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All too soon Stanley was back out on the lake, sticking his shovel into the dirt. X-Ray was right: the third hole was the hardest. So was the fourth hole. And the fifth hole. And the sixth, and the ...

He dug his shovel into the dirt.

After a while he'd lost track of the day of the week, and how many holes he'd dug. It all seemed like one big hole, and it would take a year and a half to dig it. He guessed he'd lost at least five pounds. He figured that in a year and a half he'd be either in great physical condition, or else dead.

He dug his shovel into the dirt.

It couldn't always be this hot, he thought. Surely it got cooler in December. Maybe then they froze.

He dug his shovel into the dirt.

His skin had gotten tougher. It didn't hurt so much to hold the shovel.

As he drank from his canteen he looked up at the sky. A cloud had appeared earlier in the day. It was the first cloud he could remember seeing since coming to Camp Green Lake.

He and the other boys had been watching it all day, hoping it would move in front of the sun. Occasionally it got close, but it was just teasing them.

His hole was waist deep. He dug his shovel into the dirt. As he dumped it out, he thought he saw something glisten as it fell onto the dirt pile. Whatever it was, it was quickly buried.

Stanley stared at the pile a moment, unsure if he'd even seen it. Even if it

was something, what good would it do him? He'd promised to give anything he found to X-Ray. It didn't seem worth the effort to climb out of his hole to check it out.

He glanced up at the cloud, which was close enough to the sun that he had to squint to look at it.

He dug his shovel back into the earth, scooped out some dirt, and lifted it over his dirt pile. But instead of dumping it there, he tossed it off to the side. His curiosity had gotten the better of him.

He climbed up out of his hole and sifted his fingers through the pile. He felt something hard and metallic.

He pulled it out. It was a gold tube, about as long and as wide as the second finger on his right hand. The tube was open at one end and closed at the other.

He used a few drops of his precious water to clean it.

There seemed to be some kind of design on the flat, closed end. He poured a few more drops of water on it and rubbed it on the inside of his pants pocket.

He looked again at the design engraved into the flat bottom of the tube. He could see an outline of a heart, with the letters *KB* etched inside it.



He tried to figure out some way that he wouldn't have to give it to X-Ray. He could just keep it, but that wouldn't do him any good. He wanted a day off.

He looked at the large piles of dirt near where X-Ray was digging. X-Ray was probably almost finished for the day. Getting the rest of the day off would hardly do him much good. X-Ray would first have to show the tube to Mr. Sir or Mr. Pendanski, who would then have to

show it to the Warden. By then X-Ray might be done anyway.

Stanley wondered about trying to secretly take the tube directly to the Warden. He could explain the situation to the Warden, and the Warden might make up an excuse for giving him the day off, so X-Ray wouldn't suspect.

He looked across the lake toward the cabin under the two oak trees. The place scared him. He'd been at Camp Green Lake almost two weeks, and he still hadn't seen the Warden. That was just as well. If he could go his entire year and a half without seeing the Warden, that would be fine with him.

Besides, he didn't know if the Warden would find the tube "interesting." He looked at it again. It looked familiar. He thought he'd seen something like it, somewhere before, but couldn't quite place it.

“What you got there, Caveman?” asked Zigzag.

Stanley’s large hand closed around the tube. “Nothin’, just, uh ...” It was useless. “I think I might have found something.”

“Another fossil?”

“No, I’m not sure what it is.”

“Let me see,” said Zigzag.

Instead of showing it to Zigzag, Stanley brought it to X-Ray. Zigzag followed.

X-Ray looked at the tube, then rubbed his dirty glasses on his dirty shirt and looked at the tube again. One by one, the other boys dropped their shovels and came to look.

“It looks like an old shotgun shell,” said Squid.

“Yeah, that’s probably what it is,” said Stanley. He decided not to mention the engraved design. Maybe nobody would notice it. He doubted X-Ray could see it.

“No, it’s too long and thin to be a shotgun shell,” said Magnet.

“It’s prob’ly just a piece of junk,” said Stanley.

“Well, I’ll show it to Mom,” said X-Ray. “See what he thinks. Who knows? Maybe I’ll get the day off.”

