

NOTES

Queen of the Swamp is a short story written by Leland Faulkner, a native of Louisiana. His fictitious recollections of summers spent on the Bayous of Louisiana should be performed by a male and entered in Prose Interpretation. The first-person narration, however, will also allow a person to consider performing this selection in Dramatic Interpretation. This prose selection contains both humor and drama. The performer should be equally talented in portraying the humorous moments, as well as the more dramatic passages. Warm vocals, used during the more tender moments of the selection, will showcase vocal variety, in addition to lending a more nostalgic quality to the performance. The drama mask icons are visible solely to show the performer where to turn his pages in the manuscript.

When you think of magical childhoods, names like *Huck Finn*, *Tom Sawyer*, even *Peter Pan*, might come to mind. No childhood, however, could even come *close* to being as *magical* as mine. You see, I spent every summer learning, exploring, and playing at my grandparents' home alongside the swamps of the Louisiana Bayou. Mornings and afternoons were never dull around my grandparents' swampy marshlands. There were too many places to *explore*. There were too many things to *discover*. And there were always my *faithful companions*. There was my six-year-old sister, Avery. There was my fifteen-year-old cousin, Otis. And there was Ruth. Well, truth be told, Avery, Otis, and I didn't *exactly* know if her name was *really* Ruth, but that's what we called her. Oh, I should add here... that *Ruth...* was our pet *alligator*.



I guess Ruth wasn't exactly our *pet*, because, well, you can't really have a full-grown alligator *for* a pet. Especially in the swamps. But still, Ruth was a pet in the sense that we saw her everyday. We played with her, from a distance mind you. And more importantly, we fed her.

Now, I know wild animals are supposed to fend for themselves, but we took pride in helping Ruth maintain her slithery seven hundred pound physique. We fed her frogs. Lots and lots of frogs. Each morning, Avery, Otis and I would get out of bed, eat the feast-like breakfast prepared by Grandma, and *bolt* out the door. We made

a game out of seeing who could catch the *biggest* frog to feed, what my *sister* called, the Queen of the Swamp. Otis and I let Avery *give* Ruth this well-deserved title, because it was obvious my sister knew all about things such as royalty. After all, every day, rain or shine, staying at my grandparents' home or going into town, Avery wore the same outfit: a bright, pink tutu, one of a dozen-or-so pastel leotards,, cowboy boots, and a faux-diamond tiara. So after collecting a pale full of amphibian snacks, the three of us would sit on the embankment, far away from the snapping jaws of, what was sure to be, the *only pet* in the whole *South* who couldn't actually *be* petted.



I have to hand it to my sister. Avery may have only been six-years-old, but her tenacity for catching—what Grandma called *wart-frogs*—was only overshadowed slightly by her almost unwavering ability to *throw* the slimy frogs *into* the air, *down* the embankment, and into the *mouth* of one very hungry alligator! She never flinched. Never. In fact, the only time Avery ever cried was when I tossed one of Ruth's treats high in the air and shouted, "Goodbye, Kermit!" It is then that I learned the importance of name association. Avery was fine with catching *nameless* frogs, but attaching a *name* to one of them changed the demeanor of the game entirely.



While Avery may have been a little sensitive at times, my cousin, Otis, was nothing short of our very own *Indiana Jones*. In fact, Otis gave himself his *own* nickname. *Louisiana Jones*. Nothing ruffled him. Nothing *frightened* him. Not *even* poisonous snakes. Otis thought it was a *game* to see if he could catch a poisonous snake without getting *bitten*, which would, in his own words, "...make you sick enough to go to the *hospital* and get a bunch of *shots*." It never occurred to Otis that *shots* and a trip to the local *hospital* might take a back seat to—I don't know—let's just call it *death*! I remember one time Otis *found* a snake—a *poisonous* snake mind you—coaxed it out from underneath a bush. He then *corralled* it, *grabbed* the snake by its throat (Do snakes *have* a throat?) and *snapped* it like a whip to break its neck (Again, do snakes have *necks*?) After *parading* the dead, poisonous snake *around* my grandparents' backyard, Otis asked me if I'd ever seen a flying snake. I said, "No. I've heard of flying *squirrels*, but I've never seen a *flying* snake." He told me to stand back and watch. Otis held the snake by its tail, and after a *double-full-body-spin*, released the snake. At that exact second, my sister, Avery, turned the corner to announce that Grandma had lunch set up on the back porch. I