

Please spend Monday and Tuesday reading chapter 33 – 36. Take note of any words you are unsure of and look this up.

## 33

He slowed to a walk. As far as he could tell, nobody was chasing him. He could hear voices coming from back by the truck but couldn't make out the words. Occasionally he'd hear the revving of the engine, but the truck wasn't going anywhere anytime soon. He headed in what he thought was the direction of Big Thumb. He couldn't see it through the haze. Walking helped calm him down and allowed him to think clearly. He doubted he could make it to Big Thumb, and with no water in his canteen, he didn't want to risk his life on the hope that he'd find refuge there. He'd have to return to camp. He knew that. But he was in no hurry. It would be better to return later, after everyone had a chance to calm down. And as long as he'd come this far, he might as well look for Zero. He decided he would walk as long as he could, until he was too weak to go any farther, then he'd turn around and go back. He smiled as he realized that wouldn't quite work. He would only go halfway— halfway as far as he thought he could go, so that he'd still have the strength to

return. Then he'd have to make a deal with the Warden, tell her where he found Kate Barlow's lipstick tube, and beg for mercy. He was surprised by how far out the holes extended. He couldn't even see the camp compound anymore, but he still kept passing holes. Just when he thought he'd passed the last hole, he'd come across another cluster of them, a little farther away. Back at the compound, they had dug in a systematic order, row upon row, allowing space for the water truck. But out here there was no system. It was as if every once in a while, in a fit of frustration, the Warden would just pick a spot at random, and say, "What the hell, dig here." It was like trying to guess the winning numbers in a lottery. Stanley found himself looking down into each hole he passed. He didn't admit to himself what he was looking for. After more than an hour had gone by, he thought he had surely seen the last hole, but then off to the left he saw another cluster of them. He didn't actually see the holes. He saw the mounds of dirt that surrounded them. He stepped over the mounds and looked into the first hole. His heart stopped. Down at the bottom was a family of yellow-spotted lizards. Their large red eyes looked up at him. He leapt back over the mound and ran. He didn't know if they were chasing after him. He thought he might have seen one leap out of the hole. He ran until he couldn't run any farther, then collapsed. They hadn't come after him. He sat there awhile and caught his breath. As he got back to his feet, he thought he noticed something on the ground, maybe fifty yards away. It didn't look like much, maybe just a big rock, but in a land of nothingness, any little thing seemed unusual. He walked slowly toward it. The encounter with the lizards had made him very cautious. It turned out to be an empty sack of sunflower seeds. He wondered if it was the

same one Magnet had stolen from Mr. Sir, although that didn't seem likely. He turned it inside out and found one seed stuck to the burlap. Lunch.

## 34

The sun was almost directly overhead. He figured he could walk for no more than another hour, maybe two, before he had to turn back. It seemed pointless. He could see there was nothing ahead of him. Nothing but emptiness. He was hot, tired, hungry, and, most of all, thirsty. Maybe he should just turn around now. Maybe he'd already gone halfway and didn't know it. Then, looking around, he saw a pool of water less than a hundred yards away from where he was standing. He closed his eyes and opened them to make sure he wasn't imagining it. The pool was still there. He hurried toward it. The pool hurried away from him, moving as he moved, stopping when he stopped.

There wasn't any water. It was a mirage caused by the shimmering waves of heat rising off the dry ground. He kept walking. He still carried the empty sack of sunflower seeds. He didn't know if he might find something to put in it. After a while he thought he could make out the shape of the mountains through the haze. At first he wasn't sure if this was another kind of mirage, but the farther he walked, the clearer they came into a view. Almost straight ahead of him, he could see what looked like a fist, with its thumb sticking up. He didn't know how far away it was. Five miles? Fifty miles? One thing was certain. It was more than halfway. He kept walking toward it, although he didn't know why. He knew he'd have to turn around before he got there. But every time he looked at it, it seemed to encourage him, giving him the thumbs-up sign.

As he continued walking, he became aware of a large object on the lake. He couldn't tell what it was, or even if it was natural or man-made. It looked a little like a fallen tree, although it didn't seem likely that a tree would grow here. More likely, it was a ridge of dirt or rocks. The object, whatever it was, was not on the way to Big Thumb but off to the right. He tried to decide whether to go to it or continue toward Big Thumb. Or maybe just turn around. There was no point in heading toward Big Thumb, he decided. He would never make it. For all he knew it was like chasing the moon. But he could make it to the mysterious object. He changed directions. He doubted it was anything, but the fact that there was something in the middle of all this nothing made it hard for him to pass up. He decided to make the object his halfway point, and he hoped he hadn't already gone too far.

