

The Book Hopper

I walked out of the summer London rain and into the warm sweet-smelling bookstore. My favorite place in the world. My brown, wavy hair was dripping wet and my clothes were soaked. The rain made me feel more under- the weather than I already felt. Today had been a crummy day.

My mind is still referring to an issue I had this morning before the bell. I slumped myself into a fluffy orange armchair and picked up the closest book to me. It was my favorite book, *Bridge to Terabithia* by: Katherine Paterson. I had read the original copy about 10 times; I knew some action and dialogue parts by heart. The antique purple door opened with the bell jingling and the sound made me jump. When I jumped, the book in my lap fell to the floor with a clatter. A woman was standing in the doorway with a yellow umbrella draped over her shoulder. Her familiar smile sparkled in the light of the lanterns hanging from the book shop ceiling.

“Roxy!” I yelled, making my way into her arms, trying not to get wet.

“Hey Avery! Your mom and dad hired me as your nanny again! How was school?”, Roxy shouted to me.

“I am so happy to see you. And school was...*normal*,” I replied.

“Oh, your mom mentioned that you are having problems at school, this girl named Gwen, correct?” Hearing this made my heart sink. Roxy knew about my problems?

“Um, yeah. She bugs me at school and I don’t know, um, what to do.”

After some moments of silence between us, Roxy led me toward the bookshop cafe and treated me to a big cupcake. We sat in silence, full of thought, when Roxy asked me “What’s on your mind? Gwen? Do you want to talk about it?”

“Gwen, yeah. I don’t know what to do about her and school. She just..... annoys me and makes fun of me and that makes me feel, well, sad,” I replied mournfully.

“I am sorry. Can I do anything to help?”

“Not really. Maybe now is not the time. I think I just want to read and enjoy the bookstore. “

“I get it, we can discuss it later or maybe you can talk to your mom about it again. What book are you going to read next, Avery?”, Roxy said in a sarcastic voice like she knew what I was going to say.

I ran over to the chair, my book *Bridge to Terabithia* was lying there. I plopped down in the chair. I opened to the first page and an illustration of two kids showed that they were laughing and having fun. I started reading the familiar words and felt my whole body relax.

Suddenly, from a distance I could hear the faint sounds of children giggling with glee. *I don't remember this being a part of the original book? This is the weirdest thing*, I thought to myself. I got up from the chair to see if there were any kids laughing in the shop. But as soon as I walked away from the chair, the voices in my head stopped. I sat back down, closed the book, and started to worry that I was going crazy. *Was it my imagination or in real life?*

Sometimes I get strange reactions to things that happen to me that I cannot control. I had a bad day at school and did not feel like I could handle one more thing. I squeezed my eyes shut tight. *What if this is all in my head? Is that page magical? Why is this book magical? Why does this happen to me?*

I opened my eyes. Gold magical dust was swirling around me. I touched the magic dust, hoping it was fake. I felt as if I was going down into the center of the earth. I was spinning. I closed my eyes in fear.

I fell from the sky into a patch of farm land. I screamed. I opened my eyes again and then crashed. I had landed in a patch of soft grass. A house was nearby so I started to walk toward it and then I heard kids laughing and playing again. I turned around, saw a boy and a girl sitting inside a tiny, old, beat-up and torn doghouse. They stopped talking and turned their attention to me.

Great. The last thing I need is to be the center of attention for kids I don't even know, I thought to myself. The kids stared at me, as if looking for answers.

“Hi! Who are you? I am Leslie Burke and this is Jess Aarons. Pleased to meet you!” the girl waved at me, her braids bobbing in the breeze. The boy behind her gave a timid little wave as he jotted something down on his notebook.

“I am Avery Hubbard.” I was puzzled. The kids looked at each other. The boy (Jess) scribbled something in his notebook again. Leslie piped up after some silence and said with confusion, “Do you go to Lark Creek Elementary?”

“No, I don't. I go to Mountain View Private School.”

“Do you live in the area? Like around Washington D.C.?”, Leslie asked.

