

# Dead Frog

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“Dude, just talk to her.”

“It’s not that simple, Jay,” I said. “She’s way too smart to listen to anything I have to say.”

“Tony, you realize she’s your lab partner, right?” Jay said, running a hand through the shaggy blond mop on his head. “You have to talk to Sue at some point.”

*Why did college involve group assignments?*

I took a deep breath, glancing over at my partner, who was tying her long, brown hair back in a ponytail. I felt my chest tighten. “Do I have to?”

“Dude, go!”

Taking one hesitant step at a time, I walked to the lab table Sue occupied. I scratched the back of my neck. “H-hi.”

She looked up from the packet we’d been given and smiled. “Hey.”

We made eye contact for a moment before I dropped my gaze to my sneakers. “I’m Tony.” I held out my hand.

“Sue,” she said, shaking it. “Are you excited about the lab?”

*I’m excited for it to be over.* “Yeah.”

We were silent for a moment.

Sue broke the silence. “So, um... should we get started?”

I gulped. “Yeah, yeah, let’s get started.”

She pointed to the first step. “Do you want to do the honors, or do you want to take notes?” she asked. “I’m good with either one.”

I stared long and hard at the packet. Oh, how I wished I were the frog we were cutting open and dissecting. I wasn’t that lucky. “I don’t think I can handle cutting it open.”

“That’s okay,” she said. “Do whatever you feel comfortable doing.”

I felt the corner of my mouth turn up. “Okay.”

She handed me the clipboard with the analysis sheet on it and her pencil.

I reached out to grab it, my hands trembling. I snatched the clipboard out of her hands and scribbled our names at the top of the paper.

She blinked and looked at me.

*Oh crap.*

“Are you okay?”

Heat rose on my cheeks. Somehow, that question always came up in conversation.

“Y-yeah, I fine.”

She nodded, and I could see concern flicker through her eyes. She picked up the syringe.

“Ready?”

I took a deep breath, but it didn’t help my heart hammering against my ribs. Poising the pencil over the first blank, I nodded.

The motion of her digging the small knife into the defenseless creature scared me more than talking to her. It almost looked like she was taking pleasure in dragging the blade down its soft underbelly. I covered my mouth as the putrid smell of... whatever is inside frogs reached my nose and made me gag.

She stopped and looked inside the corpse. “Oh no.”

“What happened?”

“I think I cut through the liver.”

I gagged, pinching my eyelids shut.

I felt Sue’s cold hand on my arm. “Are you sure you’re all right?”

I don’t know if it was the smell, my anxiety, or a combination of the two, but I couldn’t take it anymore. I needed to get out of the classroom. “I’m sorry,” I said, grabbing my things and rushing to the door.

I bolted to the library and walked up to the second floor. As I glanced around the stacks of books and breathed in the iconic smell every library had, I started to calm down. I found the empty table near the back, hidden in the middle of the Biblical commentary section. It was my favorite spot to hide away when I needed a break from human interaction.

I set up shop and started working on some homework. After a few hours, I sat back in my chair, stretching out my back.

“I like your shirt.”

I jerked forward, ramming my ribs into the table. I didn’t scream, but I screwed up my face in agony.

“Oh my gosh! Tony, are you okay?” Sue asked.

*Where did she come from?* “Y-yeah, I’m fine,” I said, rubbing my chest. “Thank you.”

She rose an eyebrow. “For what? Startling you?”

I shook my head. “Didn’t you say you liked my shirt?”

“Oh, yeah.” She shook her head. “Sorry, I didn’t mean to scare you.”

“It’s fine.”

Silence fell between us again.

Sue pointed at the seat across from me. “Can I sit with you?”

I nodded.

She sat and glanced around the stacks of books. “This is my favorite spot in the library.”

I looked at her. “Why?”

Her brown eyes met mine for the second time that day. “It’s quiet. No one else sits back here, so it’s like a small sanctuary. Plus, I can get away from other people.”

I sighed. “That’s why I like it, too.”

She twisted her mouth to one side. We’d broken eye-contact by then, but I could tell she had something else on her mind.

“I’m sorry for today,” I said.

She crossed one arm across her chest. “That’s funny; I was going to apologize for today, too.”

I felt my lips curl into a smile. “You have nothing to apologize for. I was... overwhelmed. And dissecting a frog at the same time didn’t help.”

Sue chuckled. “I was, too, so you’re not alone.”

My eyes widened. “You were?”

She nodded. “Why do you think I cut open the liver? I was shaking so bad I couldn’t keep the knife steady.”

I laughed for a moment and looked back at her.

She stood. “Well, I should probably get going. I’m glad you’re okay.”

“Wait, Sue,” I said. “You can stay if you want. I have at least another hour’s worth of work to do, and it would be nice to have someone else around.”

“Are you sure?”

I nodded. “Plus, it’s nice to talk to someone other than my roommate for once.”

She grinned. “All right.” She reclaimed her chair and pulled her laptop from her backpack, along with a couple of folders.

The rest of the night was spent in companionable silence, working on homework and enjoying a new friendship that blossomed over a dead frog.