He laughed to himself when he saw what it was. It was a boat—or part of a boat anyway. It struck him as funny to see a boat in the middle of this dry and barren wasteland. But after all, he realized, this was once a lake. The boat lay upside down, half buried in the dirt. Someone may have drowned here, he thought grimly—at the same spot where he could very well die of thirst. The name of the boat had been painted on the back. The upside-down red letters were peeled and faded, but Stanley could still read the name: Mary Lou. On one side of the boat there was a pile of dirt and then a tunnel leading down below the boat. The tunnel looked big enough for a good-sized animal to crawl through. He heard a noise. Something stirred under the boat. It was coming out. "Hey!" Stanley shouted, hoping to scare it back inside. His mouth was very dry, and it was hard to shout very loudly. "Hey," the thing answered weakly. Then a dark hand and an orange sleeve reached up out of the tunnel.

Zero's face looked like a jack-o'-lantern that had been left out too many days past Halloween—half rotten, with sunken eyes and a drooping smile. "Is that water?" he asked. His voice was weak and raspy. His lips were so pale they were almost white, and his tongue seemed to flop around uselessly in his mouth as he spoke, as if it kept getting in the way. "It's empty," said Stanley. He stared at Zero, not quite believing that he was real. "I tried to bring you the whole water truck, but," he smiled sheepishly, "I drove it into a hole. I can't believe you're . . ." "Me neither," said Zero. "C'mon, we got to get back to camp." Zero shook his head. "I'm not going back." "You have to. We both have to." "You want some sploosh?" Zero asked. "What?" Zero shaded his eyes with his forearm. "It's cooler under the boat," he said. Stanley watched Zero crawl back through his hole. It was a miracle he was still alive, but Stanley knew he would have to get him back to camp soon, even if he had to carry him. He crawled after him, and was just able to squeeze his body through the hole. He never would have fit when he first came to Camp Green Lake. He'd lost a lot of weight. As he pulled himself through, his leg struck something sharp and hard. It was a shovel. For a second Stanley wondered how it got there, but then remembered that Zero had taken it with him after striking Mr. Pendanski. It was cooler under the boat, which was half buried in the dirt. There were enough cracks and holes in the bottom of the boat, now the roof, to provide light and ventilation. He could see empty jars scattered about. Zero held a jar in his hand and grunted as he tried to unscrew the lid. "What is it?" "Sploosh!" His voice was strained as he worked on the jar. "That's what I call it. They were buried under the boat." He still couldn't get the lid off. "I found sixteen jars. Here, hand me the shovel." Stanley didn't have a lot of room to move. He reached behind him, grabbed the wooden end of the shovel, and held it out to Zero, blade first. "Sometimes you just have to . . ." Zero said, then he hit the jar against the blade of the shovel, breaking the top of the jar clean off. He quickly brought the jar to his mouth and licked the sploosh off the jagged edges before it spilled. "Careful," Stanley warned. Zero picked up the cracked lid and licked the sploosh off that as well. Then he handed the broken jar to Stanley. "Drink some."

Stanley held it in his hand and stared at it a moment. He was afraid of the broken glass. He was also afraid of the sploosh. It looked like mud. Whatever it was, he realized, it must have been in the boat when the boat sank. That meant it was probably over a hundred years old. Who knew what kind of bacteria might be living in it? "It's good," said Zero, encouraging him. He wondered if Zero had heard of bacteria. He raised the jar to his mouth and carefully took a sip. It was a warm, bubbly, mushy nectar, sweet and tangy. It felt like heaven as it flowed over his dry mouth and down his parched throat. He thought it might have been some kind of fruit at some time, perhaps peaches. Zero smiled at him. "I told you it was good." Stanley didn't want to drink too much, but it was too good to resist. They passed the jar back and forth until it was empty. "How many are left?" he asked. "None," said Zero. Stanley's mouth dropped. "Now I have to take you back," he said. "I'm not digging any more

holes," said Zero. "They won't make you dig," Stanley promised. "They'll probably send you to a hospital, like Barf Bag." "Barf Bag stepped on a rattlesnake," said Zero. Stanley remembered how he'd almost done the same. "I guess he didn't hear the rattle." "He did it on purpose," said Zero. "You think?" "He took off his shoe and sock first." Stanley shivered as he tried to imagine it. "What's Mar-ya Luh-oh-oo?" asked Zero. "What?" Zero concentrated hard. "Mar ya, Luh oh oo." "I have no idea." "I'll show you," said Zero. He crawled back out from under the boat. Stanley followed. Back outside, he had to shield his eyes from the brightness. Zero walked around to the back of the boat and pointed to the upside-down letters. "Mm-ar-yuh. Luh-oh-oo." Stanley smiled. "Mary Lou. It's the name of the boat." "Mary Lou," Zero repeated, studying the letters. "I thought 'y' made the 'yuh' sound." "It does," said Stanley. "But not when it's at the end of a word. Sometimes 'y' is a vowel and sometimes it's a consonant." Zero suddenly groaned. He grabbed his stomach and bent over. "Are you all right?" Zero dropped to the ground. He lay on his side, with his knees pulled up to his chest. He continued to groan.

