

Please spend Monday and Tuesday reading chapter 41 – 43. Take note of any words you are unsure of and look this up.

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Zero's condition continued to improve. Stanley slowly peeled an onion. He liked eating them one layer at a time. The water hole was now almost as large as the holes he had dug back at Camp Green Lake. It contained almost two feet of murky water. Stanley had dug it all himself. Zero had offered to help, but Stanley thought it better for Zero to save his strength. It was a lot harder to dig in water than it was in a dry lake. Stanley was surprised that he himself hadn't gotten sick—either from the sploosh, the dirty water, or from living on onions. He used to get sick quite a lot back at home. Both boys were barefoot. They had washed their socks. All their clothes were very dirty, but their socks were definitely the worst. They didn't dip their socks into the hole, afraid to contaminate the water. Instead they filled the jars and poured the water over their dirty socks. "I didn't go to the homeless shelter very often," Zero said. "Just if the weather was really bad. I'd have to find someone to pretend to be my mom. If I'd just gone by myself, they would have asked me a bunch of questions. If they'd found out I didn't have a mom, they would have made me a ward of the state." "What's a ward of the state?" Zero smiled. "I don't know. But I didn't like the sound of it." Stanley remembered Mr. Pendanski telling the Warden that Zero was a ward of the state. He wondered if Zero knew he'd become one. "I liked sleeping outside," said Zero. "I used to pretend I was a Cub Scout. I always wanted to be a Cub Scout. I'd see them at the park in their blue uniforms." "I was never a Cub Scout," said Stanley. "I wasn't good at social stuff like that. Kids made fun of me because I was fat." "I liked the blue uniforms," said Zero. "Maybe I wouldn't have liked being a Cub Scout." Stanley shrugged one shoulder. "My mother was once a Girl Scout," said Zero. "I thought you said you didn't have a mother." "Everybody has to have a mother." "Well, yeah, I know that."

"She said she once won a prize for selling the most Girl Scout cookies," said Zero. "She was real proud of that." Stanley peeled off another layer of his onion. "We always took what we needed," Zero said. "When I was little, I didn't even know it was stealing. I don't remember when I found out. But we just took what we needed, never more. So when I saw the shoes on display in the shelter, I just reached in the glass case and took them." "Clyde Livingston's shoes?" asked Stanley. "I didn't know they were his. I just thought they were somebody's old shoes. It was better to take someone's old shoes, I thought, than steal a pair of new ones. I didn't know they were famous. There was a sign, but of course I couldn't read it. Then, the next thing I know everybody's making this big deal about how the shoes are missing. It was kind of funny, in a way. The whole place is going crazy. There I was, wearing the shoes, and everyone's running around saying, 'What happened to the shoes?' 'The shoes are gone!' I just walked out the door. No one noticed me. When I got outside, I ran around the corner and immediately took off the shoes. I put them on top of a parked car. I remember they smelled really bad." "Yeah, those were them," said Stanley. "Did they fit

you?" "Pretty much." Stanley remembered being surprised at Clyde Livingston's small shoe size. Stanley's shoes were bigger. Clyde Livingston had small, quick feet. Stanley's feet were big and slow. "I should have just kept them," said Zero. "I'd already made it out of the shelter and everything. I ended up getting arrested the next day when I tried to walk out of a shoe store with a new pair of sneakers. If I had just kept those old smelly sneakers, then neither of us would be here right now."

Zero became strong enough to help dig the hole. When he finished, it was over six feet deep. He filled the bottom with rocks to help separate the water from the dirt. He was still the best hole digger around. "That's the last hole I will ever dig," he declared, throwing down the shovel. Stanley smiled. He wished it were true, but he knew they had no choice but to eventually return to Camp Green Lake. They couldn't live on onions forever. They had been completely around Big Thumb. It was like a giant sundial. They followed the shade. They were able to see out in all directions. There was no place to go. The mountain was surrounded by desert. Zero stared at Big Thumb. "It must have a hole in it," he said, "filled with water." "You think?" "Where else could the water be coming from?" Zero asked. "Water doesn't run uphill."

Stanley bit into an onion. It didn't burn his eyes or nose, and, in fact, he no longer noticed a particularly strong taste. He remembered when he had first carried Zero up the hill, how the air had smelled bitter. It was the smell of thousands of onions, growing and rotting and sprouting. Now he didn't smell a thing. "How many onions do you think we've eaten?" he asked. Zero shrugged. "I don't even know how long we've been here." "I'd say about a week," said Stanley. "And we probably each eat about twenty onions a day, so that's . . ." "Two hundred and eighty onions," said Zero. Stanley smiled. "I bet we really stink."

