

Please spend Monday and Tuesday reading chapter 30 – 32. Take note of any words you are unsure of and look this up.

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The next day was Zigzag's birthday. Or so he said. Zigzag lay in his cot as everyone headed outside. "I get to sleep in, because it's my birthday." Then a little while later he cut into the breakfast line, just in front of Squid. Squid told him to go to the end of the line. "Hey, it's my birthday," Zigzag said, staying where he was. "It's not your birthday," said Magnet, who was standing behind Squid. "Is too," said Zigzag. "July 8." Stanley was behind Magnet. He didn't know what day of the week it was, let alone the date. It could have been July 8, but how would Zigzag know? He tried to figure out how long he'd been at Camp Green Lake, if indeed it was July 8. "I came here on May 24," he said aloud. "So that means I've been here . . ." "Forty-six days," said Zero.

Stanley was still trying to remember how many days there were in May and June. He looked at Zero. He'd learned not to doubt him when it came to math. Forty-six days. It felt more like a thousand. He didn't dig a hole that first day, and he hadn't dug one yet today. That meant he'd dug forty-four holes—if it really was July 8. "Can I have an extra carton of juice?" Zigzag asked Mr. Sir. "It's my birthday." To everyone's surprise, Mr. Sir gave it to him.

Stanley dug his shovel into the dirt. Hole number 45. "The forty-fifth hole is the hardest," he said to himself. But that really wasn't true, and he knew it. He was a lot stronger than when he first arrived. His body had adjusted somewhat to the heat and harsh conditions. Mr. Sir was no longer depriving him of water. After having to get by on less water for a week or so, Stanley now felt like he had all the water he could want. Of course it helped that Zero dug some of his hole for him each day, but that wasn't as great as everyone thought it was. He always felt awkward while Zero was digging his hole, unsure of what to do with himself. Usually he stood around awhile, before sitting off by himself on the hard ground, with the sun beating down on him. It was better than digging. But not a lot better. When the sun came up a couple of hours later, Stanley looked for "the thumb of God." The mountains were little more than dark shadows on the horizon. He thought he could make out a spot where the top of one mountain seemed to jut upward, but it didn't seem very impressive. A short time later the mountains were no longer visible, hidden behind the glare of the sun, reflecting off the dirty air. It was possible, he realized, that he was somewhere near where Kate Barlow had robbed his great-grandfather. If that was really her lipstick tube he'd found, then she must have lived somewhere around here.

Zero took his turn before the lunch break. Stanley climbed out of his hole, and Zero climbed down into it. "Hey, Caveman," said Zigzag. "You should get a whip. Then if your slave doesn't

dig fast enough, you can crack it across his back." "He's not my slave," said Stanley. "We have a deal, that's all." "A good deal for you," said Zigzag. "It was Zero's idea, not mine." "Don't you know, Zig?" said X-Ray, coming over. "Caveman's doing Zero a big favor. Zero likes to dig holes." "He sure is a nice guy to let Zero dig his hole for him," said Squid. "Well, what about me?" asked Armpit. "I like to dig holes, too. Can I dig for you, Caveman, after Zero's finished?" The other boys laughed. "No, I want to," said Zigzag. "It's my birthday." Stanley tried his best to ignore them. Zigzag kept at it. "Come on, Caveman. Be a pal. Let me dig your hole."