“Your hole’s almost finished,” said Stanley.

“Yeah, so?”

Stanley raised and lowered his shoulder. “So, why don’t you wait until tomorrow to show it to Mom?” he suggested. “You can pretend you found it first thing in the morning. Then you can get the whole day off, instead of just an hour or so this afternoon.”

X-Ray smiled. “Good thinking, Cave-man.” He dropped the tube into his large pocket on the right leg of his dirty orange pants.

Stanley returned to his hole.

When the water truck came, Stanley started to take his place at the end of the line, but X-Ray told him to get behind Magnet, in front of Zero.

Stanley moved up one place in line.

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That night, as Stanley lay on his scratchy and smelly cot, he tried to figure out what he could have done differently, but there was nothing he could do. For once in his unlucky life, he was in the right place at the right time, and it still didn't help him.

“You got it?” he asked X-Ray the next morning at breakfast.

X-Ray looked at him with half-opened eyes behind his dirty glasses. “I don't know what you're talking about,” he grumbled.

“You know ...” said Stanley.

“No, I don’t know!” X-Ray snapped. “So just leave me alone, okay? I don’t want to talk to you.”

Stanley didn’t say another word.

Mr. Sir marched the boys out to the lake, chewing sunflower seeds along the way and spitting out the shells. He scraped the ground with his boot heel, to mark where each boy was supposed to dig.

Stanley stamped down on the back of the blade of the shovel, piercing the hard, dry earth. He couldn’t figure out why X-Ray snapped at him. If he wasn’t going to produce the tube, why did he make Stanley give it to him? Was he just going to keep it? The tube was gold in color, but Stanley didn’t think it was real gold.

The water truck came a little after sunrise. Stanley finished his last drop of water and stepped up out of his hole.

At this time of day, Stanley sometimes could see some distant hills or mountains on the other side of the lake. They were only visible for a short while and would soon disappear behind the haze of heat and dirt.

The truck stopped, and the dust cloud drifted past it. X-Ray took his place at the front of the line. Mr. Pendanski filled his canteen. "Thanks, Mom," X-Ray said. He didn't mention the tube.

Mr. Pendanski filled all the canteens, then climbed back into the cab of the pickup. He still had to bring water to Group E. Stanley could see them digging about two hundred yards away.

"Mr. Pendanski!" X-Ray shouted from his hole. "Wait! Mr. Pendanski! I think I might have found something!"

The boys all followed Mr. Pendanski as he walked over to X-Ray's hole. Stanley

could see the gold tube sticking out of some dirt on the end of X-Ray's shovel.

Mr. Pendanski examined it and took a long look at its flat bottom. "I think the Warden is going to like this."

"Does X-Ray get the day off?" asked Squid.

"Just keep digging until someone says otherwise," Mr. Pendanski said. Then he smiled. "But if I were you, Rex, I wouldn't dig too hard."

Stanley watched the cloud of dust move across the lake to the cabin beneath the trees.

The boys in Group E were just going to have to wait.

It didn't take long for the pickup to return. Mr. Pendanski stepped out of the cab. A tall woman with red hair stepped out of the passenger side. She looked even taller than she was, since Stanley was down in his hole. She wore

a black cowboy hat and black cowboy boots which were studded with turquoise stones. The sleeves on her shirt were rolled up, and her arms were covered with freckles, as was her face. She walked right up to X-Ray.

“This where you found it?”

“Yes, ma’am.”

“Your good work will be rewarded.” She turned to Mr. Pendanski. “Drive X-Ray back to camp. Let him take a double shower, and give him some clean clothes. But first I want you to fill everyone’s canteen.”

“I just filled them a little while ago,” said Mr. Pendanski.

The Warden stared hard at him. “Excuse me,” she said. Her voice was soft.

“I had just filled them when Rex—”

“Excuse me,” the Warden said again. “Did I ask you when you last filled them?”

“No, but it’s just—”

“Excuse me.”

Mr. Pendanski stopped talking. The Warden wiggled her finger for him to come to her. “It’s hot and it’s only going to get hotter,” she said. “Now, these fine boys have been working hard. Don’t you think it might be possible that they might have taken a drink since you last filled their canteens?”

