

Please spend Monday and Tuesday reading chapter 20 – 25. Take note of any words you are unsure of and look this up.

20

It felt good to walk in the shade of the two oak trees. Stanley wondered if this was how a condemned man felt on his way to the electric chair—appreciating all of the good things in life for the last time. They had to step around holes to get to the cabin door. Stanley was surprised to see so many around the cabin. He would have expected the Warden to not want the campers digging so close to her home. But several holes were right up against the cabin wall. The holes were closer together here as well, and were of different shapes and sizes. Mr. Sir knocked on the door. Stanley still held the empty sack. "Yes?" the Warden said, opening the door. "There's been a little trouble out on the lake," Mr. Sir said. "Caveman will tell you all about it." The Warden stared at Mr. Sir a moment, then her gaze turned toward Stanley. He felt nothing but dread now. "Come in, I suppose," said the Warden. "You're letting the cold out." It was air-conditioned inside her cabin. The television was going. She picked up the remote and turned it off. She sat down on a canvas chair. She was barefoot and wearing shorts. Her legs were as freckled as her face and arms. "So what is it you have to tell me?" Stanley took a breath to steady himself. "While Mr. Sir was filling the canteens, I snuck into the truck and stole his sack of sunflower seeds."

"I see." She turned to Mr. Sir. "That's why you brought him here?" "Yes, but I think he's lying. I think someone else stole the sack, and Caveman is covering up for X-Ray or somebody. It was a twenty-pound sack, and he claims to have eaten them all by himself." He took the sack from Stanley and handed it to the Warden. "I see," the Warden said again. "The sack wasn't full," said Stanley. "And I spilled a lot. You can check my hole." "In that room, Caveman, there's a small flowered case. Will you get it for me, please?" She pointed to a door. Stanley looked at the door, then at the Warden, then back at the door. He slowly walked toward it. It was a kind of dressing room, with a sink and a mirror. Next to the sink he saw the case, white with pink roses. He brought it back out to the Warden, and she set it on the glass coffee table in front of her. She unclasped the latch and opened the case. It was a makeup case. Stanley's mother had one similar to it. He saw several bottles of nail polish, polish remover, a couple of lipstick tubes, and other jars and powders. The Warden held up a small jar of dark-red nail polish. "You see this, Caveman?" He nodded. "This is my special nail polish. Do you see the dark rich color? You can't buy that in a store. I have to make it myself." Stanley had no idea why she was showing it to him. He wondered why the Warden would ever have the need to wear nail polish or makeup. "Do you want to know my secret ingredient?" He raised and lowered one shoulder. The Warden opened the bottle. "Rattlesnake venom." With a small paintbrush she began applying it to the nails on her left hand. "It's perfectly harmless . . . when it's dry." She finished her left hand. She waved it in the air for a few seconds, then began painting the nails on her right hand. "It's only toxic while it's wet." She finished painting her nails, then stood up. She reached over and touched Stanley's face with her fingers. She ran her sharp wet nails very gently down his cheek. He

felt his skin tingle. The nail on her pinkie just barely touched the wound behind his ear. A sharp sting of pain caused him to jump back. The Warden turned to face Mr. Sir, who was sitting on the fireplace hearth. "So you think he stole your sunflower seeds?" "No, he says he stole them, but I think it was—" She stepped toward him and struck him across the face. Mr. Sir stared at her. He had three long red marks slanting across the left side of his face. Stanley didn't know if the redness was caused by her nail polish or his blood. It took a moment for the venom to sink in. Suddenly, Mr. Sir screamed and clutched his face with both hands. He let himself fall over, rolling off the hearth and onto the rug. The Warden spoke softly. "I don't especially care about your sunflower seeds." Mr. Sir moaned. "If you must know," said the Warden, "I liked it better when you smoked."

