her heavy black shoes on the wooden stairs, he slapped a hand over his mouth to stifle a giggle. When he heard the kitchen door swing open, he slapped his other hand over his mouth, his shoulders shaking with a silent laugh. Then he peeked through the crack in the pantry door.

Earlene stomped over to the stove in that no-nonsense way of hers. She picked up a wooden spoon from the kitchen counter and peered into the pot. Then she placed the spoon back on the counter, stepped away from the stove, jammed both fists into her waist, and said, "Owen."

Her voice had that sharp edge to it that Owen had heard so many times before. He ducked back against the pantry wall and held his breath.

And then, quick as lightning, the pantry door burst open and Earlene's hand shot in, grabbed Owen by the collar, and yanked him to his feet.

Earlene was not a yeller.

Earlene was a snapper.

"Get that frog out of there," she snapped.

"You think that's funny?" she snapped.

She gave his collar a shake.

"You are a bad, bad child," she snapped. "And I thank my lucky stars every day that you are not mine."

She gave his collar another shake. “And I thank the good Lord up above that your grandfather doesn’t know what’s going on in this house.”

She stomped over to the counter and began arranging pill bottles on a tray. “The very idea of that poor sick old man up there in the bed not able to do a thing but sleep and eat applesauce and you down here thinking up ways to make my life miserable.”

Earlene sure knew how to ruin a good time.

After supper, Owen sat on his closet floor beside the plastic tub where Tooley lived and looked down at the frog. Tooley was the biggest, greenest, slimiest, most beautiful bullfrog ever to be seen in Carter, Georgia.

It had taken Owen nearly a month to catch him. A month of clomping through mud and scooping with fishnets and buckets and colanders and even a hamster cage. A month of squatting on logs, holding his breath, not moving a muscle, watching that big frog with the heart-shaped red spot between his bulging yellow eyes. A month of telling his friends Travis and Stumpy he was going to catch that frog no matter what.

And then one day, just last week, he did.

The right scoop with the right net at the right time.

He had brought the frog home and made him a perfect frog house in a plastic tub in the closet.

And he had named him Tooley Graham.

Tooley after his cousin who lived in Alabama and played in a rock-and-roll band and wore leather bracelets and made everyone mad when he came to Georgia to visit the family at Thanksgiving. (Everyone but Owen, who thought Tooley was cool.)

And Graham after the big pond where the bullfrog had lived before Owen caught him. Graham Pond.

Owen poked the frog with his finger. "Come on, Tooley," he said. "You gotta eat *something*."

But Tooley wouldn't even look at the dead fly that Owen had dropped into the water in the tub.

So Owen laid the chicken wire back on top of the tub, put a brick on top of the chicken wire, and flopped onto his bed, staring up at the ceiling. Travis and Stumpy were probably skateboarding over at the Bi-Lo parking lot. Maybe they were throwing rocks at the Quaker State Oil sign out on Highway 11. Or maybe they were thinking up some great new way to torture their dreaded enemy, Viola.

But Owen was stuck here in his bedroom, thanks to Earlene, who had tattled on him big-time as soon as his

mother had gotten home from work. He could tell his mother had thought that soup trick was at least a little bit funny. He had seen the corners of her mouth twitch when Earlene went on and on about what a bad, bad boy he was.

But his mother had told his father and his father had slammed his fist on the kitchen table and hollered at Owen and now here he was in his bedroom, just him and Tooley.

Owen wished they had never moved in with his grandfather. He wished they still lived in that little house over on Tupelo Road. Travis had lived next door and Stumpy had lived across the street and life had been good.

But then the hardware store had closed and his father didn't have a job, so they had moved across town to live with his grandfather.

There were three good things and three bad things about living with his grandfather.

The three good things were:

1. There was a lot of land around the house, with woods and paths and sheds and the big pond where Tooley had lived.
2. There was a falling-down barn behind

the house that was filled with stuff, like a rusty unicycle and a crate full of horse-shoes and about a hundred rolls of chicken wire.

3. Train tracks ran behind the woods below the house, and every few days the whistle blew late at night as the train roared through Carter.

The three bad things were:

1. Earlene had been working for his grandfather for as long as Owen had been alive. Maybe longer. Earlene was grumpy and needed everything to be clean.
2. Travis and Stumpy lived farther away and sometimes did things without him.
3. Viola lived next door.

Owen did not like Viola.

There were a lot of reasons why he did not like Viola, but the first four were:

1. Viola was nosy.
2. Viola was bossy.
3. Viola wore glasses that made her eyes look big, like a fly's.
4. Viola was a know-it-all.

There was only one good thing about Viola:
She had allergies.

Viola was allergic to pine and grass and dust and dogs and just about every good thing in life.

This was a good thing because it meant that Viola didn't like to play in the woods or the fields or down by the pond. And she never went inside Owen's grandfather's house, where Owen's dogs, Pete and Leroy, left tumbleweeds of fur along the baseboards of every room.

Owen checked on Tooley one more time before he turned off the lamp beside the bed. Then he 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.

And then . . . something else.

A noise Owen had never heard before.

From way down by the tracks.

A thud.

The crack of wood.

A tumble, tumble, tumble sound.

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