Stanley watched helplessly. He wondered if it was the sploosh. He looked back toward Camp Green Lake. At least he thought it was the direction of Camp Green Lake. He wasn't entirely sure. Zero stopped moaning, and his body slowly unbent. "I'm taking you back," said Stanley. Zero managed to sit up. He took several deep breaths. "Look, I got a plan so you won't get in trouble," Stanley assured him. "Remember when I found the gold tube. Remember, I gave it to X-Ray, and the Warden went crazy making us dig where she thought X-Ray found it. I think if I tell the Warden where I really found it, I think she'll let us off." "I'm not going back," said Zero. "You've got nowhere else to go," said Stanley. Zero said nothing. "You'll die out here," said Stanley. "Then I'll die out here." Stanley didn't know what to do. He had come to rescue Zero and instead drank the last of his sploosh. He looked off into the distance. "I want you to look at something." "I'm not—" "I just want you to look at that mountain up there. See the one that has something sticking up out of it?" "Yeah, I think." "What does it look like to you? Does it look like anything?" Zero said nothing. But as he studied the mountain, his right hand slowly formed into a fist. He raised his thumb. His eyes went from the mountain, to his hand, then back to the mountain.

They put four of the unbroken jars in the burlap sack, in case they might be able to use them. Stanley carried the sack. Zero held the shovel. "I should warn you," Stanley said. "I'm not exactly the luckiest guy in the world." Zero wasn't worried. "When you spend your whole life living in a hole," he said, "the only way you can go is up." They gave each other the thumbs-up sign, then headed out. It was the hottest part of the day. Stanley's empty-empty-empty canteen was still strapped around his neck. He thought back to the water truck, and wished he'd at least stopped and filled his canteen before running off.

They hadn't gone very far before Zero had another attack. He clutched his stomach as he let himself fall to the ground. Stanley could only wait for it to pass. The sploosh had saved Zero's life, but it was now destroying him from the inside. He wondered how long it would be before he, too, felt the effects.

He looked at Big Thumb. It didn't seem any closer than when they first started out. Zero took a deep breath and managed to sit up. "Can you walk?" Stanley asked him. "Just give me a second," Zero said. He took another breath, then, using the shovel, pulled himself back to his feet. He gave Stanley the thumbs-up sign and they continued. Sometimes Stanley would try to go for a long while without looking at Big Thumb. He'd make a mental snapshot of how it looked, then wait maybe ten minutes before looking at it again, to see if it seemed closer. It never did. It was like chasing the moon. And if they ever reached it, he realized, then they'd still have to climb it. "I wonder who she was," said Zero. "Who?" "Mary Lou," said Zero. Stanley smiled. "I guess she was once a real person on a real lake. It's hard to imagine." "I bet she was pretty," said Zero. "Somebody must have loved her a lot, to name a boat after her." "Yeah," said Stanley. "I bet she looked great in a bathing suit, sitting in the boat while her boyfriend rowed." Zero used the shovel as a third leg. Two legs weren't enough to keep him up. "I got to stop and rest," he said after a while. Stanley looked at Big Thumb. It still didn't look any closer. He was afraid if Zero stopped, he might never get started again. "We're almost there," he said. He wondered which was closer: Camp Green Lake or Big Thumb? "I really have to sit down." "Just see if you can go a little—" Zero collapsed. The shovel stayed up a fraction of a second longer, perfectly balanced on the tip of the blade, then it fell next to him. Zero knelt, bent over with his head on the ground. Stanley could hear a very low moaning sound coming from him. He looked at the shovel and couldn't help but think that he might need it to dig a grave. Zero's last hole. And who will dig a grave for me? he thought. But Zero did get up, once again flashing thumbs-up. "Give me some words," he said weakly. It took Stanley a few seconds to realize what he meant. Then he smiled and said, "R-u-n." Zero sounded it out to himself. "Rr-un, run. Run." "Good. F-u-n." "Fffun." The spelling seemed to help Zero. It gave him something to concentrate on besides his pain and weakness. It distracted Stanley as well. The next time he looked up at Big Thumb, it really did seem closer.