For a second, Mr. Sir's pain seemed to recede. He took several long, deep breaths. Then his head jerked violently, and he let out a shrill scream, worse than the one before. The Warden turned to Stanley. "I suggest you go back to your hole now." Stanley started to go, but Mr. Sir lay in the way. Stanley could see the muscles on his face jump and twitch. His body writhed in agony. Stanley stepped carefully over him. "Is he—?" "Excuse me?" said the Warden. Stanley was too frightened to speak. "He's not going to die," the Warden said. "Unfortunately for you."

21

It was a long walk back to his hole. Stanley looked out through the haze of heat and dirt at the other boys, lowering and raising their shovels. Group D was the farthest away. He realized that once again he would be digging long after everyone else had quit. He hoped he'd finish before Mr. Sir recovered. He didn't want to be out there alone with Mr. Sir. He won't die, the Warden had said. Unfortunately for you. Walking across the desolate wasteland, Stanley thought about his great-grandfather— not the pig stealer but the pig stealer's son, the one who was robbed by Kissin' Kate Barlow. He tried to imagine how he must have felt after Kissin' Kate had left him stranded in the desert. It probably wasn't a whole lot different from the way he himself felt now. Kate Barlow had left his great-grandfather to face the hot barren desert. The Warden had left Stanley to face Mr. Sir. Somehow his great-grandfather had survived for seventeen days, before he was rescued by a couple of rattlesnake hunters. He was insane when they found him. When he was asked how he had lived so long, he said he "found refuge on God's thumb." He spent nearly a month in a hospital. He ended up marrying one of the nurses. Nobody ever knew what he meant by God's thumb, including himself. Stanley heard a twitching sound. He stopped in mid-step, with one foot still in the air. A rattlesnake lay coiled beneath his foot. Its tail was pointed upward, rattling. Stanley backed his leg away, then turned and ran. The rattlesnake didn't chase after him. It had rattled its tail to warn him to stay away. "Thanks for the warning," Stanley whispered as his heart pounded. The rattlesnake would be a lot more dangerous if it didn't have a rattle.

"Hey, Caveman!" called Armpit. "You're still alive." "What'd the Warden say?" asked X-Ray. "What'd you tell her?" asked Magnet.

"I told her I stole the seeds," said Stanley. "Good going," said Magnet. "What'd she do?" asked Zigzag. Stanley shrugged one shoulder. "Nothing. She got mad at Mr. Sir for bothering her." He didn't feel like going into details. If he didn't talk about it, then maybe it didn't happen. He went over to his hole, and to his surprise it was nearly finished. He stared at it, amazed. It didn't make sense. Or perhaps it did. He smiled. Since he had taken the blame for the sunflower seeds, he realized, the other boys had dug his hole for him. "Hey, thanks," he said. "Don't look at me," said X-Ray. Confused, Stanley looked around—from Magnet, to Armpit, to Zigzag, to Squid. None of them took credit for it. Then he turned to Zero, who had been quietly digging in his hole since Stanley's return. Zero's hole was smaller than all the others.

Stanley was the first one finished. He spat in his hole, then showered and changed into his cleaner set of clothes. It had been three days since the laundry was done, so even his clean set was dirty and smelly. Tomorrow, these would become his work clothes, and his other set would be washed. He could think of no reason why Zero would dig his hole for him. Zero didn't even get any sunflower seeds. "I guess he likes to dig holes," Armpit had said. "He's a mole," Zigzag had said. "I think he eats dirt." "Moles don't eat dirt," X-Ray had pointed out. "Worms eat dirt." "Hey, Zero?" Squid had asked. "Are you a mole or a worm?" Zero had said nothing. Stanley never even thanked him. But now he sat on his cot and waited for Zero to return from the shower room. "Thanks," he said as Zero entered through the tent flap. Zero glanced at him, then went over to the crates, where he deposited his dirty clothes and towel. "Why'd you help me?" Stanley asked. Zero turned around. "You didn't steal the sunflower seeds," he said. "So, neither did you," said Stanley. Zero stared at him. His eyes seemed to expand, and it was almost as if Zero were looking right through him. "You didn't steal the sneakers," he said. Stanley said nothing. He watched Zero walk out of the tent. If anybody had X-ray vision, it was Zero.