Two nights later, Stanley lay awake staring up at the star-filled sky. He was too happy to fall asleep. He knew he had no reason to be happy. He had heard or read somewhere that right before a person freezes to death, he suddenly feels nice and warm. He wondered if perhaps he was experiencing something like that. It occurred to him that he couldn't remember the last time he felt happiness. It wasn't just being sent to Camp Green Lake that had made his life miserable. Before that he'd been unhappy at school, where he had no friends, and bullies like Derrick Dunne picked on him. No one liked him, and the truth was, he didn't especially like himself. He liked himself now. He wondered if he was delirious. He looked over at Zero sleeping near him. Zero's face was lit in the starlight, and there was a flower petal in front of his nose that moved back and forth as he breathed. It reminded Stanley of something out of a cartoon. Zero breathed in, and the petal was drawn up almost touching his nose. Zero breathed out, and the petal moved toward his chin. It stayed on Zero's face for an amazingly long time before fluttering off to the side. Stanley considered placing it back in front of Zero's nose, but it wouldn't be the same. It seemed like Zero had lived at Camp Green Lake forever, but as Stanley thought about it now, he realized that Zero must have gotten there no more than a month or two before him. Zero was actually arrested a day later. But Stanley's trial kept getting delayed because of baseball. He remembered what Zero had said a few days before. If Zero had just kept those shoes, then neither of them would be here right now. As Stanley stared at the glittering night sky, he thought there was no place he would rather be. He was glad Zero put the shoes on the parked car. He was glad

they fell from the overpass and hit him on the head. When the shoes first fell from the sky, he remembered thinking that destiny had struck him. Now, he thought so again. It was more than a coincidence. It had to be destiny.

Maybe they wouldn't have to return to Camp Green Lake, he thought. Maybe they could make it past the camp, then follow the dirt road back to civilization. They could fill the sack with onions, and the three jars with water. And he had his canteen as well. They could refill their jars and canteen at the camp. Maybe sneak into the kitchen and get some food. He doubted any counselors were still on guard. Everyone had to think they were dead. Buzzard food. It would mean living the rest of his life as a fugitive. The police would always be after him. At least he could call his parents and tell them he was still alive. But he couldn't go visit them, in case the police were watching the apartment. Although, if everyone thought he was dead, they wouldn't bother to watch the apartment. He would have to somehow get a new identity. Now, I'm really thinking crazy, he thought. He wondered if a crazy person wonders if he's crazy. But even as he thought this, an even crazier idea kept popping into his head. He knew it was too crazy to even consider. Still, if he was going to be a fugitive for the rest of his life, it would help to have some money, perhaps a treasure chest full of money. You're crazy! he told himself. Besides, just because he found a lipstick container with K B on it, that didn't mean there was treasure buried there. It was crazy. It was all part of his crazy feeling of happiness. Or maybe it was destiny. He reached over and shook Zero's arm. "Hey, Zero," he whispered. "Huh?" Zero muttered. "Zero, wake up." "What?" Zero raised up his head. "What is it?" "You want to dig one more hole?" Stanley asked him.

"We weren't always homeless," Zero said. "I remember a yellow room." "How old were you when you . . ." Stanley started to ask, but couldn't find the right words. ". . . moved out?" "I don't know. I must have been real little, because I don't remember too much. I don't remember moving out. I remember standing in a crib, with my mother singing to me. She held my wrists and made my hands clap together. She used to sing that song to me. That one you sang . . . It was different, though . . ." Zero spoke slowly, as if searching his brain for memories and clues. "And then later I know we lived on the street, but I don't know why we left the house. I'm pretty sure it was a house, and not an apartment. I know my room was yellow." It was late afternoon. They were resting in the shadow of the Thumb. They had spent the morning picking onions and putting them in the sack. It didn't take long, but long enough so that they had to wait another day before heading down the mountain.

