

Bridge to Terabithia Chapter 2 (Part 2)

Lights were winking out from all three floors of the old Perkins place. It was nearly dark. Miss Bessie's bag was tight, and she was fidgeting with discomfort. She should have been milked a couple of hours ago. He eased himself onto the stool and began to tug; the warm milk pinged into the pail. Down on the road an occasional truck passed by with its dimmers on. His dad would be home soon, and so would those cagey girls who managed somehow to have all the fun and leave him and their mother with all the work. He wondered what they had bought with all their money. Lord, what he wouldn't give for a new pad of real art paper and a set of those marking pens—color pouring out onto the page as fast as you could think it. Not like stubby school crayons you had to press down on till somebody bitched about your breaking them.

A car was turning in. It was the Timmons'. The girls had beat Dad home. Jess could hear their happy calls as the car doors slammed. Momma would fix them supper, and when he went in with the milk, he'd find them all laughing and chattering. Momma'd even forget she was tired and mad. He was the only one who had to take that stuff. Sometimes he felt so lonely among all these females—even the one rooster had died, and they hadn't yet gotten another. With his father gone from sunup until well past dark, who was there to know how he felt? Weekends

weren't any better. His dad was so tired from the wear and tear of the week and trying to catch up around the place that when he wasn't actually working, he was sleeping in front of the TV.

"Hey, Jesse." May Belle. The dumb kid wouldn't even let you think privately.

"What do you want now?"

He watched her shrink two sizes. "I got something to tell you." She hung her head.

"You ought to be in bed," he said huffily, mad at himself for cutting her down.

"Ellie and Brenda come home."

"Came. Came home." Why couldn't he quit picking on her?

But her news was too delicious to let him stop her sharing it. "Ellie bought herself a see-through blouse, and Momma's throwing a fit!"

Good, he thought. "That ain't nothing to cheer about," he said.

Baripity, baripity, baripity.

"Daddy!" May Belle screamed with delight and started running for the road. Jess watched his dad stop the truck, lean over to unlatch the door, so May Belle could climb in. He turned away. Durn lucky kid. She could run after him and grab him and kiss him. It made Jess ache inside to

watch his dad grab the little ones to his shoulder, or lean down and hug them. It seemed to him that he had been thought too big for that since the day he was born.

When the pail was full, he gave Miss Bessie a pat to move her away. Putting the stool under his left arm, he carried the heavy pail carefully, so none of the milk would slop out.

“Mighty late with the milking, aren’t you, son?” It was the only thing his father said directly to him all evening.

The next morning he almost didn’t get up at the sound of the pickup. He could feel, even before he came fully awake, how tired he still was. But May Belle was grinning at him, propped up on one elbow. “Ain’t ’cha gonna run?” she asked.

“No,” he said, shoving the sheet away. “I’m gonna fly.”

Because he was more tired than usual, he had to push himself harder. He pretended that Wayne Pettis was there, just ahead of him, and he had to keep up. His feet pounded the uneven ground, and he thrashed his arms harder and harder. He’d catch him. “Watch out, Wayne Pettis,” he said between his teeth. “I’ll get you. You can’t beat me.”

“If you’re so afraid of the cow,” the voice said, “why don’t you just climb the fence?”

He paused in midair like a stop-action TV shot and turned, almost losing his balance, to face the questioner,

who was sitting on the fence nearest the old Perkins place, dangling bare brown legs. The person had jaggedy brown hair cut close to its face and wore one of these blue undershirtlike tops with faded jeans cut off above the knees. He couldn't honestly tell whether it was a girl or a boy.

"Hi," he or she said, jerking his or her head toward the Perkins place. "We just moved in."

Jess stood where he was, staring.

The person slid off the fence and came toward him. "I thought we might as well be friends," it said. "There's no one else close by."

Girl, he decided. Definitely a girl, but he couldn't have said why he was suddenly sure. She was about his height—not quite though, he was pleased to realize as she came nearer.

"My name's Leslie Burke."

She even had one of those dumb names that could go either way, but he was sure now that he was right.

"What's the matter?"

"Huh?"

"Is something the matter?"

"Yeah. No." He pointed his thumb in the direction of his own house, and then wiped his hair off his forehead. "Jess Aarons." Too bad May Belle's girl came in the wrong size. "Well—well." He nodded at her. "See you." He

turned toward the house. No use trying to run any more this morning. Might as well milk Miss Bessie and get that out of the way.

"Hey!" Leslie was standing in the middle of the cow field, her head tilted and her hands on her hips. "Where you going?"

"I got work to do," he called back over his shoulder. When he came out later with the pail and stool, she was gone.

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

Jesse's mom has a nice temper T F

Jesse likes to draw crazy animals T F

None of the teachers like Jesse's drawing T F

Miss Edmunds is the only teacher wearing pants T F

Jesse's dad never hugs him T F

Leslie has fair hair T F

Leslie is not as tall as Jesse T F