**Chapter 12 The Bridge – Excerpt from Stephen King’s *The Body***

The bridge was made of wood and had spaces all the way across, through which you could look straight down into the river. There was a narrow walkway on either side of the tracks — wide enough so that you wouldn't actually get hit by any train, but so narrow that the wind of a passing train would blow you off the bridge. And it was a long way down to the river, and the river was shallow and fast. In fact, this bridge wasn't for walking across.

Looking at the bridge, we all felt fear start to move in our stomachs, but mixing with the fear was the excitement of a really big dare, something you could be proud to tell your friends about after you got home . . . if you got home. Teddy's eyes were shining: this was better than lorries.

'Man,' Chris said softly.

'Come on,' Teddy said. 'Let's go.' He was already at the start of the bridge, where the wooden supports were built out over the land.

'Does anybody know when the next train's due?' Vern asked uneasily.'

Nobody knew.

I said, 'There's the Route 136 bridge . . . '

'No, man!' Teddy cried. 'That means walking five miles down the river on this side and then five miles back on the other side. It'll take hours. We can cross the bridge and get to the same place in *ten minutes.'*

'But if a train comes, there's nowhere to go,' Vern said. He wasn't looking at Teddy; he was looking down at the river.

'Of course there is,' Teddy said. He climbed over the edge of the bridge and held on to one of the wooden supports between the tracks. He was still hanging over the land, but the thought of doing that in the middle of the bridge, with the river fifty feet below and a train thundering by overhead, made me feel sick.

'See how easy it is?' Teddy said. He dropped *to* the ground, wiped his hands and climbed back up beside us.

'What if it's a 200-car train?' Chris asked. 'Are you going to hang there for five or ten minutes?'

'Are you afraid?' Teddy asked. 'You can go the long way round if you want to, but I'm going across the bridge. I'll wait for you on the other side!'

'There are probably only one or two trains a day here,' I said, 'and one has passed us already. Look at all the grass growing in the middle of the tracks.'

'See?' Teddy was delighted at his victory.

'There's still a *chance* of a train,' I added.

'Yes,' Chris said. He was looking only at me, his eyes shining. 'I dare you, Lachance.'

'Darers go first.'

'All right,' Chris said. He looked at the others as well. 'Any pussies here?'

'*NO!*' Teddy shouted.

Vern cleared his throat and said 'no' in a small voice. He smiled a weak, sickly smile.

'OK,' Chris said . . . but we hesitated for a moment and looked up and down the tracks. I knelt down and touched the steel.

Nothing.

'OK,' I said.

We went out on to the bridge one by one: Chris first, then Teddy, then Vern, and me last because I was the one who said that darers go first.

You had to walk looking down, to make sure you put your feet down on wood rather than thin air. When I saw river instead of rocks below me, I stopped to look up. Chris and Teddy were a long way in front, almost halfway across the bridge. Vern was between them and me. I had to go on. If I turned back, I'd be a pussy for life.

When I was nearly halfway across I stopped again and looked up. I had almost caught up with Vern, who was being very cautious. Chris and Teddy had nearly reached the other side. And although I've written seven books about people who can do strange things like read other people's minds and see into the future, that was when I had my first and last experience of it myself. I bent down and touched the track. It was shaking hard, although it hadn't made a sound.

I have never been as frightened as I was at that moment, holding that live track. My whole body just stopped working. My legs felt like water. My mouth opened — I didn't open it, it opened by itself. I couldn't move, but I could hear and see and sense everything inside me and

for miles around me. I thought of Ray Brower, and I thought that Vern and I would soon be joining him.

That thought unlocked my body. I jumped to my feet. At least, I suppose I jumped; to me it felt as if I was moving slowly up through five hundred feet of water.

I screamed, *'TRAIN!' and* began to run.

Vern looked back over his shoulder. He saw my attempt at running and knew straight away that I wasn't joking. He began to run himself.

Far in front I could see Chris stepping off the bridge and on to solid ground. He was safe. I was glad for him, but I was also jealous as hell. I watched him drop to his knees and touch a track.

