

The Bridge Chamber

by

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Based on a short story by Rayne Hall

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FADE IN:

1 EXT. PLAYGROUND - AFTERNOON 1

GARNET MCBRIDE (9), a short, overweight girl, lies in the foetal position, crying. As she sobs, BALDWIN BARKER (10) stands over her, laughing. Among the onlookers is Baldwin's sister NESTA BARKER (8).

NESTA  
(pointing)  
Ha ha! Look at the big fat baby.

BALDWIN  
Want a dummy, baby?

Garnet turns her head suddenly, and scowls at Nesta. She scrambles to her feet, and lunges towards her, knocking her to the ground. Garnet lands on top of Nesta, and pulls wildly at her hair. Miss Willoughby runs towards them.

MISS WILLOUGHBY  
(screaming)  
Garnet! Get off! You'll hurt her!

Miss Willoughby tries to separate the girls. Mr Clark appears just in time, and drags Garnet to her feet. He frogmarches her across the playground.

GARNET  
(sobbing)  
It wasn't me sir. Please don't tell Mam. Please! Sir!

2 INT. HEADMASTER'S OFFICE - AFTERNOON 2

Garnet stands at the desk, pouting, head down, and hands clasped in front.

GARNET  
Baldwin and Nesta started it, sir.

MR CLARK  
It doesn't matter who started it. Nesta is a very poorly little girl. If her heart beats too hard she could die.

Garnet looks up. Her lip quivers, and she starts to cry again.

MR CLARK (CONT'D)  
(reaching for the phone)  
Will your mother be home yet?

He starts to dial, and Garnet hangs her head.

3 INT. CORRIDOR - LATER

3

Garnet stands in the corridor. Through an open door she sees Nesta sitting up on a bed, being given a glass of milk, and a biscuit. A bell rings, and children rush down the corridor. As Baldwin runs past, he slaps Garnet across the head. She starts to cry again.

MR CLARK

I haven't been able to get an answer at your home. If I let you go now, will someone be there when you get back?

GARNET

Yes. Mam's probably just in the garden.

MR CLARK

Alright then. Off you go. Be a good girl now.

GARNET

Yes, sir.

4 EXT. COUNTRY LANE - LATE AFTERNOON

4

Garnet walks along the lane, scuffing her shoes in the dust. She walks up a path, and into her house.

5 INT. GARNET'S HOUSE - LATE AFTERNOON

5

Garnet's mother, RUBY MCBRIDE (35), lies asleep on the couch, with an empty bottle next to her. Garnet walks into the kitchen, and fills her pockets with biscuits. She leaves the house.

6 EXT. GARNET'S HOUSE - LATE AFTERNOON

6

Garnet draws shapes in the dirt with a stick, munching on one biscuit after another. She picks up a passing caterpillar, and studies it carefully.

BALDWIN

(in Garnet's ear)

Is that your tea, Fatty?

Garnet jumps.

GARNET

Go away.

BALDWIN  
(to Nesta)  
Fatty's mother gets so drunk she  
has to hunt for her own food.

Nesta giggles.

GARNET  
You're a liar. I've just had  
sausages and chips for tea, and  
some trifle.

BALDWIN  
Yeah, slug trifle.

Nesta giggles again.

BALDWIN (CONT'D)  
Bet you're grounded for the  
weekend now, after starting that  
fight.

GARNET  
(shouting)  
I did *not* start that fight, and I  
am *not* grounded.

NESTA  
So why are you still here? We're  
going to the park, for ice cream.

BALDWIN  
(quickly)  
And you're not invited.

GARNET  
I don't want to come to the  
stupid park. I'm going  
exploring.

BALDWIN  
For worms?

GARNET  
I've found a secret cave.

BALDWIN  
No you haven't.

GARNET  
Yes I have, and I'm going back  
for the treasure. There's a box  
buried in the floor, and I'm  
going to dig it up. I've already  
found some silver coins.

Baldwin falls about laughing, and Nesta follows his lead.

GARNET (CONT'D)  
I have! Look!

She digs in her pocket, and pulls out a battered coin.

GARNET (CONT'D)  
Please yourselves. If I go on my  
own, that's more for me.

Garnet picks up a trowel and walks down the lane. The others look on for a few seconds, before Baldwin strides after her, quickly followed by Nesta.

BALDWIN  
So, where is this imaginary cave  
of yours?

GARNET  
Under the old railway bridge.  
There are loads of tunnels  
though, and only I know which is  
the right one.

BALDWIN  
(to Nesta)  
She's still lying. Want to have  
a laugh?