Stanley smiled, as if it were all a big joke. When Mr. Pendanski arrived with water" and lunch, Zigzag offered Stanley his place in line. "Since you're so much better than me." Stanley remained where he was. "I didn't say I was bet—" "You're insulting him, Zig," said X-Ray. "Why should Caveman take your place, when he deserves to be at the very front? He's better than all of us. Aren't you, Caveman?" "No," said Stanley. "Sure you are," said X-Ray. "Now come to the front of the line where you belong." "That's okay," said Stanley. "No, it's not okay," said X-Ray. "Get up here." Stanley hesitated, then moved to the front of the line. "Well, this is a first," Mr. Pendanski said, coming around the side of the truck. He filled Stanley's canteen and handed him a sack lunch. Stanley was glad to get away. He sat down between his hole and Zero's. He was glad that he'd be digging his own hole for the rest of the day. Maybe the other boys would leave him alone. Maybe he shouldn't let Zero dig his hole for him anymore. But he needed to save his energy to be a good teacher. He bit into his sandwich, which contained some kind of meat-and-cheese mixture that came in a can. Just about everything at Green Lake came in a can. The supply truck came once a month. He glanced up to see Zigzag and Squid walking toward him. "I'll give you my cookie if you let me dig your hole," said Zigzag. Squid laughed. "Here, take my cookie," said Zigzag, holding it out for him. "No, thanks," said Stanley. "C'mon, take my cookie," said Zigzag, sticking it in his face. "Leave me alone," said Stanley. "Please eat my cookie," said Zigzag, holding it under Stanley's nose. Squid laughed. Stanley pushed it away. Zigzag pushed him back. "Don't push me!" "I didn't . . ." Stanley got to his feet. He looked around. Mr. Pendanski was filling Zero's canteen. Zigzag pushed him again. "I said, 'Don't push me.'" Stanley took a step backward, carefully avoiding Zero's hole. Zigzag kept after him. He shoved Stanley and said, "Quit pushing!" "Lay off," said Armpit, as he, Magnet, and X-Ray joined them. "Why should he?" snapped X-Ray. "Caveman's bigger. He can take care of himself." "I don't want any trouble," Stanley said. Zigzag pushed him hard. "Eat my cookie," he said. Stanley was glad to see Mr. Pendanski coming toward them, along with Zero. "Hi, Mom," said Armpit. "We were just fooling around."

"I saw what was going on," Mr. Pendanski said. He turned to Stanley. "Go ahead, Stanley," he said. "Hit him back. You're bigger." Stanley stared at Mr. Pendanski in astonishment. "Teach the bully a lesson," said Mr. Pendanski. Zigzag hit Stanley on the shoulder with his open hand. "Teach me a lesson," he challenged. Stanley made a feeble attempt to punch Zigzag, then he felt a flurry of fists against his head and neck. Zigzag had hold of his collar

with one hand and was hitting him with the other. The collar ripped and Stanley fell backward onto the dirt. "That's enough!" Mr. Pendanski yelled. It wasn't enough for Zigzag. He jumped on top of Stanley. "Stop!" shouted Mr. Pendanski. The side of Stanley's face was pressed flat against the dirt. He tried to protect himself, but Zigzag's fists slammed off his arms and pounded his face into the ground. All he could do was wait for it to be over. Then, suddenly, Zigzag was off of him. Stanley managed to look up, and he saw that Zero had his arm around Zigzag's long neck. Zigzag made a gagging sound, as he desperately tried to pry Zero's arm off of him. "You're going to kill him!" shouted Mr. Pendanski. Zero kept squeezing. Armpit charged into them, freeing Zigzag from Zero's choke hold. The three boys fell to the ground in different directions. Mr. Pendanski fired his pistol into the air.

The other counselors came running from the office, the tents, or out on the lake. They had their guns drawn, but holstered them when they saw the trouble was over. The Warden walked over from her cabin. "There was a riot," Mr. Pendanski told her. "Zero almost strangled Ricky." The Warden looked at Zigzag, who was still stretching and massaging his neck. Then she turned her attention to Stanley, who was obviously in the worst condition. "What happened to you?" "Nothing. It wasn't a riot." "Ziggy was beating up the Caveman," said Armpit. "Then Zero started choking Zigzag, and I had to pull Zero off of Zigzag. It was all over before Mom fired his gun." "They just got a little hot, that's all," said X-Ray. "You know how it is. In the sun all day. People get hot, right? But everything's cool now." "I see," the Warden said. She turned to Zigzag. "What's the matter? Didn't you get a puppy for your birthday?" "Zig's just a little hot," said X-Ray. "Out in the sun all day. You know how it is. The blood starts to boil." "Is that what happened, Zigzag?" asked the Warden. "Yeah," said Zigzag. "Like X-Ray said. Working so hard in the hot sun, while Caveman just sits around doing nothing. My blood boiled."