My left foot almost slipped, but I recovered and ran on. Now I was just behind Vern. We were more than halfway across, and for the first time I heard the train. It was coming from behind us, from the Castle Rock side of the river.

*'Ooooooh,Jesus!'* Vern screamed.

'Run, you pussy!' I shouted, and hit him on his back with my hand.

'I can't! I'll fall!'

*'Run faster!'*

*'Gordie! I can't!'*

*'YOU CAN! RUN FASTER, PUKE-FACE!'* I shouted at the top of my voice . . . and was I *enjoying* this?

The train was very loud now. I kept expecting the bridge to start shaking under my feet. When that happened the train would be right behind us.

*'GO FASTER, VERN! FAAASTER!'*

'Oh God Gordie oh Gordie God *ooooooh, heeeell!'*

The noise of the train filled the air now. There was no other sound in the world. It tore the air and it was the sound of death. I could see Chris below us and to the right, and Teddy behind him. They were both mouthing a single word and the word was *jump!,* but the train had taken all the blood out of the word, leaving only its shape in their mouths. The bridge began to shake as the train charged across it. We jumped.

Vern landed in the dust and the stones, and I landed beside him, almost on top of him. I never saw the train and I don't know if the engineer saw us. I clapped my hands over my ears and dug my face into the hot dirt as the train went by, metal screaming against metal, the air blowing over us. I had no wish to look at it. Before it had passed completely I felt a warm hand on my neck and I knew it was Chris's.

When it was gone — when I was *sure* it was gone — I lifted my head. Vern was still lying face down in the dirt. Chris was sitting between us, one hand on Vern's sweaty neck, the other still on mine.

When Vern finally sat up, shaking all over and wetting his lips. Chris said, 'Maybe we should have those Cokes? What do you guys think? Could anybody use one besides me?'

We all thought we could use one.

**Reading Like a Writer**

Do a close reading of the passage, looking for:

1. **Tension building** (how the writer builds suspense and action- find places where this happens in the piece)
2. **Creative dialogue** (the words that characters speak out loud). Then answer this question: *How does the dialogue add to the effectiveness of the piece?* \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Chapter 12 The Bridge – Excerpt from Stephen King’s *The Body* (modified)**

The bridge was made of wood and had spaces all the way across, through which you could look straight down into the river. There was a narrow walkway on either side of the tracks — wide enough so that you wouldn't actually get hit by any train, but so narrow that the wind of a passing train would blow you off the bridge. And it was a long way down to the river, and the river was shallow and fast. In fact, this bridge wasn't for walking across.

Looking at the bridge, we all felt fear start to move in our stomachs, but mixing with the fear was the excitement of a really big dare, something you could be proud to tell your friends about after you got home . . . if you got home. Teddy's eyes were shining: this was better than lorries.

'Man,' Chris said softly.

'Come on,' Teddy said. 'Let's go.' He was already at the start of the bridge, where the wooden supports were built out over the land.

'Does anybody know when the next train's due?' Vern asked uneasily.'

Nobody knew.

I said, 'There's the Route 136 bridge . . . '

'No, man!' Teddy cried. 'That means walking five miles down the river on this side and then five miles back on the other side. It'll take hours. We can cross the bridge and get to the same place in *ten minutes.'*

'But if a train comes, there's nowhere to go,' Vern said. He wasn't looking at Teddy; he was looking down at the river.

'Of course there is,' Teddy said. He climbed over the edge of the bridge and held on to one of the wooden supports between the tracks. He was still hanging over the land, but the thought of doing that in the middle of the bridge, with the river fifty feet below and a train thundering by overhead, made me feel sick.

'See how easy it is?' Teddy said. He dropped *to* the ground, wiped his hands and climbed back up beside us.

'What if it's a 200-car train?' Chris asked. 'Are you going to hang there for five or ten minutes?'

'Are you afraid?' Teddy asked. 'You can go the long way round if you want to, but I'm going across the bridge. I'll wait for you on the other side!'

'There are probably only one or two trains a day here,' I said, 'and one has passed us already. Look at all the grass growing in the middle of the tracks.'

'See?' Teddy was delighted at his victory.

