

Please spend Monday and Tuesday reading chapter 44 – 47. Take note of any words you are unsure of and look this up.

## 44

Stanley tried to sleep, not knowing when he'd get the chance again. He heard the showers and, later, the sounds of dinner. He heard the creaking of the Wreck Room door. His fingers drummed against the side of the hole. He heard his own heart beat.

He took a drink from the canteen. He had given Zero the water jars. They each had a good supply of onions. He wasn't sure how long he remained in the hole, maybe five hours. He was surprised when he heard Zero whispering for him to wake up. He didn't think he'd fallen asleep. If he had, he thought it must have just been for the last five minutes. Although, when he opened his eyes, he was surprised how dark it was. There was only one light on at camp, in the office. The sky was cloudy, so there was very little starlight. Stanley could see a sliver of a moon, which appeared and disappeared among the clouds. He carefully led Zero to the hole, which was hard to find in the darkness. He stumbled over a small pile of dirt. "I think this is it," he whispered. "You think?" Zero asked. "It's it," said Stanley, sounding more certain than he really was. He climbed down. Zero handed him the shovel. Stanley stuck the shovel into the dirt at the bottom of the hole and stepped on the back of the blade. He felt it sink beneath his weight. He scooped out some dirt and tossed it off to the side. Then he brought the shovel back down. Zero watched for a while. "I'm going to try to refill the water jars," he said. Stanley took a deep breath and exhaled. "Be careful," he said, then continued digging. It was so dark, he couldn't even see the end of his shovel. For all he knew he could be digging up gold and diamonds instead of dirt. He brought each shovelful close to his face, to try to see if anything was there, before dumping it out of the hole. As he made the hole deeper, it became harder to lift the dirt up and out. It was five feet deep before he even started. He decided to use his efforts to make it wider instead. This made more sense, he told himself. If Kate Barlow had buried a treasure chest, she probably wouldn't have been able to dig much deeper, so why should he? Of course, Kate Barlow probably had a whole gang of thieves helping her. "You want some breakfast?" Stanley jumped at the sound of Zero's voice. He hadn't heard him approach. Zero handed down a box of cereal. Stanley carefully poured some cereal into his mouth. He didn't want to put his dirty hands inside the box. He nearly gagged on the ultra-sweet taste. They were sugar-frosted flakes, and after eating nothing but onions for more than a week, he had trouble adjusting to the flavor. He washed them down with a swig of water. Zero took over the digging. Stanley sifted his fingers through the fresh piles of dirt, in case he had missed anything. He wished he had a flashlight. A diamond no bigger than a pebble would be worth thousands of dollars. Yet there was no way he'd see it. They finished the water that Zero had gotten from the spigot by the showers. Stanley said he'd go fill the jars again, but Zero insisted that he do it instead.

"No offense, but you make too much noise when you walk. You're too big." Stanley returned to the hole. As the hole grew wider, parts of the surface kept caving in. They were running out of room. To make it much wider, they would first

have to move some of the surrounding dirt piles out of the way. He wondered how much time they had before the camp woke up. "How's it going?" Zero asked when he returned with the water. Stanley shrugged one shoulder. He brought the shovel down the side of the hole, shaving off a slice of the dirt wall. As he did so, he felt the shovel bounce off something hard. "What was that?" Zero asked. Stanley didn't know. He moved his shovel up and down the side of the hole. As the dirt chipped and flaked away, the hard object became more pronounced. It was sticking out of the side of the hole, about a foot and a half from the bottom. He felt it with his hands. "What is it?" Zero asked. He could just feel a corner of it. Most of it was still buried. It had the cool, smooth texture of metal. "I think I might have found the treasure chest," he said. His voice was filled more with astonishment than with excitement. "Really?" asked Zero. "I think so," Stanley said. The hole was wide enough for him to hold the shovel lengthwise and dig sideways into the wall. He knew he had to dig very carefully. He didn't want the side of the hole to collapse, along with the huge pile of dirt directly above it. He scraped at the dirt wall, until he exposed one entire side of the box-like object. He ran his fingers over it. It felt to be about eight inches tall, and almost two feet wide. He had no way of knowing how far into the earth it extended. He tried pulling it out, but it wouldn't budge. He was afraid that the only way to get to it was to start back up at the surface, and dig down. They didn't have time for that. "I'm going to try to dig a hole underneath it," he said. "Then maybe I can pull it down and slip it out." "Go for it," said Zero. Stanley jammed the shovel into the bottom edge of his hole, and carefully began to dig a tunnel underneath the metal object. He hoped it didn't cave in. Occasionally he'd stop, stoop down, and try to feel the far end of the box. But even when the tunnel was as long as his arm, he still couldn't feel the other side. Once again he tried pulling it out, but it was firmly in the ground. If he pulled too hard, he feared, he'd cause a cave-in. He knew that when he was ready to pull it out, he would have to do it quickly, before the ground above it collapsed. As his tunnel grew deeper and wider—and more precarious—Stanley was able to feel latches on one end of the box, and then a leather handle. It wasn't really a box. "I think it might be some kind of metal suitcase," he told Zero. "Can you pry it loose with the shovel?" Zero suggested. "I'm afraid the side of the hole will collapse." "You might as well give it a try," said Zero. Stanley took a sip of water. "Might as well," he said.