NESTA  
Yeah, let's follow her.

Garnet almost cracks a smile. She quickens her pace.

7 EXT. PATH - EARLY EVENING

7

The children walk along the path, with Garnet leading the way.

GARNET  
I was in there last week, and  
found an old army helmet. I  
think soldiers must have hidden  
in there, during the war.

An excited look sweeps across Baldwin's face.

BALDWIN  
Yeah?

Garnet turns to look back at him, and he quickly adopts a deadpan expression.

GARNET  
It's still there. It might even  
be off a German.

As her head turns to face forward again, Baldwin grins.

8 EXT. RAILWAY TRACK - EARLY EVENING

8

Garnet stops suddenly, and looks up at the mouth of a tunnel, obscured by thorns. It takes a bit of effort, but she manages to haul herself up.

GARNET  
(looking down)  
Scaredy cats! You can't be  
explorers if you're frightened of  
a few thorns!

Without missing a beat, Baldwin scrambles up - much quicker than Garnet did. Nesta is close behind.

9 EXT. TUNNEL ENTRANCE - EARLY EVENING

9

The children squat in the entrance, looking at three smaller tunnels which continue into the darkness. Baldwin takes a cigarette out of his mouth.

BALDWIN  
So, which one is it, Fatty?

GARNET  
I'm not telling if you're going  
to call me names . . . and say  
please.

BALDWIN  
I still think you're a liar. You  
haven't been down any of them.

NESTA  
Yeah, liar!

Baldwin stubs out his cigarette with the heel of his boot.

BALDWIN  
I'm going home.

GARNET  
(flustered)  
Ok, it's the middle one.

Garnet pulls some weeds aside from the middle tunnel, and takes a deep breath. She crouches down, and crawls into it. Baldwin and Nesta follow, on their hands and knees.

10

INT. MIDDLE TUNNEL - EVENING

10

NESTA

It's getting dark. I want to go home.

Baldwin takes out his cigarette lighter, and strikes the flint.

BALDWIN

There. Happy now?

They crawl on, slowly, in the flickering light.

BALDWIN (CONT'D)

Get a move on, Fatty.

GARNET

We have to go slowly. There are rats in here.

NESTA

Get me out. Get me out NOW.

Nesta starts to turn. Baldwin grabs her shoulder, and drags her back.

BALDWIN

How much further is it?

GARNET

Not far. Nearly there.

The tunnel gets narrower. Garnet is forced to crawl on her belly. She takes out her trowel, and scrapes at the earth above her. Dirt falls on her face, and into her mouth. She coughs, and spits it out. Nesta screams. The other two jump.

NESTA

(her voice getting weaker, and breathy)

I..want...to...go...home...now.

I...want...my...

Nesta lies still, face down.

BALDWIN

If you don't stop messing about, you're going to get hit.

No response. Baldwin shakes her.

BALDWIN (CONT'D)

Nesta? Nesta? Come on, wake up.

He turns to Garnet, and his voice begins to crack.

BALDWIN (CONT'D)  
 She's probably had a seizure. We  
 need to get her to help, or she  
 could die.

They try to push Nesta out of the tunnel, and to crawl over  
 her, but it's just too narrow.

BALDWIN (CONT'D)  
 Go further down the tunnel, into  
 the cave. We can see if there's  
 another way out.

Garnet starts to cry.

GARNET  
 (between sobs)  
 There is no cave. I made it up.

BALDWIN  
 I don't believe you. Keep going.  
 NOW.

Garnet crawls a few feet further. She's now scraping  
 against the sides of the tunnel. She tries to move  
 forward, then backward. Nothing. She's stuck.

BALDWIN (CONT'D)  
 Get a move on Fatty.

GARNET  
 I'm stuck.

Baldwin points the lighter at Garnet, and kicks at her  
 repeatedly. Garnet screams. He kicks again, and there's a  
 loud CRACK - then silence.

BALDWIN  
 No! Help!

Baldwin is hyperventilating, and turns around in a vain  
 attempt to claw his way past Nesta. He turns back towards  
 Garnet in time to see a rat run in his direction. Another  
 one appears from behind Garnet. His lighter extinguishes,  
 and he cries out in terror.

11 EXT. TUNNEL ENTRANCE - EVENING

11

A number of rats make their way up the tunnel, and spill  
 out of the entrance. In the distance, Baldwin shouts for  
 help, and then starts to cry. Great heaving sobs.

He screams for help, but his voice is drowned out by a  
 passing train.

FADE OUT.