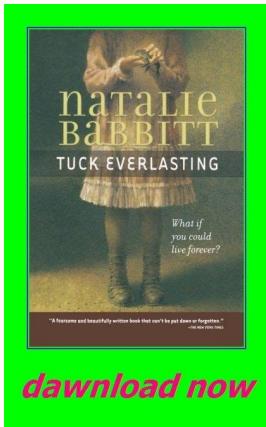
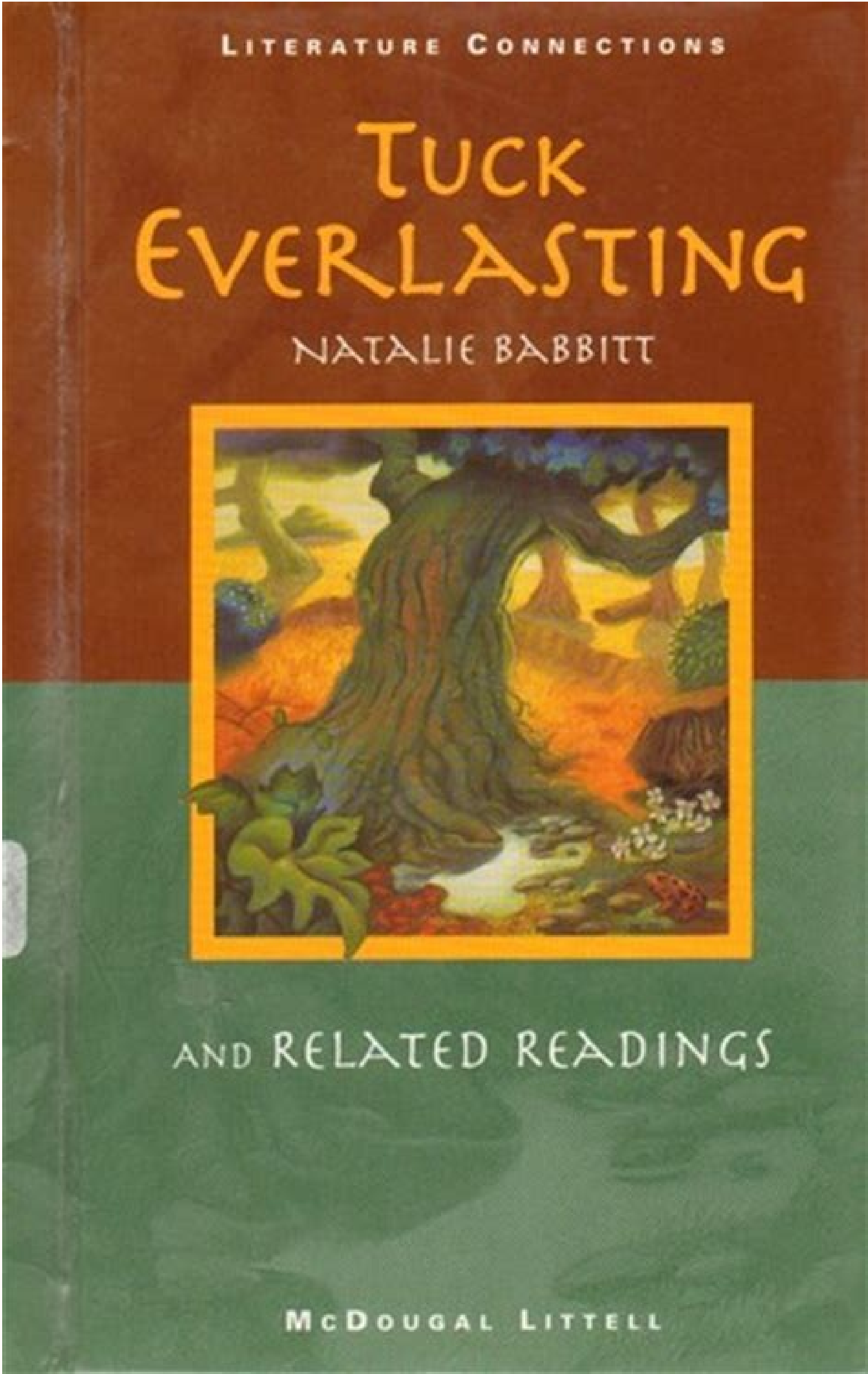
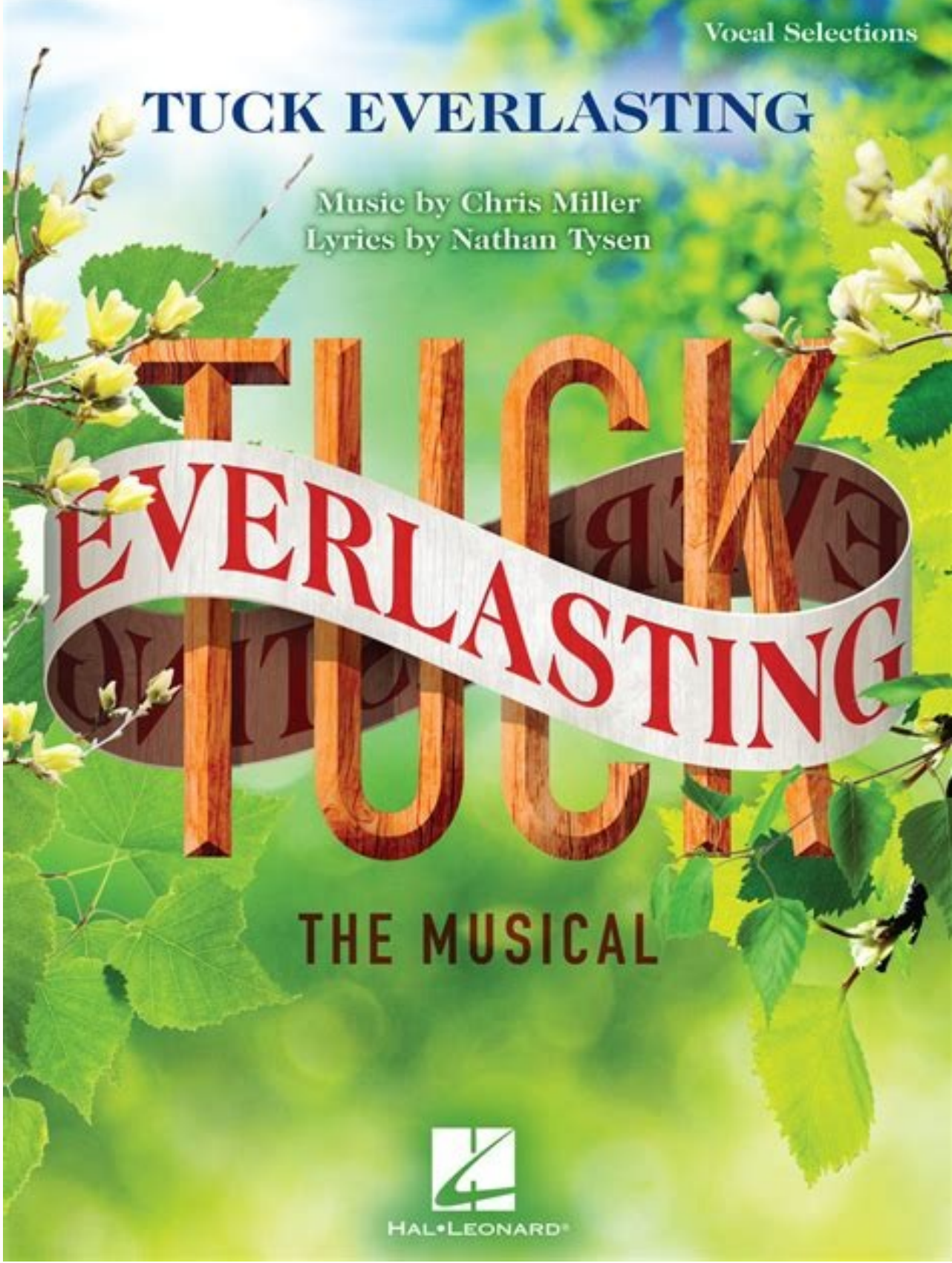


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There was a gas station there now. A young man in greasy coveralls was polishing the windshield of a wide and rusty Hudson automobile. As Mae and Tuck rolled past, the young man grinned and said to the driver of the Hudson, who lounged at the wheel, "Looky there. In from the country for a big time." And they chuckled together. Mae and Tuck clattered on into the village proper, past a catholic mixture of houses which soon gave way to shops and other places of business: a hot-dog stand; a dry cleaner; a pharmacy; a five-and-ten; another gas station; a tall, white frame building with a pleasant verandah, The Treegap Hotel—Family Dining, Easy Rates. The post office. Beyond that, the jailhouse, but a larger jailhouse now, painted brown, with an office for the county clerk. A black and white police car was parked in front, with a red glass searchlight on its roof and a radio antenna, like a buggy whip, fastened to the windshield. Mae glanced at the jailhouse, but looked away quickly. "See beyond there?" she said, pointing. "That diner? Let's stop there and get a cup of coffee. All right?" "All right," said Tuck. "Maybe they'll know something." Inside, the diner gleamed with chrome and smelled like linoleum and ketchup. Mae and Tuck took seats on rumbling swivel stools at the long counter. The counterman emerged from the kitchen at the rear and sized them up expertly. They looked all right. A little queer, maybe—their clothes, especially—but honest. He slapped a cardboard menu down in front of them and leaned on the foaming orangeade cooler. "You folks from off?" he asked. "Yep," said Tuck. "Just passing through." "Sure," said the counterman. "Say," said Tuck cautiously, fingering the menu. "Didn't there used to be a wood once, down the other side of town?" "Sure," said the counterman. "Had a big electrical storm, though, about three years ago now or thereabouts. Big tree got hit by lightning, split right down the middle. Caught fire and everything. Tore up the ground, too. Had to bulldoze her all out." "Oh," said Tuck. He and Mae exchanged glances. "Coffee, please," said Mae. "Black. For both of us." "Sure," said the counterman. He took the menu away, poured coffee into thick pottery mugs, and leaned again on the orangeade cooler. "Used to be a fresh-water spring in that wood," said Tuck boldly, sipping his coffee. "Don't know nothing about that," said the counterman. "Had to bulldoze her all out, like I say." "Oh," said Tuck. Afterward, while Mae was shopping for supplies, Tuck went back through the town on foot—back the way they had come—out to the little hill. There were houses there now, and a feed-and-grain store, but on the far side of the hill, inside a rambling iron fence, was a cemetery. Tuck's heart quickened. He had noticed the cemetery on the way in. Mae had seen it, too. They had not spoken about it. But both knew it might hold other answers. Tuck straightened his old jacket. He passed through an archway of wrought-iron