"Wait!" he called, then hurried out after him. Zero had stopped just outside the tent, and Stanley almost ran into him. "I'll try to teach you to read if you want," Stanley offered. "I don't know if I know how to teach, but I'm not that worn-out today, since you dug a lot of my hole." A big smile spread across Zero's face. They returned to the tent, where they were less likely to be bothered. Stanley got his box of stationery and a pen out of his crate. They sat on the ground. "Do you know the alphabet?" Stanley asked. For a second, he thought he saw a flash of defiance in Zero's eyes, but then it passed. "I think I know some of it," Zero said. "A, B, C, D." "Keep going," said Stanley. Zero's eyes looked upward. "E . . ." "F," said Stanley. "G," said Zero. He blew some air out of the side of his mouth. "H . . . I . . . K, P." "H, I, J, K, L," Stanley said. "That's right," said Zero. "I've heard it before. I just don't have it memorized exactly." "That's all right," said Stanley. "Here, I'll say the whole thing, just to kind of refresh your memory, then you can try it." He recited the alphabet for Zero, then Zero repeated it without a single mistake. Not bad for a kid who had never seen Sesame Street! "Well, I've heard it before, somewhere," Zero said, trying to act like it was nothing, but his big smile gave him away. The next step was harder. Stanley had to figure out how to teach him to recognize each letter. He gave Zero a piece of paper, and took a piece for himself. "I guess we'll start with A." He printed a capital A, and then Zero copied it on his sheet of paper. The paper wasn't lined, which made it more difficult, but Zero's A wasn't bad, just a little big. Stanley told him he needed to write smaller, or else they'd run out of paper real quick. Zero printed it smaller. "Actually, there are two ways to write each letter," Stanley said, as he realized this was going to be even harder than he thought. "That's a capital A. But usually you'll see a small a. You only have capitals at the beginning of a word, and only if it's the start of a sentence, or if it's a proper noun, like a name." Zero nodded as if he understood, but Stanley knew he had made very little sense. He printed a lowercase a, and Zero copied it. "So there are fifty-two," said Zero. Stanley didn't know what he was talking about. "Instead of twenty-six letters. There are really fifty-two." Stanley looked at

him, surprised. "I guess that's right. How'd you figure that out?" he asked. Zero said nothing. "Did you add?" Zero said nothing.

"Did you multiply?" "That's just how many there are," said Zero. Stanley raised and lowered one shoulder. He didn't even know how Zero knew there were twenty-six in the first place. Did he count them as he recited them? He had Zero write a few more upper- and lowercase A's, and then he moved on to a capital B. This was going to take a long time, he realized. "You can teach me ten letters a day," suggested Zero. "Five capitals and five smalls. After five days I'll know them all. Except on the last day I'll have to do twelve. Six capitals and six smalls." Again Stanley stared at him, amazed that he was able to figure all that out. Zero must have thought he was staring for a different reason, because he said, "I'll dig part of your hole every day. I can dig for about an hour, then you can teach me for an hour. And since I'm a faster digger anyway, our holes will get done about the same time. I won't have to wait for you." "Okay," Stanley agreed. As Zero was printing his B's, Stanley asked him how he figured out it would take five days. "Did you multiply? Did you divide?" "That's just what it is," Zero said. "It's good math," said Stanley. "I'm not stupid," Zero said. "I know everybody thinks I am. I just don't like answering their questions."