“What are you talking about? I live in London, England.” Leslie looked shocked by my answer. Jess even looked up from his notebook and gaped at her in awe.

“Why did you fall out of the sky?” Jess, the quiet boy asked in a tiny mouse voice.

“Jess Oliver Aarons! Apologize!” shouted Leslie, pulling tight on his shirt.

“You sound like my mother,” Jess replied, letting go from Leslie’s grip. My eyes swerved around the little shack. A sign on the door said: royals of Terabithia’s Castle!

“TERABITHIA?” my head was spinning. What was happening? Leslie and Jess stopped fighting and turned to me. A thought was turning in my brain. *Where am I? Are these really the Leslie Burke and Jess Aarons of the Bridge to Terabithia? How can this be? Are these the characters of the book that I had memorized parts of by heart?* My insides were turning inside out with excitement.

“Um, Terabithia. Yeah. It’s a magical place we made up in these woods...umph!” Jess had clamped his hand over her mouth to stop her from talking.

“We promised not to tell anyone! Leslie!” Jess was livid. Leslie blushed and smiled sheepishly as if she was hiding a secret.

“I guess but she is from London! She is far away from us.” Jess shrugged at the thought but started to write feverishly in his notebook.

“Do you want to help us think of a letter to write to Janice Avery? The biggest bully in our school? We are going to teach her a lesson.” Leslie asked. I thought about that. No one at my school had ever written a trick letter. In the original book, Bridge to Terabithia, Leslie and Jess do write a letter to Janice and she falls for it.

“Yes, to the question you asked me before, I will help you write a letter.” Leslie’s face lit up like the lights in the bookshop back home. She tore out a piece of paper from Jess’s notebook and handed her a spare pencil.

“Can you think of ideas to write a trick letter to Janice Avery?” Leslie asked. I knew this part of their story well. My mind swirled. If Janice Avery was the bully here, then the bully in London is ...Gwen! I should write a letter to Gwen!

“You guys think of ideas for Janice, I have a bully of my own who needs a kindness letter,” I said with a smile on my face.

“Sure! Me and Jess will write to Janice Avery then.” Jess grabbed his notebook and asked Leslie to give him ideas. Leslie blabbered her mouth off as she gave the directions to Jess, he wrote a long mischievous note to Janice Avery “from Willard Hughes”. When they were finished, Leslie smiled and said, “Mean old Janice will eat this stuff up.”

“No doubt, Leslie,” Jess spoke while laughing.

I tried to concentrate on the letter I was writing to Gwen. I put all my deepest thinking into the letter and I wanted it to have an effect on Gwen. In the end, my best piece of writing looked like this:

Dear Gwen,

I hope you read this letter because this stands for every kid you have picked on. Please stop picking on people. It hurts our feelings. Then Mountain View School could be the happiest school in the world. Please accept this offer to change. I would like to be your friend if you decide to change. I bet you will need a friend.

Sincerely,

Avery Hubbard.

I clutched the note tightly in my hand and felt a wave of pride wash over myself.

My arm started to tingle. I was floating in the air. I was rising up into the sky with a gold magical dust surrounding me. Leslie and Jess waved goodbye to me from down below. I let the dust surround me and slowly felt a slow feeling of pride and joy of making new friends that felt like old friends. Soon enough, I was back in the bookshop. Roxy came running over to me and I saw the happiness in her eyes.

“Where have you been, Avery?”

I thought about this. Then an idea came to me. “I got lost in a book, as usual. “Roxy hugged me and chuckled under her breath. She walked me out of the store back to my nice and cozy warm house.

The next day, I walked to school and found Gwen sitting under a cherry tree. This was my chance. I approached her and she looked up at me. I smiled and handed her the note I wrote in *Terabithia*. She read it silently at me. She stood up and took hold of my hand.

“I am very sorry for my behavior. I really just wanted to be your friend. Can we be friends?” she whispered in my ear, her eyes shining with tears. I smiled then said, “Of course.”

After school, I got to sit in that orange armchair again. I picked up a book. This is where it all started and where I should be, escaping into a good book. Me, the *Book Hopper*.