Reading

Bridge to Terabithia

Chapter 2

1. Match the words with the pictures

cliff

can vegetables

pray

jaw

diamond

pail

beast

cymbals

lipstick

rooster

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T W O

Leslie Burke

Ellie and Brenda weren't back by seven. Jess had finished all the picking and helped his mother can the beans. She never canned except when it was scalding hot anyhow, and all the boiling turned the kitchen into some kind of hellhole. Of course, her temper had been terrible, and she had screamed at Jess all afternoon and was now too tired to fix any supper.

Jess made peanut-butter sandwiches for the little girls and himself, and because the kitchen was still hot and almost nauseatingly full of bean smell, the three of them went outside to eat.

The U-Haul was still out by the Perkins place. He couldn't see anybody moving outside, so they must have finished unloading.

"I hope they have a girl, six or seven," said May Belle. "I need somebody to play with."

"You got Joyce Ann."

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"I hate Joyce Ann. She's nothing but a baby."

Joyce Ann's lip went out. They both watched it tremble. Then her pudgy body shuddered, and she let out a great cry.

"Who's teasing the baby?" his mother yelled out the screen door.

Jess sighed and poked the last of his sandwich into Joyce Ann's open mouth. Her eyes went wide, and she clamped her jaws down on the unexpected gift. Now maybe he could have some peace.

He closed the screen door gently as he entered and slipped past his mother, who was rocking herself in the kitchen chair watching TV. In the room he shared with the little ones, he dug under his mattress and pulled out his pad and pencils. Then, stomach down on the bed, he began to draw.

Jess drew the way some people drink whiskey. The peace would start at the top of his muddled brain and seep down through his tired and tensed-up body. Lord, he loved to draw. Animals, mostly. Not regular animals like Miss Bessie or the chickens, but crazy animals with problems—for some reason he liked to put his beasts into impossible fixes. This one was a hippopotamus just leaving the edge of the cliff, turning over and over—you could tell by the curving lines—in the air toward the sea below where surprised fish were leaping goggle-eyed out of the water.

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There was a balloon over the hippopotamus—where his head should have been but his bottom actually was—"Oh!" it was saying. "I seem to have forgot my glasses."

Jesse began to smile. If he decided to show it to May Belle, he would have to explain the joke, but once he did, she would laugh like a live audience on TV.

He would like to show his drawings to his dad, but he didn't dare. When he was in first grade, he had told his dad that he wanted to be an artist when he grew up. He'd thought his dad would be pleased. He wasn't. "What are they teaching in that damn school?" he had asked. "Bunch of old ladies turning my only son into some kind of a—" He had stopped on the word, but Jess had gotten the message. It was one you didn't forget, even after four years.

The devil of it was that none of his regular teachers ever liked his drawings. When they'd catch him scribbling, they'd screech about waste—wasted time, wasted paper, wasted ability. Except Miss Edmunds, the music teacher. She was the only one he dared show anything to, and she'd only been at school one year, and then only on Fridays.

Miss Edmunds was one of his secrets. He was in love with her. Not the kind of silly stuff Ellie and Brenda giggled about on the telephone. This was too real and too deep to talk about, even to think about very much. Her long swishy black hair and blue, blue eyes. She could play

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the guitar like a regular recording star, and she had this soft floaty voice that made Jess squish inside. Lord, she was gorgeous. And she liked him, too.

One day last winter he had given her one of his pictures. Just shoved it into her hand after class and run. The next Friday she had asked him to stay a minute after class. She said he was "unusually talented," and she hoped he wouldn't let anything discourage him, but would "keep it up." That meant, Jess believed, that she thought he was the best. It was not the kind of best that counted either at school or at home, but it was a genuine kind of best. He kept the knowledge of it buried inside himself like a pirate treasure. He was rich, very rich, but no one could know about it for now except his fellow outlaw, Julia Edmunds.

"Sounds like some kinda hippie," his mother had said when Brenda, who had been in seventh grade last year, described Miss Edmunds to her.

She probably was. Jess wouldn't argue that, but he saw her as a beautiful wild creature who had been caught for a moment in that dirty old cage of a schoolhouse, perhaps by mistake. But he hoped, he prayed, she'd never get loose and fly away. He managed to endure the whole boring week of school for that one half hour on Friday afternoons when they'd sit on the worn-out rug on the floor of the teachers' room (there was no place else in the building for Miss

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Edmunds to spread out all her stuff) and sing songs like "My Beautiful Balloon," "This Land Is Your Land," "Free to Be You and Me," "Blowing in the Wind," and because Mr. Turner, the principal, insisted, "God Bless America."

Miss Edmunds would play her guitar and let the kids take turns on the autoharp, the triangles, cymbals, tambourines, and bongo drum. Lord, could they ever make a racket! All the teachers hated Fridays. And a lot of the kids pretended to.

But Jess knew what fakes they were. Sniffing "hippie" and "peacenik," even though the Vietnam War was over and it was supposed to be OK again to like peace, the kids would make fun of Miss Edmunds' lack of lipstick or the cut of her jeans. She was, of course, the only female teacher anyone had ever seen in Lark Creek Elementary wearing pants. In Washington and its fancy suburbs, even in Millsburg, that was OK, but Lark Creek was the backwash of fashion. It took them a long time to accept there what everyone could see by their TV's was OK anywhere else.

So the students of Lark Creek Elementary sat at their desks all Friday, their hearts thumping with anticipation as they listened to the joyful pandemonium pouring out from the teachers' room, spent their allotted half hours with Miss Edmunds under the spell of her wild beauty and in the snare of her enthusiasms, and then went out and pretended

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that they couldn't be suckered by some hippie in tight jeans with makeup all over her eyes but none on her mouth.

Jess just kept his mouth shut. It wouldn't help to try to defend Miss Edmunds against their unjust and hypocritical attacks. Besides, she was beyond such stupid behavior. It couldn't touch her. But whenever possible, he stole a few minutes on Friday just to stand close to her and hear her voice, soft and smooth as suede, assuring him that he was a "neat kid."

We're alike, Jess would tell himself, me and Miss Edmunds. Beautiful Julia. The syllables rolled through his head like a ripple of guitar chords. We don't belong at Lark Creek, Julia and me. "You're the proverbial diamond in the rough," she'd said to him once, touching his nose lightly with the tip of her electrifying finger. But it was she who was the diamond, sparkling out of that muddy, grassless, dirty-brick setting.

"Jess-*see*!"

Jess shoved the pad and pencils under his mattress and lay down flat, his heart thumping against the quilt.

His mother was at the door. "You milk yet?"

He jumped off the bed. "Just going to." He dodged around her and out, grabbing the pail from beside the sink and the stool from beside the door, before she could ask him what he had been up to.

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