Later that night, as he lay on his cot, Stanley reconsidered the deal he had made with Zero. Getting a break every day would be a relief, but he knew X-Ray wouldn't like it. He wondered if there might be some way Zero would agree to dig part of X-Ray's hole as well. But then again, why should he? I'm the one teaching Zero. I need the break so I'll have the energy to ' teach him. I'm the one who took the blame for the sunflower seeds. I'm the one who Mr. Sir is mad at. He closed his eyes, and images from the Warden's cabin floated inside his head: her red fingernails, Mr. Sir writhing on the floor, her flowered makeup kit. He opened his eyes. He suddenly realized where he'd seen the gold tube before. He'd seen it in his mother's bathroom, and he'd seen it again in the Warden's cabin. It was half of a lipstick container. KB? KB? He felt a jolt of astonishment. His mouth silently formed the name Kate Barlow, as he wondered if it really could have belonged to the kissin' outlaw.

One hundred and ten years ago, Green Lake was the largest lake in Texas. It was full of clear cool water, and it sparkled like a giant emerald in the sun. It was especially beautiful in the spring, when the peach trees, which lined the shore, bloomed with pink and rose-colored blossoms. There was always a town picnic on the Fourth of July. They'd play games, dance, sing, and swim in the lake to keep cool. Prizes were awarded for the best peach pie and peach jam. A special prize was given every year to Miss Katherine Barlow for her fabulous spiced peaches. No one else even tried to make spiced peaches, because they knew none could be as delicious as hers. Every summer Miss Katherine would pick bushels of peaches and preserve them in jars with cinnamon, cloves, nutmeg, and other spices which she kept secret. The jarred peaches would last all winter. They probably would have lasted a lot longer than that, but they were always eaten by the end of winter. It was said that Green Lake was "heaven on earth" and that Miss Katherine's spiced peaches were "food for the angels." Katherine Barlow was the town's only schoolteacher. She taught in an old one-room schoolhouse. It was old even then. The roof leaked. The windows wouldn't open. The door hung crooked on its bent hinges. She was a wonderful teacher, full of knowledge and full of life. The children loved her. She taught classes in the evening for adults, and many of the adults loved her as well. She was very pretty. Her classes were often full of young men, who were a lot more interested in the teacher than they were in getting an education. But all they ever got was an education. One such young man was Trout Walker. His real name was Charles Walker, but everyone called him Trout because his two feet smelled like a couple of dead fish. This wasn't entirely Trout's fault. He had an incurable foot fungus. In fact, it was the same foot fungus that a hundred and ten years later would afflict the famous ballplayer Clyde Livingston. But at least Clyde Livingston showered every day. "I take a bath every Sunday morning," Trout would brag, "whether I need to or not." Most everyone in the town of Green Lake expected Miss Katherine to marry Trout Walker. He was the son of the richest man in the county. His family owned most of the peach trees and all the land on the east side of the lake. Trout often showed up at night school but never paid attention. He talked in class and was disrespectful of the students around him. He was loud and stupid. A lot of men in town were not educated. That didn't bother Miss Katherine. She knew they'd spent most of their lives working on farms and ranches and hadn't had much schooling. That was why she was there—to teach them. But Trout didn't want to learn. He seemed to be proud of his stupidity. "How'd you like to take a ride on my new boat this Saturday?" he asked her one evening after class. "No, thank you," said Miss Katherine. "We've got a brand-new boat," he said. "You don't even have to row it."

"Yes, I know," said Miss Katherine. Everyone in town had seen—and heard—the Walkers' new boat. It made a horrible loud noise and spewed ugly black smoke over the beautiful lake. Trout had always gotten everything he ever wanted. He found it hard to believe that Miss Katherine had turned him down. He pointed his finger at her and said, "No one ever says 'No' to Charles Walker!" "I believe I just did," said Katherine Barlow.