Mr. Pendanski said nothing.

The Warden turned to Stanley. “Cave-man, will you come here, please?”

Stanley was surprised she knew his name. He had never seen her. Until she stepped out of the truck, he didn’t even know the Warden was a woman.

He nervously went toward her.

“Mr. Pendanski and I have been having a discussion. Have you taken a drink since Mr. Pendanski last filled your canteen?”

Stanley didn't want to cause any trouble for Mr. Pendanski. "I still got plenty left," he said.

"Excuse me."

He stopped. "Yeah, I drank some."

"Thank you. May I see your canteen please."

Stanley handed it to her. Her fingernails were painted dark red.

She gently shook the canteen, letting the water swish inside the plastic container. "Do you hear the empty spaces?" she asked.

"Yes," said Mr. Pendanski.

"Then fill it," she said. "And the next time I tell you to do something, I expect you to do it without questioning my authority. If it's too much trouble for you to fill a canteen, I'll give you a shovel. You can dig the hole, and the Caveman can fill your canteen." She turned back

to Stanley. “I don’t think that would be too much trouble for you, would it?”

“No,” said Stanley.

“So what will it be?” she asked Mr. Pendanski. “Do you want to fill the canteens or do you want to dig?”

“I’ll fill the canteens,” said Mr. Pendanski.

“Thank you.”

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Mr. Pendanski filled the canteens.

The Warden got a pitchfork out of the back of the pickup. She poked it through X-Ray's dirt pile, to see if anything else might have been buried in there as well.

"After you drop off X-Ray, I want you to bring back three wheelbarrows," she said.

X-Ray got in the pickup. As the truck pulled away, he leaned out the wide window and waved.

"Zero," said the Warden. "I want you to take over X-Ray's hole." She seemed to know that Zero was the fastest digger.

"Armpit and Squid, you will keep digging where you have been," she said.

“But you’re each going to have a helper. Zigzag, you help Armpit. Magnet will help Squid. And Caveman, you’ll work with Zero. We’re going to dig the dirt twice. Zero will dig it out of the hole, and Caveman will carefully shovel it into a wheelbarrow. Zigzag will do the same for Armpit, and the same with Magnet and Squid. We don’t want to miss anything. If either of you find something, you’ll both get the rest of the day off, and a double shower.

“When the wheelbarrows are full, you are to dump them away from this area. We don’t want any dirt piles to get in the way.”

The Warden remained at the site for the remainder of the day, along with Mr. Pendanski and Mr. Sir, who showed up after a while. Occasionally Mr. Sir would leave to take water to the other groups of campers, but otherwise he and the

water truck stayed parked there. The Warden saw to it that nobody in Group D was ever thirsty.

Stanley did as he was told. He carefully looked through all the dirt dug up by Zero, as he shoveled it into a wheelbarrow, though he knew he wouldn't find anything.

It was easier than digging his own hole. When the wheelbarrow was full, he took it a good distance away before dumping it.

The Warden couldn't keep still. She kept walking around, looking over the boys' shoulders, and sticking her pitchfork through the dirt piles. "You're doing fine, just fine," she told Stanley.

After a while, she told the boys to switch places, so that Stanley, Zigzag, and Magnet dug in the holes, and Zero, Armpit, and Squid shoveled the excavated dirt into the wheelbarrows.

After lunch, Zero took over the digging again, and Stanley returned to the wheelbarrow. "There's no hurry," the Warden said several times. "The main thing is not to miss anything."

The boys dug until each hole was well over six feet deep and wide. Still, it was easier for two boys to dig a six-foot hole than it was for one boy to dig a five-foot hole.

"All right, that's enough for today," the Warden said. "I've waited this long, I can wait another day."

Mr. Sir drove her back to her cabin.

"I wonder how she knew all our names," Stanley said as he walked back to the compound.

"She watches us all the time," said Zigzag. "She's got hidden microphones and cameras all over the place. In the tents, the Wreck Room, the shower."

“The shower?” asked Stanley. He wondered if Zigzag was just being paranoid.

“The cameras are tiny,” said Armpit. “No bigger than the toenail on your little toe.”

Stanley had his doubts about that. He didn't think they could make cameras that small. Microphones, maybe.

