Daddy-long-legs and the Rotten Egg

Long before I wanted to kiss Tyler Trammell, I ran from him, crying. Every time. He relished watching my tears forming, my sorry attempts to hold them back, before running home to beg my dad to do something and make him stop.

I was six years old when Tyler’s family bought the Dotterer’s house across the street. Brian Dotterer was my friend. We played together every day. I blamed Tyler for Brian moving away.

The other kids in our neighborhood were older than me. Katie Arahood lived in the house on the corner. She was in second grade. It was her eighth birthday. She was having a party in her backyard, and she’d invited me. I guessed her parents told her she had to invite *all* of the neighborhood kids. Jane Frantic, whose family lived in the neighboring cul-de-sac, was also in the second grade. Colleen and Todd Simpson, who lived right next door to me, had just arrived; they were in fourth and fifth grade.

And, of course, there was Tyler. We’d been playing Kick the Can under the heat of the sun when Tyler decided it was time to cool off in Katie’s garage.

“Last one there’s a rotten egg!” Tyler shouted.

I ran as hard as I could. But I was the farthest away, and I couldn’t outrun any of them.

“Arbeiter stinks!”

“Ooooh, nasty, get away from me.”

I found a place away from everyone and sat in the corner, alone.

Katie whispered something to Jane. Colleen said she and Todd had to leave.

“Hang on a sec,” Tyler said. “Watch this.”

He crouched down on all fours and placed the daddy-long-legs in front of me. “Now pin it down with one finger and pull off a leg, like this.”

Todd pointed at the struggling, now five-legged daddy long-legs. “Look, he’s crippled!” Colleen, Katie, and Jane joined him in a cruel chorus of amusement.

“Your turn,” Tyler said, slapping my back.

Tyler, the king perpetrator. Just a year older than me, he had earned the others’ respect.

I looked at the poor clumsy creature, trying so hard to adapt to having lost one of its legs. It was just an experiment, I told myself. In a few years, we’d be dissecting frogs in science class. This isn’t really a big deal.

But I knew this was mean, and it was wrong.

I wanted the older kids to see that I was not a cry-baby. I wanted to be accepted. This was my chance, my initiation. I just had to find someone or something weak, and I had to hurt it.

I wanted to see what it would do with only four legs. So I steeled myself and snapped off a leg.

“All right, Arbeiter. Now watch the spider try to walk,” Tyler said..

“It’s an insect, stupid. A spider has eight legs. Daddy-long-legs only have *six* legs,” Jane pointed out.

“Shut up, Mrs. Know-it-all.” Todd was not impressed.

“No, she’s right,” said Colleen. “The other two just look like legs. They’re really antennae.”

Todd didn’t care. “Whatever. Rip off another.”

“Your turn, Arbeiter. Watch the *insect* try to walk with three legs,” Tyler emphasized the word,showing them all who was in charge here.

I didn’t have the guts to stop it. I was too desperate to show them I was one of them. I was certainly no upstander.

I looked at the thing in front of me, imagining it with only three legs. And broke off another leg.

It was a tripod now.

“Two, two, two, two, two!” They cheered loudly, a mad chorus of bystanders.

Todd shouted, “Let’s see him hop!”

It was just a living toy we could torture.

Another leg amputated. The daddy-long-legs tried to find balance, hopping between two legs like an unused creaky see-saw. And they laughed.

“One! One! One! One! One! One! One!” Everyone chanted, perpetrators of torture.

There was no turning back. No returning the daddy-long-legs to a normal life now.

On its belly, one leg propped like it was resting, it began to squirm. It tried to push itself along with its lone limb.

“What do you call a man with no arms, no legs, floating in Lake Michigan?”

“Duh, we’ve all heard that one,” Colleen punched her brother’s arm.

“All right, Bob, let’s see you float,” Tyler sneered. “Do it, Arbeiter.”

I knew it was disgusting, that I wanted to make this innocent creature suffer. It was just in the wrong place at the wrong time.

I broke off the last leg. It was down to just the core of its body. It would never move again. Never eat. It would starve and die.

“Let’s see how long it takes before he kicks the bucket!” Katie cheered.

Tyler squashed it with his shoe. “Last one to the swing-set’s a rotten egg!”

Everybody raced after Tyler. I ran after them, but it didn’t matter.

Always the rotten egg.

At night, I couldn’t sleep. There on my wall, the daddy-long-legs—now a giant—waited, watching me squirm.