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Firegirl



Synopsis

This poignant novel about a boy's friendship with a burn victim is perfect for fans of R. J. Palacio's *Wonder*. From the moment Jessica arrives, life is never quite the same for Tom and his seventh-grade classmates. They learn that Jessica has been in a fire and was badly burned, and will be attending St. Catherine's while receiving medical treatments. Despite her appearance and the fear she evokes in him and most of the class, Tom slowly develops a tentative friendship with Jessica that changes his life.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This remarkable book gives children a window into interior thinking. It articulates strong and often bewildering feelings that they have yet to articulate themselves. It shows, through wonderful storytelling skill, how what looks weak can be strong, what looks strong can be weak or troubled or wicked, how group think can create rumors based on fantasy. Most of all it shows how friendship can develop through adversity and how a burned child can show others the difference between surface and abiding values. Our eleven year old adored this book. She read it as part of a fourth

grade class assignment and was deeply engaged in the study questions that followed the reading. It brought up interesting conversations in the family.

Sometimes the smallest books pack such a punch. When you least expect it, a book can really get under your skin. Tony Abbot's *Firegirl* had me thinking about it for a long time after I turned the final page. For such a short book, there is a lot to think about. Tom, like most boys, just wants the prettiest girl in his class to notice him. He thinks about her all the time, but can't bring himself to talk to her. This is the most confusing thing he has had to deal with, until Jessica arrives at school, that is. Before Jessica arrives, the teacher explains they should be prepared for what she looks like. Jessica was badly burned and is coming to the school to be close to a hospital that will be conducting reconstructive surgeries. This is all the teacher tells them. Nothing more, nothing less. When Jessica arrives and they all see her burned and grafted face, the kids can't stop talking about her. With no information about how she was burned, the rumors start flying. Kids come up with all kinds of crazy theories about her accident, but none take the time to get to know Jessica. When the teacher asks Tom to bring Jessica her homework after a few days of her being absent, his curiosity leads him to her house. What he doesn't expect is that getting to Jessica will change his life forever. Jessica will change everything Tom thought he knew about his friends and who he really is. In the book world, 150 pages is nothing. I have read books where the first 400 pages are just background information. To fit in a purpose, an execution, and make it mean something into 150 pages is talent, pure and simple. I didn't know what to think of this book at first. Then, I couldn't stop thinking about it. What stayed with me the most was that in an effort to protect Jessica, the teachers didn't tell the kids about her accident. This was understandable of course- you wouldn't want that information out unless she told people. But the consequences, especially when you are dealing with children was that if someone doesn't know the real story, they tend to speculate. The more time that passes without the real story, the wilder the stories become. Then I began to think about this in adult terms, and it isn't all that different. In fact, isn't this the origin of most rumors- a lack of knowledge that leads to speculation? Being an adolescent is difficult enough, but being so when you are "different" in anyway is near impossible. Sure kids live through it every day, but how much does it change them in the end? Why don't we share the whole, real truth with people? Adults and children alike succumb to speculation when curious, so why not stop the rumors with the truth. Granted, the truth can be scary at times, but it has to be better than rumors! This is a powerful story, written in language meant for middle readers but with content that had my 30 year old adult self swimming in my own thoughts for a long time. It is a book that you could think about, write about, and talk about

for hours and never truly feel satisfied. And at 150 pages, it is a manageable size that can build the self-esteem of any struggling reader while still challenging them to think, explore, and examine the world they live in.

I found this an enjoyable, emotional book with a lesson at the end. I thought it was: one small thing could create a huge impact on someone's life. This book is pretty short, but you won't forget it. The way it made you think, and feel. I felt really sad for Jessica, I thought it was unfair the way she was treated, just because she was burned. I felt angry at Jeff, because he is always being mean to her, and to everybody really. Tom, I think, also learns something from Jessica. It's unfortunate, and unfair, the things she had to go through while she went to the school, you'd think that people would at least try to be nice. Jeff was probably the worst. I think you should get this book. Anyone will like this. And if a single one star review shows up, that person simply doesn't have the ability to appreciate a book like this.

This was a pretty nice little school life drama. It moves pretty quickly, with something interesting happening in every chapter, which to me is a huge plus with any book. And another huge plus - I could completely relate to the characters. But let's start from the beginning. Firegirl follows Tom, a regular 7th grade kid who is like many other kids - he is somewhat envious of his best friend, Jeff, and he has a crush on a girl named Courtney. Tom regularly daydreams about being a hero and saving Courtney from various dangers, ultimately resulting in a romance between the two. In the real world, he can't imagine being close to her, especially since she's the most popular girl in his class. Then one day, Jessica, a girl who was burned horribly in a fire, enters the class, as her parents don't want her to miss too much school in between receiving treatments at a hospital. From that point, everything begins to change. The other kids are repulsed by Jessica, Jeff in particular. Jeff makes nasty comments about her when she's not around, and can't stand her presence. Tom, on the other hand, sees Jessica as a human being and feels sorry for her, and begins to like her more when he (as part of a favor) visits her house. Tom ends up torn between Jeff's constant belittling of Jessica and his lack of compassion for a horrible burn victim, and his own desire to do the right thing. The plot may be relatively simple (Tom himself even sums it up in a few sentences near the end while reflecting on the events), but what makes it really work is the characterization. I could definitely relate to Tom. While he may kind of be the "Everykid", so to speak, he's actually more of the quiet, shy kid, who comes from a stable two-parent household, but still envies the cooler kids who have more material goods than him. Tom is afraid to speak up and stick up for Jessica, but

does try to redirect meanspirited conversations away from her, to mixed success. Jeff is pretty much the kid who's cool among his peers and has all the coolest stuff everyone wants, but secretly hates his home life. And sadly, it's left its toll on him. I couldn't help but wonder if Jeff would have more compassion for others if he hadn't been bouncing between his neglectful father and his mother, who he also doesn't have that much respect for. The scene where Jeff burned a toy car and compared it to Jessica, while Tom tries desperately to change the subject, rang painfully true. And Jessica, even with horrible backstory, is no saint. She's as imperfect as any human being, and even displays some rudeness and bluntness, as if trying to hide her pain. That only makes her more real as a person, and more likeable. In all, Firegirl may not be a fantastic or complex story, but with its believable characters, situation and dialog, it's an excellent experience as a book. I'd recommend it.

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