

Jody is nine years old. She lives with her parents in a shanty house at the edge of the great swamp in a Cajun community called Pierre's Folly. She's imaginative, brave, adventurous and curious of everyone and everything. When she's not in school she roams the swamplands and discovers it can be a spooky dangerous place full of all kinds of characters and con men.

Early one spring morning on one of Jody's adventures she overhears a snake pleading for its life. On a closer look she sees the snake hanging from a large alligator's mouth. She steps in to save the day by convincing the alligator he really doesn't want to eat the snake; "The last time I saw a gator eat a snake like that, his belly swelled up this big and popped plum wide open. Then a hurricane came by and blew the gator away." The gator reluctantly sets the snake free.

Jody soon discovers this snake is an educated wisecracking comical reptile, affectionately called ROPÉ, who becomes her side kick and devoted friend. Ropé seldom leaves Jody's side wrapping himself around her arm and together they roam the swamp lands and neighborhoods to find adventure

Henry Johnson is an eleven-year-old Negro boy. He lives in Cow Hollow where the people are proud of their heritage and traditions. Henry and Jody become best friends. But Henry's family warns him. "Us Negro folks are different then other folks." Henry doesn't understand, but tries to explain it to Jody. "We're different you, know." Jody tries to compare the differences but in her childhood innocence, she can't find any.

One day in Cow Hollow, Jody comes upon a tall gray haired old man. He introduces himself as Guthie. "My name is..." but before she can finish. "I know your name. I know lotsa things 'round here."

Guthie lives in a small weather beaten shack with a rusty tin roof hidden under a grove of large oak trees where Spanish moss hangs to the ground. Jody senses that old man Guthie knows a lot, and the stories that he tells fascinate her. Some say old man Guthie is a healer and knows the future as well as the past.

Jody and Ropé visit Guthie often, to listen to his tales and, of course, to eat pralines and drink sweet tea, which seems to be available all the time. Sometimes they come just to seek his advice. When Guthie

hears that Jody and Henry spends a lot of time playing in the cemetery he tells them a story about the time New Orleans was under six feet of water. Wooden coffins popped right out of the ground." Guthie pointed toward St. Louis Number One on Basin Street where Jody and Henry played. "Some broke open and the dead just floated around. Them bodies didn't want be in the ground, they wanted to be where they could hear the music that played the day they went there."

"Can the dead hear? Sure they can hear. Why do you think we talk to them?" Guthie continued, "After the rain stopped and the water went down folks gathered their loved ones and built a city for the dead. Some didn't recognize their own so they filled the tombs with bodies just to give them a restin' place. Why, some of my kin and some of your kin are together havin' a grand ole time doin' the bone dance to the very music that followed them there. Soon after that they built levees around the city to keep out the water."

When Guthie tells his stories Jody, Henry and Ropé sit quietly listening to every word. Soon a visit to old man Guthie's place is as regular as clockwork.

As Henry grows up he has one goal in mind. That is to become a famous trumpet player and play jazz for one of the big bands downtown. His father realizes how serious Henry is about playing the trumpet and buys him a secondhand horn. This is the best his father could afford, but Henry remembers that day as one of the happiest in his life.

Everyday Jody meets Henry in the cemetery to listen to him practice. He's a natural and she believes one day he will become famous. Henry soon gains his confidences and starts to play on street corners and in Jackson Square with local musicians. But after many months Henry becomes dishearten when his horn stops producing the sounds he hears in his head. He has no money to buy a new horn and nearly gives up his dream. "I'll never be able to play with the big bands," he tells Jody. "Oh yes you will," she encourages.

Jody steps in as a devoted friend and tries to help Henry. She convinces him he must talk to Guthie who is wise and seems to have all the answers. Henry agrees.

After some deep thought, Guthie tells Henry, he can indeed become a great trumpet player, but not without practice and hard work. "I can't, my horn is too old and won't work no more." The old man knows just what to say... "Oh, you'll find a way. I'm sure you will."

Wanting to help Henry, Jody visits Guthie and he tells her a story about "The Legend of The Golden Horn." It's a mythical golden trumpet that can make anyone who plays it become the best trumpeter in the world. The problem is it's on an island deep in the heart of the swamp, and no one has been able to go there. Those who've tried have never returned. As rumor has it, the island is protected by the King of the Gators and his clan."

