



Being Youngest

Jim Heynen

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"It's not as if grown-ups will let you be average if you're youngest. If you're not fat, they call you Skinny or Bones. If you're not skinny, they call you Hippo or Tubby."

Henry and Gretchen are the youngest children in two Iowa farm families. Being youngest, they get left out, blamed, ignored, and picked on all the time. At least that's how, being youngest, they tend to see it.

In a summer filled with change, Henry and Gretchen swap stories, become friends, fight with their older brothers and sister, and get to know the odd old couple down the road. Between the old fan's habit of plucking nails out of the ground and the old woman's weird "children" who are kept locked in a room upstairs, they are strange enough. But are they just strange, or could the old folks actually be dangerous?

Jim Heynen's story of one farm summer has fun, humor, some scary moments, and many wonderful insights into what being youngest means.

"Before Henry and Gretchen went their separate ways, they didn't compare the stories they were going to tell at home. They did agree they'd tell something--but not all. They both had learned to hide the best part. They knew that to keep a secret you had to hide it down a blind alley of stories that are only part of what happened. You didn't want to pretend that nothing happened. Too much silence was like honey to a hungry bear, and grown-ups were bound to start pawing around in it. It was best to throw them a few scraps of the truth to keep them away from the real honey of what you did."



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