They quit spelling words when it hurt too much to talk. Stanley's throat was dry. He was weak and exhausted, yet as bad as he felt, he knew that Zero felt ten times worse. As long as Zero could keep going, he could keep going, too. It was possible, he thought, he hoped, that he didn't get any of the bad bacteria. Zero hadn't been able to unscrew the lid. Maybe the bad germs couldn't get in, either. Maybe the bacteria were only in the jars which opened easily, the ones he was now carrying in his sack. What scared Stanley the most about dying wasn't his actual death. He figured he could handle the pain. It wouldn't be much worse than what he felt now. In fact, maybe at the moment of his death he would be too weak to feel pain. Death would be a relief. What worried him the most was the thought of his parents not knowing what happened to him, not knowing whether he was dead or alive. He hated to imagine what it would be like for his mother and father, day after day, month after month, not knowing, living on false hope. For him, at least, it would be over. For his parents, the pain would never end. He wondered if the Warden would send out a search party to look for him. It didn't seem likely. She didn't send anyone to look for Zero. But no one cared about Zero. They simply destroyed his files. But Stanley had a family. She couldn't pretend he was never there. He wondered what she would tell them. And when? "What do you think's up there?" Zero asked. Stanley looked to the top of Big Thumb. "Oh, probably an Italian restaurant," he said. Zero managed to laugh. "I think I'll get a pepperoni pizza and a large root beer," said Stanley. "I want an ice cream sundae," said Zero. "With nuts and whipped cream, and bananas, and hot fudge." The sun was almost directly in front of them. The thumb pointed up toward it.

They came to the end of the lake. Huge white stone cliffs rose up before them. Unlike the eastern shore, where Camp Green Lake was situated, the western shore did not slope down gradually. It was as if they had been walking across the flat bottom of a giant frying pan, and now they had to somehow climb up out of it. They could no longer see Big Thumb. The cliffs blocked their view. The cliffs also blocked out the sun. Zero groaned and clutched his stomach, but he remained standing. "I'm all right," he whispered. Stanley saw a rut, about a foot wide and six inches deep, running down a cliff. On either side of the rut were a series of ledges. "Let's try there," he said. It looked to be about a fifty-foot climb, straight up. Stanley still managed to hold the sack of jars in his left hand as he slowly moved up, from ledge to ledge, crisscrossing the rut. At times he had to use the side of the rut for support, in order to make it to the next ledge.

Zero stayed with him, somehow. His frail body trembled terribly as he climbed the stone wall. Some of the ledges were wide enough to sit on. Others stuck out no more than a few inches—just enough for a quick step. Stanley stopped about two-thirds of the way up, on a fairly wide ledge. Zero came up alongside him. "You okay?" Stanley asked. Zero gave the thumbs-up sign. Stanley did the same. He looked above him. He wasn't sure how he'd get to the next ledge. It was three or four feet above his head, and he didn't see any footholds. He

was afraid to look down. "Give me a boost," said Zero. "Then I'll pull you up with the shovel." "You won't be able to pull me up," said Stanley. "Yes, I will," said Zero. Stanley cupped his hands together, and Zero stepped on his interwoven fingers. He was able to lift Zero high enough for him to grab the protruding slab of rock. Stanley continued to help him from below as Zero pulled himself onto the ledge. While Zero was getting himself situated up there, Stanley ' attached the sack to the shovel by poking a hole through the burlap. He held it up to Zero. Zero first grabbed hold of the sack, then the shovel. He set the shovel so that half the blade was supported by the rock slab. The wooden shaft hung down toward Stanley. "Okay," he said. Stanley doubted this would work. It was one thing for him to lift Zero, who was half his weight. It was quite another for Zero to try to pull him up. Stanley grabbed hold of the shovel as he climbed up the rock wall, using the sides of the rut to help support him. His hands moved one over the other, up the shaft of the shovel. He felt Zero's hand clasp his wrist. He let go of the shaft with one hand and grabbed the top of the ledge. He gathered his strength and for a brief second seemed to defy gravity as he took a quick step up the wall and, with Zero's help, pulled himself the rest of the way over the ledge. He caught his breath. There was no way he could have done that a few months ago. He noticed a large spot of blood on his wrist. It took him a moment to realize that it was Zero's blood. Zero had deep gashes in both hands. He had held on to the metal blade of the shovel, keeping it in place, as Stanley climbed. Zero brought his hands to his mouth and sucked up his blood. One of the glass jars had broken in the sack. They decided to save the pieces. They might need to make a knife or something. They rested briefly, then continued on up. It was a fairly easy climb the rest of the way. When they reached flat ground, Stanley looked up to see the sun, a fiery ball balancing on top of Big Thumb. God was twirling a basketball. Soon they were walking in the long thin shadow of the thumb.