They wanted to leave at the first hint of daylight, so they'd have plenty of time to make it to Camp Green Lake before dark. Stanley wanted to be sure he could find the right hole. Then, they would hide by it until everyone went to sleep. They would dig for as long as it seemed safe, and not a second longer. And then, treasure or no treasure, they'd head up the dirt road. If it was absolutely safe, they'd try to steal some food and water from the camp kitchen. "I'm good at sneaking in and out of places," Zero had said. "Remember," Stanley had warned. "The door to the Wreck Room squeaks." Now he lay on his back, trying to save his strength for the long days ahead. He wondered what happened to Zero's parents, but he didn't ask. Zero didn't like answering questions. It was better to just let him talk when he felt like it. Stanley thought about his own parents. In her last letter, his mom was worried that they might be evicted from their apartment because of the smell of burning sneakers. They could easily become homeless as well. Again, he wondered if they'd been told that he ran away from camp. Were they told that he was dead? An image appeared in his head of his parents hugging each other and crying. He tried not to think about it. Instead he tried to recapture the feelings he'd had the night before—the inexplicable feeling of happiness, the sense of destiny. But those feelings didn't return. He just felt scared.

The next morning they headed down the mountain. They'd dunked their caps in the water hole before putting them on their heads. Zero held the shovel, and Stanley carried the sack, which was crammed with onions and the three jars of water. They left the pieces of the broken jar on the mountain. "This is where I found the shovel," Stanley said, pointing out a patch of weeds. Zero turned and looked up toward the top of the mountain. "That's a long way." "You were light," Stanley said. "You'd already thrown up everything that was inside your stomach." He shifted the sack from one shoulder to the other. It was heavy. He stepped on a loose rock, slipped, then fell hard. The next thing he knew he was sliding down the steep side of the mountain. He dropped the sack, and onions spilled around him. He slid into a patch of weeds and grabbed onto a thorny vine. The vine ripped out of the earth, but

slowed him enough so that he was able to stop himself. "Are you all right?" Zero asked from above. Stanley groaned as he pulled a thorn out of the palm of his hand. "Yeah," he said. He was all right. He was worried more about the jars of water. Zero climbed down after him, retrieving the sack along the way. Stanley pulled some thorns out of his pant legs. The jars hadn't broken. The onions had protected them, like Styrofoam packing material. "Glad you didn't do that when you were carrying me," Zero said.

They'd lost about a third of the onions, but recovered many of them as they continued down the mountain. When they reached the bottom, the sun was just rising above the lake. They walked directly toward it. Soon they stood on the edge of a cliff, looking down on the dry lake bed. Stanley wasn't sure, but he thought he could see the remains of the Mary Lou off in the distance. "You thirsty?" Stanley asked. "No," said Zero. "How about you." "No," Stanley lied. He didn't want to be the first one to take a drink. Although they didn't mention it, it had become a kind of challenge between him and Zero. They climbed down into the frying pan. It was a different spot from where they had climbed up. They eased themselves down from one ledge to another, and let themselves slide in other places, being especially careful with the sack. Stanley could no longer see the Mary Lou, but headed in what he thought was the right direction. As the sun rose, so did the familiar haze of heat and dirt. "You thirsty?" Zero asked. "No," said Stanley. "Because you have three full jars of water," said Zero. "I thought maybe it was getting too heavy for you. If you drink some, it will lighten your load." "I'm not thirsty," said Stanley. "But if you want a drink, I'll give you some." "I'm not thirsty," said Zero. "I was just worried about you." Stanley smiled. "I'm a camel," he said. They walked for what seemed like a very long time, and still never came across the Mary Lou. Stanley was pretty sure they were heading in the right direction. He remembered that when they left the boat, they were headed toward the setting sun. Now they were headed toward the rising sun. He knew the sun didn't rise and set exactly in the east and west; more southeast and southwest, but he wasn't sure how that made a difference. His throat felt as if it was coated with sandpaper. "You sure you're not thirsty?" he asked. "Not me," said Zero. His voice was dry and raspy. When they did finally take a drink, they agreed to do it at the same time. Zero, who was now carrying the sack, set it down and took out two jars, giving one to Stanley. They decided to save the canteen for last, since it couldn't accidentally break. "You know I'm not thirsty," Stanley said, as he unscrewed the lid. "I'm just drinking so you will." "I'm just drinking so you will," said Zero. They clinked the jars together and, each watching the other, poured the water into their stubborn mouths.

Zero was the first to spot the Mary Lou, maybe a quarter mile away, and just a little off to the right. They headed for it. It wasn't even noon yet when they reached the boat. They sat against the shady side and rested.