24

Stanley was half asleep as he got in line for breakfast, but the sight of Mr. Sir awakened him. The left side of Mr. Sir's face had swollen to the size of half a cantaloupe. There were three dark-purple jagged lines running down his cheek where the Warden had scratched him. The other boys in Stanley's tent had obviously seen Mr. Sir as well, but they had the good sense not to say anything. Stanley put a carton of juice and a plastic spoon on his tray. He kept his eyes down and hardly breathed as Mr. Sir ladled some oatmeal-like stuff into his bowl. He brought his tray to the table. Behind him, a boy from one of the other tents said, "Hey, what happened to your face?" There was a crash. Stanley turned to see Mr. Sir holding the boy's head against the oatmeal pot. "Is something wrong with my face?" The boy tried to speak but couldn't. Mr. Sir had him by the throat. "Does anyone see anything wrong with my face?" asked Mr. Sir, as he continued to choke the boy. Nobody said anything. Mr. Sir let the boy go. His head banged against the table as he fell to the ground. Mr. Sir stood over him and asked, "How does my face look to you now?" A gurgling sound came out of the boy's mouth, then he managed to gasp the word, "Fine." "I'm kind of handsome, don't you think?" "Yes, Mr. Sir."

Out on the lake, the other boys asked Stanley what he knew about Mr. Sir's face, but he just shrugged and dug his hole. If he didn't talk about it, maybe it would go away. He worked as hard and as fast as he could, not trying to pace himself. He just wanted to get off the lake and away from Mr. Sir as soon as possible. Besides, he knew he'd get a break. "Whenever you're ready, just let me know," Zero had said. The first time the water truck came, it was driven by Mr. Pendanski. The second time, Mr. Sir was driving.

No one said anything except "Thank you, Mr. Sir" as he filled each canteen. No one even dared to look at his grotesque face. As Stanley waited, he ran his tongue over the roof of his mouth and inside his cheeks. His mouth was as dry and as parched as the lake. The bright sun reflected off the side mirror of the truck, and Stanley had to shield his eyes with his hand. "Thank you, Mr. Sir," said Magnet, as he took his canteen from him. "You thirsty, Caveman?" Mr. Sir asked. "Yes, Mr. Sir," Stanley said, handing his canteen to him. Mr. Sir opened the nozzle, and the water flowed out of the tank, but it did not go into Stanley's canteen. Instead, he held the canteen right next to the stream of water. Stanley watched the water splatter on the dirt, where it was quickly absorbed by the thirsty ground. Mr. Sir let the water run for about thirty seconds, then stopped. "You want more?" he asked. Stanley didn't say anything. Mr. Sir turned the water back on, and again Stanley watched it pour onto the dirt. "There, that should be plenty." He handed Stanley his empty canteen. Stanley stared at the dark spot on the ground, which quickly shrank before his eyes. "Thank you, Mr. Sir," he said.

25

There was a doctor in the town of Green Lake, one hundred and ten years ago. His name was Dr. Hawthorn. And whenever people got sick, they would go see Doc Hawthorn. But they would also see Sam, the onion man. "Onions! Sweet, fresh onions!" Sam would call, as he and his donkey, Mary Lou, walked up and down the dirt roads of Green Lake. Mary Lou pulled a cart full of onions. Sam's onion field was somewhere on the other side of the lake. Once or twice a week he would tow across the lake and pick a new batch to fill the cart. Sam had big strong arms, but it would still take all day for him to row across the lake and another day for him to return. Most of the time he would leave Mary Lou in a shed, which the Walkers let him use at no charge, but sometimes he would take Mary Lou on his boat with him. Sam claimed that Mary Lou was almost fifty years old, which was, and still is, extraordinarily old for a donkey. "She eats nothing but raw onions," Sam would say, holding up a white onion between his dark fingers. "It's nature's magic vegetable. If a person ate nothing but raw onions, he could live to be two hundred years old." Sam was not much older than twenty, so nobody was quite sure that Mary Lou was really as old as he said she was. How would he know? Still, nobody ever argued with Sam. And whenever they were sick, they would go not only to Doc Hawthorn but also to Sam.