He forced the tip of the shovel between the dirt and the top of the metal case and tried to wedge it free. He wished he could see what he was doing. He worked the end of the shovel, back and forth, up and down, until he felt the suitcase fall free. Then he felt the dirt come piling down on top of it. But it wasn't a huge cave-in. As he knelt down in the hole, he could tell that only a small portion of the earth had collapsed. He dug with his hands until he found the leather handle, and then he pulled the suitcase up and out of the dirt. "I got it!" he exclaimed. It was heavy. He handed it up to Zero. "You did it," Zero said, taking it from

him. "We did it," said Stanley. He gathered his remaining strength, and tried to pull himself up out of the hole. Suddenly, a bright light was shining in his face. "Thank you," said the Warden. "You boys have been a big help."

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The beam of the flashlight was directed away from Stanley's eyes and onto Zero, who was sitting on his knees. The suitcase was on his lap. Mr. Pendanski was holding the flashlight. Mr. Sir stood next to him with his gun drawn and pointed in the same direction. Mr. Sir was barefoot and bare-chested, wearing only his pajama bottoms. The Warden moved toward Zero. She was also in her bed clothes, wearing an extra-long T-shirt. Unlike Mr. Sir, however, she had on her boots. Mr. Pendanski was the only one fully dressed. Perhaps he had been on guard duty. Off in the distance, Stanley could see two more flashlights bobbing toward them in the darkness. He felt helpless in the hole. "You boys arrived just in the nick—" the Warden started to say. She stopped talking and she stopped walking. Then she slowly backed away. A lizard had crawled up on top of the suitcase. Its big red eyes glowed in the beam of the flashlight. Its mouth was open, and Stanley could see its white tongue moving in and out between its black teeth. Zero sat as still as a statue. A second lizard crawled up over the side of the suitcase and stopped less than an inch away from Zero's little finger. Stanley was afraid to look, and afraid not to. He wondered if he should try to scramble out of the hole before the lizards turned on him, but he didn't want to cause any commotion. The second lizard crawled across Zero's fingers and halfway up his arm. It occurred to Stanley that the lizards were probably on the suitcase when he handed it to Zero.

"There's another one!" gasped Mr. Pendanski. He shined the flashlight on the box of Frosted Flakes, which lay on its side beside Stanley's hole. A lizard was crawling out of it. The light also illuminated Stanley's hole. He glanced downward and had to force himself to suppress a scream. He was standing in a lizard nest. He felt the scream explode inside him. He could see six lizards. There were three on the ground, two on his left leg, and one on his right sneaker. He tried to remain very still. Something was crawling up the back of his neck. Three other counselors approached the area. Stanley heard one say, "What's going—" and then whisper, "Oh my God." "What do we do?" asked Mr. Pendanski. "We wait," said the Warden. "It won't be very long." "At least we'll have a body to give that woman," said Mr. Pendanski. "She's going to ask a lot of questions," said Mr. Sir. "And this time she'll have the A.G. with her." "Let her ask her questions," said the Warden. "Just so long as I have the suitcase, I don't care what happens. Do you know how long . . ." Her voice trailed off, then started up again. "When I was little I'd watch my parents dig holes, every weekend and holiday. When I got bigger, I had to dig, too. Even on Christmas." Stanley felt tiny claws dig into the side of his face as the lizard pulled itself off his neck and up past his chin. "It won't

be long now," the Warden said. Stanley could hear his heart beat. Each beat told him he was still alive, at least for one more second.

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Five hundred seconds later, his heart was still beating. Mr. Pendanski screamed. The lizard which had been in the cereal box was springing toward him. Mr. Sir shot it in midair. Stanley felt the blast shatter the air around him. The lizards scurried frantically across his very still body. He did not flinch. A lizard ran across his closed mouth. He glanced at Zero and Zero's eyes met his. Somehow they were both still alive, at least for one more second, one more heartbeat. Mr. Sir lit a cigarette. "I thought you quit," said one of the other counselors. "Yeah, well, sometimes sunflower seeds just won't cut it." He took a long drag on his cigarette. "I'm going to have nightmares the rest of my life." "Maybe we should just shoot them," suggested Mr. Pendanski. "Who?" asked a counselor. "The lizards or the kids?"