curlicues, and paused, squinting at the weedy rows of gravestones. And then, far over to the right, he saw a tall monument, once no doubt imposing but now tipped slightly sidewise. On it was carved one name: Foster. Slowly, Tuck turned his footsteps toward the monument. And saw, as he approached, that there were other, smaller markers all around it. A family plot. And then his throat closed. For it was there. He had wanted it to be there, but now that he saw it, he was overcome with sadness. He knelt and read the inscription: In Loving Memory Winifred Foster Jackson Dear Wife Dear Mother 1870-1948 "So," said Tuck to himself. "Two years. She's been gone two years." He stood up and looked around, embarrassed, trying to clear the lump from his throat. But there was no one to see him. The cemetery was very quiet. In the branches of a willow behind him, a red-winged blackbird chirped. Tuck wiped his eyes hastily. Then he straightened his jacket again and drew up his hand in a brief salute. "Good girl," he said aloud. And then he turned and left the cemetery, walking quickly. Later, as he and Mae rolled out of Treegap, Mae said softly, without looking at him, "She's gone?" Tuck nodded. "She's gone," he answered. There was a long moment of silence between them, and then Mae said, "Poor Jesse." "He knowed it, though," said Tuck. "At least, he knowed she wasn't coming. We all knowed that, long time ago." "Just the same," said Mae. She sighed. And then she sat up a little straighter. "Well, where to now, Tuck? No need to come back here no more." "That's so," said Tuck. "Let's just head on out this way. We'll locate something." "All right," said Mae. And then she put a hand on his arm and pointed. "Look out for that toad." Tuck had seen it, too. He reined in the horse and climbed down from the wagon. The toad was squatting in the middle of the road, quite unconcerned. In the other lane, a pickup truck rattled by, and against the breeze it made, the toad shut its eyes tightly. But it did not move. Tuck waited till the truck had passed, and then he picked up the toad and carried it to the weeds along the road's edge. "Durn fool thing must think it's going to live forever," he said to Mae. And soon they were rolling on again, leaving Treegap behind, and as they went, the tinkling little melody of a music box drifted out behind them and was lost at last far down the road. Go Fish Questions for the Author What did you want to be when you grew up? When I was a preschooler, I wanted to be a pirate, and then when I started school, I wanted to be a librarian. But in the fourth grade, I got my copy of Alice in Wonderland / Alice Through the Looking-Glass and decided once and for all that I wanted to be an illustrator of stories for children. When did you realize you wanted to be a writer? I didn't even think about writing. My husband wrote the story for the first book. But then he didn't want to do it anymore, so I had to start writing my own stories. After all, you can't make pictures for stories unless you have stories to make pictures for. What's your first childhood memory? I have a lot of preschool memories, all