

KATHERINE PATERSON



Bridge  
to  
Terabithia



O N E

Jesse Oliver Aarons, Jr.

*Ba-room, ba-room, ba-room, baripity, baripity, baripity, baripity*—Good. His dad had the pickup going. He could get up now. Jess slid out of bed and into his overalls. He didn't worry about a shirt because once he began running he would be hot as popping grease even if the morning air was chill, or shoes because the bottoms of his feet were by now as tough as his worn-out sneakers.

"Where you going, Jess?" May Belle lifted herself up sleepily from the double bed where she and Joyce Ann slept.

"*Sh.*" He warned. The walls were thin. Momma would be mad as flies in a fruit jar if they woke her up this time of day.

He patted May Belle's hair and yanked the twisted sheet up to her small chin. "Just over the cow field," he whispered. May Belle smiled and snuggled down under the sheet.

"Gonna run?"

"Maybe."

Of course he was going to run. He had gotten up early every day all summer to run. He figured if he worked at it—and Lord, had he worked—he could be the fastest runner in the fifth grade when school opened up. He had to be the fastest—not one of the fastest or next to the fastest, but *the* fastest. The very best.

He tiptoed out of the house. The place was so rattly that it screeched whenever you put your foot down, but Jess had found that if you tiptoed, it gave only a low moan, and he could usually get outdoors without waking Momma or Ellie or Brenda or Joyce Ann. May Belle was another matter. She was going on seven, and she worshiped him, which was OK sometimes. When you were the only boy smashed between four sisters, and the older two had despised you ever since you stopped letting them dress you up and wheel you around in their rusty old doll carriage, and the littlest one cried if you looked at her cross-eyed, it was nice to have somebody who worshiped you. Even if it got unhandy sometimes.

He began to trot across the yard. His breath was coming out in little puffs—cold for August. But it was early yet. By noontime when his mom would have him out working, it would be hot enough.

Miss Bessie stared at him sleepily as he climbed across the scrap heap, over the fence, and into the cow field.

“Moo—oo,” she said, looking for all the world like another May Belle with her big, brown droopy eyes.

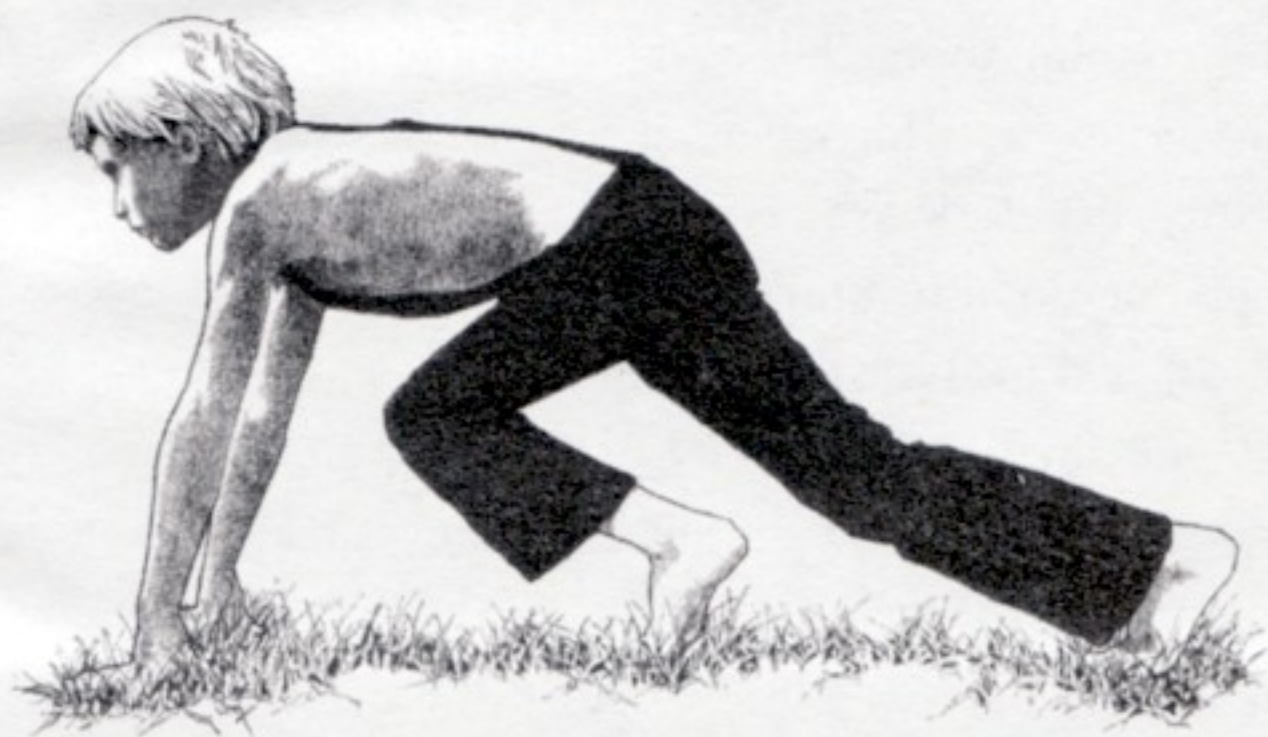
“Hey, Miss Bessie,” Jess said soothingly. “Just go on back to sleep.”

Miss Bessie strolled over to a greenish patch—most of the field was brown and dry—and yanked up a mouthful.

“That’s a girl. Just eat your breakfast. Don’t pay me no mind.”

He always started at the northwest corner of the field, crouched over like the runners he had seen on *Wide World of Sports*.

“Bang,” he said, and took off flying around the cow field. Miss Bessie strolled toward the center, still following him with her droopy eyes, chewing slowly. She didn’t look



## A secret world of their own

**J**ess Aarons' greatest ambition is to be the fastest runner in the fifth grade. He's been practicing all summer and can't wait to see his classmates' faces when he beats them all. But on the first day of school, a new girl boldly crosses over to the boys' side of the playground and outruns everyone.

That's not a very promising beginning for a friendship, but Jess and Leslie Burke become inseparable. Leslie has imagination. Together, she and Jess create Terabithia, a magical kingdom in the woods where the two of them reign as king and queen, and their imaginations set the only limits. Then one morning a terrible tragedy occurs. Only when Jess is able to come to grips with this tragedy does he finally understand the strength and courage Leslie has given him.



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