Bridge to Terabithia – Chapter 3 Part 1



sneakers



basement

radiator



thumb





stomp

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THREE

The Fastest Kid in the Fifth Grade

Jess didn't see Leslie Burke again except from a distance until the first day of school, the following Tuesday, when Mr. Turner brought her down to Mrs. Myers' fifth-grade class at Lark Creek Elementary.

Leslie was still dressed in the faded cutoffs and the blue undershirt. She had sneakers on her feet but no socks. Surprise swooshed up from the class like steam from a released radiator cap. They were all sitting there primly dressed in their spring Sunday best. Even Jess wore his one pair of corduroys and an ironed shirt.

The reaction didn't seem to bother her. She stood there in front, her eyes saying, "OK, friends, here I am," in answer to their openmouthed stares while Mrs. Myers fluttered about trying to figure where to put the extra desk. The room was a small basement one, and five rows of six desks already filled it more than comfortably.

"Thirty-one," Mrs. Myers kept mumbling over her

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double chin, "thirty-one. No one else has more than twenty-nine." She finally decided to put the desk up against the side wall near the front. "Just there for now uh—Leslie. It's the best we can do—for now. This is a very crowded classroom." She swung a pointed glance at Mr. Turner's retreating form.

Leslie waited quietly until the seventh-grade boy who'd been sent down with the extra desk scraped it into position hard against the radiator and under the first window. Without making any noise, she pulled it a few inches forward from the radiator and settled herself into it. Then she turned once more to gaze at the rest of the class.

Thirty pairs of eyes were suddenly focused on desktop scratches. Jess ran his forefinger around the heart with two pairs of initials, BR + SK, trying to figure out whose desk he had inherited. Probably Sally Koch's. Girls did more of the heart stuff in fifth grade than boys. Besides BR must be Billy Rudd, and Billy was known to favor Myrna Hauser last spring. Of course, these initials might have been here longer than that, in which case . . .

"Jesse Aarons. Bobby Greggs. Pass out the arithmetic books. Please." On the last word, Mrs. Myers flashed her famous first-day-of-school smile. It was said in the upper grades that Mrs. Myers had never been seen to smile except on the first and the last day of school.

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Jess roused himself and went to the front. As he passed Leslie's desk, she grinned and rippled her fingers low in a kind of wave. He jerked a nod. He couldn't help feeling sorry for her. It must be embarrassing to sit in front when you find yourself dressed funny on the first day of school. And you don't know anybody.

He slapped the books down as Mrs. Myers directed. Gary Fulcher grabbed his arm as he went by. "Gonna run today?" Jess nodded. Gary smirked. *He thinks he can beat me, the dumbhead.* At the thought, something jiggled inside Jess. He knew he was better than he had been last spring. Fulcher might think he was going to be the best, now that Wayne Pettis was in sixth, but he, Jess, planned to give old Fulcher a *le-etle* surprise come noon. It was as though he had swallowed grasshoppers. He could hardly wait.

Mrs. Myers handed out books almost as though she were President of the United States, dragging the distribution process out in senseless signings and ceremonies. It occurred to Jess that she, too, wished to postpone regular school as long as possible. When it wasn't his turn to pass out books, Jess sneaked out a piece of notebook paper and drew. He was toying with the idea of doing a whole book of drawings. He ought to choose one chief character and do a story about it. He scribbled several animals and tried

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to think of a name. A good title would get him started. *The Haunted Hippo*? He liked the ring of it. *Herby the Haunted Hippo*? Even better. *The Case of the Crooked Crocodile*. Not bad.

"Whatcha drawing?" Gary Fulcher was leaning way over his desk.

Jess covered the page with his arm. "Nothing."

"Ah, c'mon. Lemme see."

Jess shook his head.

Gary reached down and tried to pull Jess's hand away from the paper. "The Case of the Crooked—c'mon, Jess," he whispered hoarsely. "I ain't gonna hurt nothing." He yanked at Jess's thumb.

Jess put both arms over the paper and brought his sneaker heel crashing down on Gary Fulcher's toe.

"*Ye-ow!*"

"Boys!" Mrs. Myers' face had lost its lemon-pie smile.

"He stomped my toe."

"Take your seat, Gary."

"But he—"

"Sit down!"

"Jesse Aarons. One more peep from your direction and you can spend recess in here. Copying the dictionary."

Jess's face was burning hot. He slid the notebook paper back under his desktop and put his head down. A whole

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year of this. Eight more years of this. He wasn't sure he could stand it.

Say whether the sentences are true (T) or false (F)

Leslie wore a dress on her first day at school	T	F
Leslie's desk was put on the side	T	F
There are 30 students at Mrs. Myers's class	T	F
Mrs. Myers smiles every day at work	T	F

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