That night Jody lays awake thinking of a safe way to get across the swamp to the island when she suddenly remembers seeing the king cakes her mother has just baked for the Mardi Gras celebration. By morning she has an idea, but she needs Ropé's help. Remembering being caught in an alligator's mouth and nearly slipping down its deep dark throat, Ropé tells her, "You can count me out; I'm not gonna cross that swamp and find myself in the jaws of another gator." Jody replies, "I saved you before, didn't I?" Ropé' thinks about his friend for awhile and then finally agrees, "Oh, all right I'll help"

That very day Jody and Ropé set out to build a raft to cross the swamp. A new adventure starts as we follow Jody and Ropé' headed through the deep dark swamp, having to overcome all kinds of obstacles. Finally reaching the island, the King of the clan is enchanted by Jody's reasons and determination and decides to loan Jody The Golden Horn. But she must promise to return it "before the leaves turn to gold." "Oh, I will. I will." Jody promises.

Henry's life quickly changes when he takes the horn in his hands: his fingers began to dance gracefully over the valves. He raises it to his lips and began to blow. The notes are high and clear. "Wow, it's like magic!" He raises the horn back to his lips and plays again. Suddenly! This was a sound not heard before. Clear and beautiful music floats upon the air! Had Gabriel come down to play for them?

Certainly a mere human could not make these sounds! But there in the square was Henry playing a trumpet with the most indefinable beauty and precision ever heard. A large crowd gathers around in awe. Henry is overwhelmed when he is offered a position to play with one of the

big bands in town as soon and he becomes of age, and that isn't too far off.

But Henry's dreams vanish when he awakens one morning to find the horn missing.

After hiding out for several days two gators, Bumpy and Grunge, dressed in disguise enter the mint expecting to get rich. They approach a balding man at the counter reading the New Orleans Times-Picayune.

Grunge removes the horn from under his coat and smugly hands it to the man. "We would like to have this melted into gold coins." The man takes the horn, turns it over, feels the weight, and begins to laugh.

Bumpy and Grunge thought he was laughing because of the fine treasure they had just given him and they too began to laugh. Suddenly he stops laughing, leans forward, and peers into their eyes. "Why, who are you trying to fool? This is nothing but a piece of tin. I wouldn't give you one plug nickel for it," he tells them, pushing it back across the counter.

Shocked! Bumpy and Grunge run into the streets. Not giving up on the idea of becoming rich they start making plans to find someone to pawn the horn off on before word gets out that it's a fake.

Meanwhile Henry returns to Guthie seeking advice. "The fear has clouded your mind." Guthie tells Henry. "You have the talent. We all have a given talent, some use it, and some don't. You gotta want it bad enough. Then you gotta make it happen. Guthie closes his eyes and puts his hand on Henry's shoulder. "Can you hear it?" he asked. Henry closes his eyes, and listens. He hears a trumpet playing in the distance. The music is sweet and clear. He looks deeper into his mind's eye and sees himself on stage, his fingers moving gracefully, the notes he's never played before flowing so musically. "Yessir, yessir!" Henry leaps to his feet filled with excitement. "I can hear it! I can see it!" He tells Guthie.

"You've seen it; you've heard it, now go and do it!" Guthie instructs Henry. With further adventures The magical Golden Horn is finally located. To avoid punishment the two greedy gators, are ordered by

the town Constable to escort Jody and Ropé back across the swamp to return the horn to its rightful owner, "before the leaves turn to gold."

When Jody tries to explain to the king that the horn is not really gold, but tin, he smiles and says "The power of The Golden Horn is in the minds of those who believe in it."

Good things start to happen when Henry gathers the coins he's collected while playing on street corners and in Jackson Square and adds them to the money he's made helping his father load and unload cargo along the Mississippi River. He proudly rushes to the music store to purchase his very own golden horn. In just a few days he will become of age and start to play in a Downtown Club with Papa Joe's Band.

It's at this time Henry and Jody discover that something else has snuck up on them that'll change their lives forever. As Ropé is fond of saying... "That's the truth and nothin' but the truth."