from when we lived in a little town just south of Columbus, Ohio. I kind of remember sitting in a high chair. And when I was a little older, I remember seeing Jack Frost looking in through the kitchen window. That was pretty surprising. What's your most embarrassing childhood memory? I don't remember any. I'm probably just suppressing them all. What's your favorite childhood memory? I think I liked best the times when my sister and I would curl up next to our mother while she read aloud to us. As a young person, who did you look up to most? No question: my mother. What was your worst subject in school? Arithmetic. I think you call it math now. What was your best subject in school? Art. And after that, English. What was your first job? It was when I was a teenager. I worked in what we called the College Shop in a big downtown Cleveland (Ohio) department store called Higbee's. But after that, I mostly worked in the pricing department of a washing machine factory. How did you celebrate publishing your first book? I don't think I did anything special. By that time, I was beginning to get over my absolute astonishment at having found my editor in the first place. That was the most wonderful moment of all. Where do you write your books? I think about them for a long time before I actually start putting words on paper, and I think about them all over the place. Then, when I'm ready, I work at my computer in my workroom. But before, I always wrote them out longhand, sitting on my sofa in the living room. I wrote on a big tablet, and then I typed everything, paragraph by paragraph, on my typewriter, making changes as I went along. Where do you find inspiration for your writing? I mostly write about all the unanswered questions I still have from when I was in elementary school. Which of your characters is most like you? The main characters in all of my long stories are like me, but I think Winnie Foster, in Tuck Everlasting, is most like me. When you finish a book, who reads it first? Always my editor, Michael di Capua. His opinion is the most important one. Are you a morning person or a night owl? Neither one, really. I'm mostly a middle-of-the-day person. What's your idea of the best meal ever? One that someone else cooked. And it has to have something chocolate for dessert. Which do you like better: cats or dogs? Cats to look at and to watch, but dogs to own. What do you value most in your friends? Good talk and plenty of laughing. Where do you go for peace and quiet? Now that my children are grown and gone into lives of their own, I have plenty of peace and quiet just sitting around the house. What makes you laugh out loud? Words. My father was very funny with words, and I grew up laughing at the things he said. What's your favorite song? Too many to mention, but most of them are from the '30s and '40s, when songs were to sing, not to shout and wiggle to. Who is your favorite fictional character? No question: Alice from Alice in Wonderland and Alice Through the Looking-Glass. What are you most afraid of? I have a fear that is very common when we are little, and I seem to have hung on to it: the fear