"I don't know what happened to my mother," Zero said. "She left and never came back." Stanley peeled an onion. "She couldn't always take me with her," Zero said. "Sometimes she

had to do things by herself." Stanley had the feeling that Zero was explaining things to himself. "She'd tell me to wait in a certain place for her. When I was real little, I had to wait in small areas, like on a porch step or a doorway. 'Now don't leave here until I get back,' she'd say. "I never liked it when she left. I had a stuffed animal, a little giraffe, and I'd hug it the whole time she was gone. When I got bigger I was allowed to stay in bigger areas. Like, 'Stay on this block.' Or, 'Don't leave the park.' But even then, I still held Jaffy." Stanley guessed that Jaffy was the name of Zero's giraffe. "And then one day she didn't come back," Zero said. His voice sounded suddenly hollow. "I waited for her at Laney Park." "Laney Park," said Stanley. "I've been there." "You know the playscape?" asked Zero. "Yeah. I've played on it." "I waited there for more than a month," said Zero. "You know that tunnel that you crawl through, between the slide and the swinging bridge? That's where I slept." They ate four onions apiece and drank about half a jar of water. Stanley stood up and looked around. Everything looked the same in all directions. "When I left camp, I was heading straight toward Big Thumb," he said. "I saw the boat off to the right. So that means we have to turn a little to the left." Zero was lost in thought. "What? Okay," he said. They headed out. It was Stanley's turn to carry the sack. "Some kids had a birthday party," Zero said. "I guess it was about two weeks after my mother left. There was a picnic table next to the playscape and balloons were tied to it. The kids looked to be the same age as me. One girl said hi to me and asked me if I wanted to play. I wanted to, but I didn't. I knew I didn't belong at the party, even though it wasn't their playscape. There was this one mother who kept staring at me like I was some kind of monster. Then later a boy asked me if I wanted a piece of cake, but then that same mother told me, 'Go away!' and she told all the kids to stay away from me, so I never got the piece of cake. I ran away so fast, I forgot Jaffy." "Did you ever find him—it?" For a moment, Zero didn't answer. Then he said, "He wasn't real." Stanley thought again about his own parents, how awful it would be for them to never know if he was dead or alive. He realized that was how Zero must have felt, not knowing what happened to his own mother. He wondered why Zero never mentioned his father. "Hold on," Zero said, stopping abruptly. "We're going the wrong way." "No, this is right," said Stanley. "You were heading toward Big Thumb when you saw the boat off to your right," said Zero. "That means we should have turned right when we left the boat."

"You sure?" Zero drew a diagram in the dirt. Stanley still wasn't sure. "We need to go this way," Zero said, first drawing a line on the map and then heading that way himself. Stanley followed. It didn't feel right to him, but Zero seemed sure. Sometime in the middle of the afternoon, a cloud drifted across the sky and blocked out the sun. It was a welcome relief. Once again, Stanley felt that destiny was on his side. Zero stopped and held out his arm to stop Stanley, too. "Listen," Zero whispered. Stanley didn't hear anything. They continued walking very quietly and Stanley began to make out the faint sounds of Camp Green Lake. They were still too far away to see the camp, but he could hear a blend of indistinct voices. As they got closer he occasionally could hear Mr. Sir's distinctive bark. They walked slowly and quietly, aware that sounds travel in both directions. They approached a cluster of holes. "Let's wait here, until they go in," said Zero. Stanley nodded. He checked to make sure there was nothing living in it, then climbed down into a hole. Zero climbed into the one next to

him. Despite having gone the wrong way for a while, it hadn't taken them nearly as long as Stanley had expected. Now, they just had to wait. The sun cut through the cloud, and Stanley felt its rays beating down on him. But soon more clouds filled the sky, shading Stanley and his hole. He waited until he was certain the last of the campers had finished for the day. Then he waited a little longer. As quietly as possible, he and Zero climbed up out of their holes and crept toward camp. Stanley held the sack in front of him, cradled in his arms, instead of over his shoulder, to keep the jars from clanking against each other. A wave of terror rushed over him when he saw the compound— the tents, the Wreck Room, the Warden's cabin under the two oak trees. The fear made him dizzy. He took a breath, summoned his courage, and continued. "That's the one," he whispered, pointing out the hole where he had found the gold tube. It was still about fifty yards away, but Stanley was pretty sure it was the right hole. There was no need to risk going any closer. They climbed down into adjacent holes, and waited for the camp to fall asleep.