"Excuse me?" said the Warden. "Caveman digs his holes, just like everyone else." Zigzag shrugged. "Sometimes." "Excuse me?" "Zero's been digging part of Caveman's hole every day," said Squid. The Warden looked from Squid to Stanley to Zero. "I'm teaching him to read and write," said Stanley. "It's sort of a trade. The hole still gets dug, so what does it matter who digs it?" "Excuse me?" said the Warden. "Isn't it more important for him to learn to read?" Stanley asked. "Doesn't that build character more than digging holes?" "That's his character," said the Warden. "What about your character?" Stanley raised and lowered one shoulder. The Warden turned to Zero. "Well, Zero, what have you learned so far?" Zero said nothing. "Have you just been digging Caveman's hole for nothing?" the Warden asked him. "He likes to dig holes," said Mr. Pendanski. "Tell me what you learned yesterday," said the Warden. "Surely you can remember that." Zero said nothing. Mr. Pendanski laughed. He picked up a shovel and said, "You might as well try to teach this shovel to read! It's got more brains than Zero." "The 'at' sound," said Zero. "The 'at' sound," repeated the Warden. "Well then, tell me, what does c-a-t spell?" Zero glanced around uneasily. Stanley knew he knew the answer. Zero just didn't like answering questions. "Cat," Zero said. Mr. Pendanski clapped his hands. "Bravo! Bravo! The boy's a genius!" "F-a-t?"

asked the Warden. Zero thought a moment. Stanley hadn't taught him the "f" sound yet. "Eff," Zero whispered. "Eff-at. Fat." "How about h-a-t?" asked the Warden. Stanley hadn't taught him the "h" sound either. Zero concentrated hard, then said, "Chat." All the counselors laughed. "He's a genius, all right!" said Mr. Pendanski. "He's so stupid, he doesn't even know he's stupid." Stanley didn't know why Mr. Pendanski seemed to have it in for Zero. If Mr. Pendanski only thought about it, he'd realize it was very logical for Zero to think that the letter "h" made the "ch" sound. "Okay, from now on, I don't want anyone digging anyone else's hole," said the Warden. "And no more reading lessons." "I'm not digging another hole," said Zero.

"Good," said the Warden. She turned to Stanley. "You know why you're digging holes? Because it's good for you. It teaches you a lesson. If Zero digs your hole for you, then you're not learning your lesson, are you?" "I guess not," Stanley mumbled, although he knew they weren't digging just to learn a lesson. She was looking for something, something that belonged to Kissin' Kate Barlow. "Why can't I dig my own hole, but still teach Zero to read?" he asked. "What's wrong with that?" "I'll tell you what's wrong with that," the Warden said. "It leads to trouble. Zero almost killed Zigzag." "It causes him stress," said Mr. Pendanski. "I know you mean well, Stanley, but face it. Zero's too stupid to learn to read. That's what makes his blood boil. Not the hot sun." "I'm not digging another hole," said Zero. Mr. Pendanski handed him the shovel. "Here, take it, Zero. It's all you'll ever be good for." Zero took the shovel. Then he swung it like a baseball bat. The metal blade smashed across Mr. Pendanski's face. His knees crumpled beneath him. He was unconscious before he hit the ground. The counselors all drew their guns. Zero held the shovel out in front of him, as if he were going to try to bat away the bullets. "I hate digging holes," he said. Then he slowly backed away. "Don't shoot him," said the Warden. "He can't go anywhere. The last thing we need is an investigation." Zero kept backing up, out past the cluster of holes the boys had been digging, then farther and farther out onto the lake. "He's going to have to come back for water," the Warden said. Stanley noticed Zero's canteen lying on the ground near his hole. A couple of the counselors helped Mr. Pendanski to his feet and into the truck. Stanley looked out toward Zero, but he had disappeared into the haze. The Warden ordered the counselors to take turns guarding the shower room and Wreck Room, all day and all night. They were not to let Zero drink any water. When he returned, he was to be brought directly to her. She examined her fingernails and said, "It's almost time for me to paint my nails again." Before she left, she told the six remaining members of Group D that she still expected seven holes.