Sam always gave the same advice: "Eat plenty of onions." He said that onions were good for the digestion, the liver, the stomach, the lungs, the heart, and the brain. "If you don't believe me, just look at old Mary Lou here. She's never been sick a day in her life." He also had many different ointments, lotions, syrups, and pastes all made out of onion juice and different parts of the onion plant. This one cured asthma. That one was for warts and pimples. Another was a remedy for arthritis. He even had a special ointment which he claimed would cure baldness. "Just rub it on your husband's head every night when he's sleeping, Mrs. Collingwood, and soon his hair will be as thick and as long as Mary Lou's tail." Doc Hawthorn did not resent Sam. The folks of Green Lake were afraid to take chances. They would get regular medicine from Doc Hawthorn and onion concoctions from Sam. After they got over their illness, no one could be sure, not even Doc Hawthorn, which of the two treatments had done the trick. Doc Hawthorn was almost completely bald, and in the morning his head often smelled like onions.

Whenever Katherine Barlow bought onions, she always bought an extra one or two and would let Mary Lou eat them out of her hand. "Is something wrong?" Sam asked her one day as she was feeding Mary Lou. "You seem distracted." "Oh, just the weather," said Miss Katherine. "It looks like rain clouds moving in." "Me and Mary Lou, we like the rain," said Sam. "Oh, I like it fine," said Miss Katherine, as she rubbed the donkey's rough hair on top of

its head. "It's just that the roof leaks in the schoolhouse." "I can fix that," said Sam. "What are you going to do?" Katherine joked. "Fill the holes with onion paste?" Sam laughed. "I'm good with my hands," he told her. "I built my own boat. If it leaked, I'd be in big trouble." Katherine couldn't help but notice his strong, firm hands. They made a deal. He agreed to fix the leaky roof in exchange for six jars of spiced peaches. It took Sam a week to fix the roof, because he could only work in the afternoons, after school let out and before night classes began. Sam wasn't allowed to attend classes because he was a Negro, but they let him fix the building. Miss Katherine usually stayed in the schoolhouse, grading papers and such, while Sam worked on the roof. She enjoyed what little conversation they were able to have, shouting up and down to each other. She was surprised by his interest in poetry. When he took a break, she would sometimes read a poem to him. On more than one occasion, she would start to read a poem by Poe or Longfellow, only to hear him finish it for her, from memory. She was sad when the roof was finished. "Is something wrong?" he asked.

"No, you did a wonderful job," she said. "It's just that . . . the windows won't open. The children and I would enjoy a breeze now and then." "I can fix that," said Sam. She gave him two more jars of peaches and Sam fixed the windows. It was easier to talk to him when he was working on the windows. He told her about his secret onion field on the other side of the lake, "where the onions grow all year round, and the water runs uphill." When the windows were fixed, she complained that her desk wobbled. "I can fix that," said Sam. The next time she saw him, she mentioned that "the door doesn't hang straight," and she got to spend another afternoon with him while he fixed the door. By the end of the first semester, Onion Sam had turned the old run-down schoolhouse into a well-crafted, freshly painted jewel of a building that the whole town was proud of. People passing by would stop and admire it. "That's our schoolhouse. It shows how much we value education here in Green Lake." The only person who wasn't happy with it was Miss Katherine. She'd run out of things needing to be fixed. She sat at her desk one afternoon, listening to the pitter-patter of the rain on the roof. No water leaked into the classroom, except for the few drops that came from her eyes. "Onions! Hot sweet onions!" Sam called, out on the street. She ran to him. She wanted to throw her arms around him but couldn't bring herself to do it. Instead she hugged Mary Lou's neck. "Is something wrong?" he asked her. "Oh, Sam," she said. "My heart is breaking." "I can fix that," said Sam. She turned to him. He took hold of both of her hands, and kissed her. Because of the rain, there was nobody else out on the street. Even if there was, Katherine and Sam wouldn't have noticed. They were lost in their own world. At that moment, however, Hattie Parker stepped out of the general store. They didn't see her, but she saw them. She pointed her quivering finger in their direction and whispered, "God will punish you!"