'There's still a *chance* of a train,' I added.

'Yes,' Chris said. He was looking only at me, his eyes shining. 'I dare you, Lachance.'

'Darers go first.'

'All right,' Chris said. He looked at the others as well. 'Any pussies here?'

'*NO!*' Teddy shouted.

Vern cleared his throat and said 'no' in a small voice. He smiled a weak, sickly smile.

'OK,' Chris said . . . but we hesitated for a moment and looked up and down the tracks. I knelt down and touched the steel.

Nothing.

'OK,' I said.

We went out on to the bridge one by one: Chris first, then Teddy, then Vern, and me last because I was the one who said that darers go first.

You had to walk looking down, to make sure you put your feet down on wood rather than thin air. When I saw river instead of rocks below me, I stopped to look up. Chris and Teddy were a long way in front, almost halfway across the bridge. Vern was between them and me. I had to go on. If I turned back, I'd be a pussy for life.

When I was nearly halfway across I stopped again and looked up. I had almost caught up with Vern, who was being very cautious. Chris and Teddy had nearly reached the other side. And although I've written seven books about people who can do strange things like read other people's minds and see into the future, that was when I had my first and last experience of it myself. I bent down and touched the track. It was shaking hard, although it hadn't made a sound.

I have never been as frightened as I was at that moment, holding that live track. My whole body just stopped working. My legs felt like water. My mouth opened — I didn't open it, it opened by itself. I couldn't move, but I could hear and see and sense everything inside me and

for miles around me. I thought of Ray Brower, and I thought that Vern and I would soon be joining him.

That thought unlocked my body. I jumped to my feet. At least, I suppose I jumped; to me it felt as if I was moving slowly up through five hundred feet of water.

I screamed, *'TRAIN!' and* began to run.

Vern looked back over his shoulder. He saw my attempt at running and knew straight away that I wasn't joking. He began to run himself.

Far in front I could see Chris stepping off the bridge and on to solid ground. He was safe. I was glad for him, but I was also jealous as hell. I watched him drop to his knees and touch a track.

My left foot almost slipped, but I recovered and ran on. Now I was just behind Vern. We were more than halfway across, and for the first time I heard the train. It was coming from behind us, from the Castle Rock side of the river.

*'Ooooooh,Jesus!'* Vern screamed.

'Run, you pussy!' I shouted, and hit him on his back with my hand.

'I can't! I'll fall!'

*'Run faster!'*

*'Gordie! I can't!'*

*'YOU CAN! RUN FASTER, PUKE-FACE!'* I shouted at the top of my voice . . . and was I *enjoying* this?

The train was very loud now. I kept expecting the bridge to start shaking under my feet. When that happened the train would be right behind us.

*'GO FASTER, VERN! FAAASTER!'*

'Oh God Gordie oh Gordie God *ooooooh, heeeell!'*

The noise of the train filled the air now. There was no other sound in the world. It tore the air and it was the sound of death. I could see Chris below us and to the right, and Teddy behind him. They were both mouthing a single word and the word was *jump!,* but the train had taken all the blood out of the word, leaving only its shape in their mouths. The bridge began to shake as the train charged across it. We jumped.

Vern landed in the dust and the stones, and I landed beside him, almost on top of him. I never saw the train and I don't know if the engineer saw us. I clapped my hands over my ears and dug my face into the hot dirt as the train went by, metal screaming against metal, the air blowing over us. I had no wish to look at it. Before it had passed completely I felt a warm hand on my neck and I knew it was Chris's.

When it was gone — when I was *sure* it was gone — I lifted my head. Vern was still lying face down in the dirt. Chris was sitting between us, one hand on Vern's sweaty neck, the other still on mine.

When Vern finally sat up, shaking all over and wetting his lips. Chris said, 'Maybe we should have those Cokes? What do you guys think? Could anybody use one besides me?'

We all thought we could use one.

**Reading Like a Writer**

Do a close reading of the passage, looking for:

1. **Action** (look for three places where there is a lot of action in the story)
2. **Word Choice** (pick out your five favourite words from the story).

Then answer this question: *What do you like the most about this snapshot moment?* \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_