Stanley angrily dug his shovel into the dirt. He was angry at everyone—Mr. Pendanski, the Warden, Zigzag, X-Ray, and his

no-good-dirty-rotten-pig-stealing-great-great-grandfather. But mostly he was angry at himself. He knew he never should have let Zero dig part of his hole for him. He still could have taught him to read. If Zero could dig all day and still have the strength to learn, then he should have been able to dig all day and still have the strength to teach. What he should do, he thought, was go out after Zero. But he didn't. None of the others helped him dig Zero's hole, and he didn't expect them to. Zero had been helping him dig his hole. Now he had to dig Zero's. He remained out on the lake, digging during the hottest part of the day, long after everyone else had gone in. He kept an eye out for Zero, but Zero didn't come back. It would have been easy to go out after Zero. There was nobody to stop him. He kept thinking that's what he should do. Maybe they could climb to the top of Big Thumb. If it wasn't too far away. And if it was really the same place where his great-grandfather found refuge. And if, after a hundred years or so, water was still there. It didn't seem likely. Not when an entire lake had gone dry. And even if they did find refuge on Big Thumb, he thought, they'd still have to come back here, eventually. Then they'd both have to face the Warden, and her rattlesnake fingers. Instead, he came up with a better idea, although he didn't have it quite all figured out yet. He thought that maybe he could make a deal with the Warden. He'd tell her where he really found the gold tube if she wouldn't scratch Zero. He wasn't sure how he'd make this deal without getting himself in deeper trouble. She might just say, Tell me where you found it or I'll scratch you, too. Plus, it would mean X-Ray would get in trouble, too. She'd probably scratch him up as well. X-Ray would be out to get him for the next sixteen months. He dug his shovel into the dirt.

By the next morning, Zero still hadn't returned. Stanley saw one of the counselors sitting guard by the water spigot outside the shower wall. Mr. Pendanski had two black eyes and a bandage over his nose. "I always knew he was stupid," Stanley heard him say. Stanley was required to dig only one hole the next day. As he dug, he kept a constant watchout for Zero, but never saw him. Once again he considered going out on the lake to look for him, but he began to realize that it was already too late. His only hope was that Zero had found God's thumb on his own. It wasn't impossible. His great-grandfather had found it. For some reason his great-grandfather had felt the urge to climb to the top of that mountain. Maybe Zero would feel the same urge. If it was the same mountain. If water was still there.

He tried to convince himself it wasn't impossible. There had been a storm just a few days ago. Maybe Big Thumb was actually some kind of natural water tower that caught and stored the rain. It wasn't impossible.

He returned to his tent to find the Warden, Mr. Sir, and Mr. Pendanski all waiting for him. "Have you seen Zero?" the Warden asked him. "No." "No sign of him at all?" "No." "Do you have any idea where he went?" "No." "You know you're not doing him any favors if you're lying," said Mr. Sir. "He can't survive out there for more than a day or two." "I don't know where he is." All three stared at Stanley as if they were trying to figure out if he was telling the truth. Mr. Pendanski's face was so swollen, he could barely open his eyes. They were just slits. "You sure he has no family?" the Warden asked Mr. Pendanski. "He's a ward of the state," Mr. Pendanski told her. "He was living on the streets when he was arrested." "Is there anyone who might ask questions? Some social worker who took an interest in him?" "He had nobody," said Mr. Pendanski. "He was nobody." The Warden thought a moment. "Okay, I want you to destroy all of his records." Mr. Pendanski nodded. "He was never here," said the Warden. Mr. Sir nodded. "Can you get into the state files from our computer?" she asked Mr. Pendanski. "I don't want anyone in the A.G.'s office to know he was here." "I don't think I can erase him completely from all the state files," said Mr. Pendanski. "Too many cross-references. But I can make it so it would be very difficult for anyone to ever find a record of him. Like I said, though, no one will ever look. No one cares about Hector Zeroni." "Good," said the Warden.