Mr. Pendanski laughed grimly. "The kids are going to die anyway." He laughed again. "At least we got plenty of graves to choose from." "We've got time," said the Warden. "I've waited this long, I can wait another few . . ." Her voice trailed off. Stanley felt a lizard crawl in and out of his pocket. "We're going to keep our story simple," said the Warden. "That woman's going to ask a lot of questions. The A.G. will most likely initiate an investigation. So this is what happened: Stanley tried to run away in the night, fell in a hole, and the lizards got him. That's it. We're not even going to give them Zero's body. As far as anybody knows, Zero doesn't exist. Like Mom said, we got plenty of graves to choose from." "Why would he run away if he knew he was getting released today?" asked Mr. Pendanski. "Who knows? He's crazy. That was why we couldn't release him yesterday. He was delirious, and we had to keep watch over him so he wouldn't hurt himself or anybody else." "She's not going to like it," said Mr. Pendanski. "She's not going to like anything we tell her," said the Warden. She stared at Zero and at the suitcase. "Why aren't you dead yet?" she asked. Stanley only half listened to the talk of the counselors. He didn't know who "that woman" was or what "A.G." meant. He didn't even realize they were initials. It sounded like one word, "Age-ee." His mind was focused on the tiny claws that moved up and down his skin and through his hair. He tried to think about other things. He didn't want to die with the images of the Warden, Mr. Sir, and the lizards etched into his brain. Instead, he tried to see his mother's face. His brain took him back to a time when he was very little, all bundled up in a snowsuit. He and his mother were walking, hand in hand, mitten in mitten, when they both slipped on some ice and fell and rolled down a snow-covered hillside. They ended up at the bottom of the hill. He remembered he almost cried, but instead he laughed. His mother laughed, too. He could feel the same light-headed feeling he felt then, dizzy from rolling down the hill. He felt the sharp coldness of the snow against his ear. He could see flecks of snow on his mother's bright and cheery face. This was where he wanted to be when he died. "Hey,

Caveman, guess what?" said Mr. Sir. "You're innocent, after all. I thought you'd like to know that. Your lawyer came to get you yesterday. Too bad you weren't here." The words meant nothing to Stanley, who was still in the snow. He and his mother climbed back up the hill and rolled down again, this time on purpose. Later they had hot chocolate with lots of melted marshmallows.

"It's getting close to 4:30," said Mr. Pendanski. "They'll be waking up." The Warden told the counselors to return to the tents. She told them to give the campers breakfast and to make sure they didn't talk to anyone. As long as they did as

they were told, they wouldn't have to dig any more holes. If they talked, they would be severely punished. "How should we say they will be punished?" one of the counselors asked. "Let them use their imaginations," said the Warden. Stanley watched the counselors return to the tents, leaving only the Warden and Mr. Sir behind. He knew the Warden didn't care whether the campers dug any more holes or not. She'd found what she was looking for. He glanced at Zero. A lizard was perched on his shoulder. Zero remained perfectly still except for his right hand, which slowly formed into a fist. Then he raised his thumb, giving Stanley the thumbs-up sign. Stanley thought back to what Mr. Sir had said to him earlier, and the bits of conversation he'd overheard. He tried to make sense out of it. Mr. Sir had said something about a lawyer, but Stanley knew his parents couldn't afford a lawyer. His legs were sore from remaining rigid for so long. Standing still was more strenuous than walking. He slowly allowed himself to lean against the side of the hole. The lizards didn't seem to mind.

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The sun was up, and Stanley's heart was still beating. There were eight lizards in the hole with him. Each one had exactly eleven yellow spots. The Warden had dark circles under her eyes from Jack of sleep, and lines across her forehead and face which seemed exaggerated in the stark morning light. Her skin looked blotchy. "Satan," said Zero. Stanley looked at him, unsure if Zero had even spoken or if he'd just imagined it. "Why don't you go see if you can take the suitcase from Zero," the Warden suggested. "Yeah, right," said Mr. Sir. "The lizards obviously aren't hungry," said the Warden. "Then you go get the suitcase," said Mr. Sir. They waited. "Sa-tan lee," said Zero.

Sometime later Stanley saw a tarantula crawl across the dirt, not too far from his hole. He had never seen a tarantula before, but there was no doubt what it was. He was momentarily fascinated by it, as its big hairy body moved slowly and steadily along. "Look, a tarantula," said Mr. Sir, also fascinated. "I've never seen one," said the Warden. "Except in—" Stanley suddenly felt a sharp sting on the side of his neck. The lizard hadn't bitten him, however. It

was merely pushing off. It leapt off Stanley's neck and pounced on the tarantula. The last Stanley saw of it was one hairy leg sticking out of the lizard's mouth.

"Not hungry, huh?" said Mr. Sir. Stanley tried to return to the snow, but it was harder to get there when the sun was up.

