

Holes

Chapter 41

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."

Chapter 42

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.