Two days later a new kid was assigned to Group D. His name was Brian, but X-Ray called him Twitch because he was always fidgeting. Twitch was assigned Zero's bed, and Zero's crate. Vacancies don't last long at Camp Green Lake.

Twitch had been arrested for stealing a car. He claimed he could break into a car, disconnect the alarm, and hot-wire the engine, all in less than a minute. "I never plan to, you know, steal one," he told them. "But sometimes, you know, I'll be walking past a real nice car, parked in a deserted area, and, you know, I'll just start twitching. If you think I twitch now, you should see me when I'm around a car. The next thing I know, I'm behind the wheel." Stanley lay on his scratchy sheets. It occurred to him that his cot no longer smelled bad. He wondered if the smell had gone away, or if he had just gotten used to it. "Hey, Caveman," said Twitch. "Do we really have to get up at 4:30?" "You get used to it," Stanley told him. "It's the coolest part of the day." He tried not to think about Zero. It was too late. Either he'd made it to Big Thumb, or . . . What worried him the most, however, wasn't that it was too late. What worried him the most, what really ate at his insides, was the fear that it wasn't too late. What if Zero was still alive, desperately crawling across the dirt searching for water? He tried to force the image out of his mind.

The next morning, out on the lake, Stanley listened as Mr. Sir told Twitch the requirements for his hole: ". . . as wide and as deep as your shovel." Twitch fidgeted. His fingers drummed against the wooden shaft of his shovel, and his neck moved from side to side. "You won't be twitching so much after digging all day," Mr. Sir told him. "You won't have the strength to wiggle your pinkie." He popped some sunflower seeds in his mouth, deftly chewed them, and spat out the shells. "This isn't a Girl Scout camp." The water truck came shortly after sunrise. Stanley got in line behind Magnet, ahead of Twitch. What if it's not too late? He watched Mr. Sir fill X-Ray's canteen. The image of Zero crawling across the hot dry dirt remained in his head. But what could he do about it? Even if Zero was somehow alive after more than four days, how would Stanley ever find him? It would take days. He'd need a car. Or a pickup truck. A pickup truck with a tank of water in the back. Stanley wondered if Mr. Sir had left the keys in the ignition. He slowly backed away from the line, then circled over to the side of the truck. He looked through the window. The keys were there, dangling in the ignition. Stanley felt his fingers start to twitch. He took a deep breath to steady himself and tried to think clearly. He had never driven before. But how hard could it be? This is really crazy, he told himself. Whatever he did, he knew he'd have to do it quickly, before Mr. Sir noticed. It's too late, he told himself. Zero couldn't have survived. But what if it wasn't too late?

He took another deep breath. Think about this, he told himself, but there wasn't time to think. He flung open the door to the truck and climbed quickly inside. "Hey!" shouted Mr. Sir. He turned the key and stepped on the gas pedal. The engine revved. The truck didn't

move. He pressed the pedal to the floor. The engine roared, but the truck was motionless. Mr. Sir came running around the side of the truck. The door was still open. "Put it in gear!" shouted Twitch. The gear shift was on the floor next to the seat. Stanley pulled the lever back until the arrow pointed to the letter D, for Drive. The truck lurched forward. Stanley jerked back against the seat and tightly gripped the wheel as the truck accelerated. His foot was pressed to the floor. The truck went faster and faster across the dry lake bed. It bounced over a pile of dirt. Suddenly Stanley was slammed forward, then instantly backward as an airbag exploded in his face. He fell out of the open door and onto the ground. He had driven straight into a hole. He lay on the dirt staring at the truck, which stuck lopsided into the ground. He sighed. He couldn't blame his no-good-dirty-rotten-pig-stealing-great-great-grandfather this time. This time it was his own fault, one hundred percent. He had probably just done the stupidest thing he had ever done in his short and miserable life. He managed to get to his feet. He was sore but didn't think he had broken any bones. He glanced back at Mr. Sir, who remained where he was, staring at Stanley. He ran. His canteen was strapped around his neck. It banged against his chest as he ran, and every time it hit against him, it reminded him that it was empty, empty, empty.