

Passages

Reading Level 6



Title: Briar Rose

Author: Jane Yolen

Sample From The Book

Ben and I have not got the same father. I live with mine. But his father is somewhere out west, the last I heard, in Santa Fe or Tucson, I forget which. I don't like to ask Ben because he says, "I don't know, Carrie," and that ends whatever conversation we're having.

Ben is six years older than I am. He'll be nineteen this summer, and I'll be thirteen in November, I don't like the sound of that - thirteen - but my friend, Abby, says it can't be worse than being twelve. Ben and I don't look at all alike except for the color of our hair and its length. Mine is down to my shoulders now, and I expect, in the next year, to have it grow to my waist.

"Quit measuring your hair, Carrie," my brother says when he catches me looking in the mirror. "It only grows when you aren't watching."

"When are you going to get your hair cut, Ben?" my mother asks him at least once a week.

Ben's answer is to shrug his shoulders. Then Mama looks at my father and she shrugs too. Then my father's face goes blank as if he were half-listening to a conversation between two people he didn't know.

He came in the late 1860's, the best I remember. Anyhow, it was the year that Papa and a bunch of other Salt Licks settlers formed a "pool herd" of their little separate bunches of steers and trailed them to the new cattle market at Abilene, Kansas.

This was to get "cash money," a thing that all Texans were short of in those years right after the Civil War. We lived then in a new country and a good one. As Papa pointed out the day the men talked over making the drive, we had plenty of grass, wood, and water. We had wild game for the killing, fertile ground for growing bread corn, and the Indians had been put onto reservations with the return of U.S. soldiers to the Texas forts.



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