As the sun rose, the lizards moved lower in the hole, keeping mainly in the shade. They were no longer on his head and shoulders but had moved down to his stomach, legs, and feet. He couldn't see any lizards on Zero, but believed there were two, between Zero's knees, shaded from the sun by the suitcase. "How are you doing?" Stanley asked quietly. He didn't whisper, but his voice was dry and raspy. "My legs are numb," said Zero. "I'm going to try to climb out of the hole," Stanley said. As he tried to pull himself up, using just his arms, he felt a claw dig into his ankle. He gently eased himself back down. "Is your last name your first name backward?" Zero asked. Stanley stared at him in amazement. Had he been working on that all night? He heard the sound of approaching cars. Mr. Sir and the Warden heard it as well. "You think it's them?" asked the Warden. "It ain't Girl Scouts selling cookies," said Mr. Sir.

He heard the cars come to a stop, and the doors open and shut. A little while later he saw Mr. Pendanski and two strangers, coming across the lake. One was a tall man in a business suit and cowboy hat. The other was a short woman holding a briefcase. The woman had to take three steps for every two taken by the man. "Stanley Yelnats?" she called, moving out ahead of the others. "I suggest you don't come any closer," said Mr. Sir. "You can't stop me," she snapped, then took a second glance at him, wearing pajama pants and nothing else. "We'll get you out of there, Stanley," she said. "Don't you worry." She appeared to be Hispanic, with straight black hair and dark eyes. She spoke with a little bit of a Mexican accent, trilling her r's. "What in tarnation?" the tall man exclaimed, as he came up behind her. She turned on him. "I'm telling you right now, if any harm comes to him, we will be filing charges not only against Ms. Walker and Camp Green Lake but the entire state of Texas as well. Child abuse. False imprisonment. Torture." The man was more than a head taller than she, and was able to look directly over her as he spoke to the Warden. "How long have they been in there?" "All night, as you can see by the way we're dressed. They snuck into my cabin while I was asleep, and stole my suitcase. I chased after them, and they ran out here and fell into the lizards' nest. I don't know what they were thinking." "That's not true!" Stanley said.

"Stanley, as your attorney, I advise you not to say anything," said the woman, "until you and I have had a chance to talk in private." Stanley wondered why the Warden lied about the suitcase. He wondered who it legally belonged to. That was one thing he wanted to ask his

lawyer, if she really was his lawyer. "It's a miracle they're still alive," said the tall man. "Yes, it is," the Warden agreed, with just a trace of disappointment in her voice. "And they better come out of this alive," Stanley's lawyer warned. "This wouldn't have happened if you'd released him to me yesterday." "It wouldn't have happened if he wasn't a thief," said the Warden. "I told him he would be set free today, and I guess he decided he'd try to take some of my valuables with him. He's been delirious for the last week." "Why didn't you release him when she came to you yesterday?" the tall man asked. "She didn't have proper authorization," said the Warden. "I had a court order!" "It was not authenticated," the Warden said. "Authenticated? It was signed by the judge who sentenced him." "I needed authentication from the Attorney General," said the Warden. "How do I know it's legitimate? The boys in my custody have proven themselves dangerous to society. Am I supposed to just turn them loose any time someone hands me a piece of paper?" "Yes," said the woman. "If it's a court order." "Stanley has been hospitalized for the last few days," the Warden explained. "He's been suffering from hallucinations and delirium. Ranting and raving. He was in no condition to leave. The fact that he was trying to steal from me on the day before his release proves . . ." Stanley tried to climb out of his hole, using mostly his arms so as not to disturb the lizards too much. As he pulled himself upward, the lizards moved downward, keeping out of the sun's direct rays. He swung his legs up and over, and the last of the lizards hopped off. "Thank God!" exclaimed the Warden. She started toward him, then stopped. A lizard crawled out of his pocket and down his leg. Stanley was overcome by a rush of dizziness and almost fell over. He steadied himself, then reached down, took hold of Zero's arm, and helped him slowly to his feet. Zero still held the suitcase. The lizards, which had been hiding under it, scurried quickly into the hole. Stanley and Zero staggered away. The Warden rushed to them. She hugged Zero. "Thank God, you're alive," she said, as she tried to take the suitcase from him. He jerked it free. "It belongs to Stanley," he said. "Don't cause any more trouble," the Warden warned. "You stole it from my cabin, and you've been caught red-handed. If I press charges, Stanley might have to return to prison. Now I'm willing, in view of all the circumstances, to—" "It's got his name on it," said Zero.

Stanley's lawyer pushed past the tall man to have a look. "See," Zero showed her. "Stanley Yelnats." Stanley looked, too. There, in big black letters, was STANLEY YELNATS. The tall man looked over the heads of the others at the name on the suitcase. "You say he stole it from your cabin?" The Warden stared at it in disbelief. "That's im . . . imposs . . . It's imposs . . ." She couldn't even say it.