of being abandoned. What time of year do you like best? May is my favorite month. What is your favorite TV show? I don't watch many shows anymore—just CNN News and old movies. If you were stranded on a desert island, who would you want for company? My husband, Sam. If you could travel in time, where would you go? Back to Middletown, Ohio, to Lincoln School on Central Avenue, to live through fifth grade again. And again and again. What's the best advice you have ever received about writing? No one single thing. Too many good things to list. What do you want readers to remember about your books? The questions without answers. What would you do if you ever stopped writing? Spend all my time doing word puzzles and games, and practicing the good old songs on my piano. What do you like best about yourself? That I can draw, and play the good old songs on my piano. What is your worst habit? Always expecting things to be perfect. What is your best habit? Trying to make things as perfect as I can. What do you consider to be your greatest accomplishment? Right now, it's a picture for a new book that hasn't even been published yet. It's a picture of a man in a washtub, floating on the ocean in a rainstorm. I'm really proud of that picture. Where in the world do you feel most at home? That's a hard question. My family moved away from Middletown, Ohio (see the question/answer about time travel), when I was in the middle of sixth grade, and we never went back. Even after all these years, though, Middletown is the place I think of when I think about "home." I've lived in a lot of different places, though, and liked them all, so I don't feel sorry for myself. It's just that the word "home" has its own kind of special meaning. What do you wish you could do better? Everything. Cook, write, play the piano, everything. What would your readers be most surprised to learn about you? Maybe that I believe that writing books is a long way from being important. The most important thing anyone can do is be a teacher. As for those of us who write books, I often think we should all stop for fifty years. There are so many wonderful books to read, and not enough time to get around to all of them. But we writers just keep cranking them out. All we can hope for is that readers will find at least a little time for them, anyway. Books by Natalie Babbitt Dick Foote and the Shark Phoebe's Revolt The Search for Delicious Kneeknock Rise The Something Goody Hall The Devil's Storybook Tuck Everlasting The Eyes of the Amaryllis Herbert Rowbarge The Devil's Other Storybook Nellie: A Cat on Her Own Bub, or The Very Best Thing Ouch! Elsie Times Eight An Imprint of Macmillan TUCK EVERLASTING. Copyright © 1975 by Natalie Babbitt. All rights reserved. Printed in July 2007 in the United States of America by R.R. Donnelley & Sons Company, Harrisonburg, Virginia. For information, address Square Fish, 175 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10010. Square Fish and the Square Fish logo are trademarks of Macmillan and are used by Farrar, Straus and Giroux under license from Macmillan. 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