He realized that was why X-Ray didn't want to talk to him about the gold tube at breakfast. X-Ray was afraid the Warden might have been listening.

One thing was certain: They weren't just digging to “build character.” They were definitely looking for something.

And whatever they were looking for, they were looking in the wrong place.

Stanley gazed out across the lake, toward the spot where he had been digging yesterday when he found the gold tube. He dug the hole into his memory.

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As Stanley entered the Wreck Room, he could hear X-Ray's voice from all the way across the room.

"See what I'm saying," X-Ray said. "Am I right, or am I right?"

The other bodies in the room were little more than bags of flesh and bones, dumped across broken chairs and couches. X-Ray was full of life, laughing and waving his arms around as he talked. "Yo, Caveman, my man!" he called out.

Stanley made his way across the room.

"Hey, slide on over, Squid," said X-Ray. "Make room for the Caveman."

Stanley crashed on the couch.

He had looked for a hidden camera in the shower. He hadn't seen anything, and he hoped the Warden hadn't either.

"What's the matter?" asked X-Ray. "You guys tired or something?" He laughed.

"Hey, keep it down, will you," groaned Zigzag. "I'm trying to watch TV."

Stanley glanced uncertainly at Zigzag, who was staring very intently at the busted television screen.

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The Warden greeted the boys at breakfast the next morning and went with them to the holes. Four dug in the holes, and three tended to the wheelbarrows. "Glad you're here, X-Ray," she said to him. "We need your sharp eyes."

Stanley spent more time pushing the wheelbarrow than digging, because he was such a slow digger. He carted away the excess dirt and dumped it into pre-

viously dug holes. He was careful not to dump any of it in the hole where the gold tube was actually found.

He could still see the tube in his mind. It seemed so familiar, but he just couldn't place it. He thought that it might have been the lid to a fancy gold pen. *K B* could have been the initials of a famous author. The only famous authors he could think of were Charles Dickens, William Shakespeare, and Mark Twain. Besides, it didn't really look like the top of a pen.

By lunchtime the Warden was beginning to lose her patience. She made them eat quickly, so they could get back to work. "If you can't get them to work any faster," she told Mr. Sir, "then you're going to have to climb down there and dig with them."

After that, everyone worked faster, especially when Mr. Sir was watch-

ing them. Stanley practically ran when he pushed his wheelbarrow. Mr. Sir reminded them that they weren't Girl Scouts.

They didn't quit digging until after every other group had finished.

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Later, as Stanley sat sprawled across an understuffed chair, he tried to think of a way to tell the Warden where the tube was really found, without getting himself or X-Ray into trouble. It didn't seem possible. He even thought about sneaking out at night and digging in that hole by himself. But the last thing he wanted to do after digging all day was to dig at night, too. Besides, the shovels were locked up at night, presumably so they couldn't be used as weapons.

Mr. Pendanski entered the Wreck Room. "Stanley," he called as he made his way to him.

“His name’s Caveman,” said X-Ray.

“Stanley,” said Mr. Pendanski.

“My name’s Caveman,” said Stanley.

“Well, I have a letter here for someone named Stanley Yelnats,” said Mr. Pendanski. He turned over an envelope in his hands. “It doesn’t say Caveman anywhere.”

“Uh, thanks,” Stanley said, taking it.

It was from his mother.

“Who’s it from?” Squid asked. “Your *mother?*”

Stanley put it in the big pocket of his pants.

“Aren’t you going to read it to us?” asked Armpit.

“Give him some space,” said X-Ray. “If Caveman doesn’t want to read it to us, he doesn’t have to. It’s probably from his girlfriend.”

Stanley smiled.

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He read it later, after the other boys had gone to dinner.

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Dear Stanley,

It was wonderful to hear from you. Your letter made me feel like one of the other moms who can afford to send their kids to summer camp. I know it's not the same, but I am very proud of you for trying to make the best of a bad situation. Who knows? Maybe something good will come of this.

Your father thinks he is real close to a breakthrough on his sneaker project. I hope so. The landlord is threatening to evict us because of the odor.

I feel sorry for the little old lady who lived in a shoe. It must have smelled awful!

Love from both of us,

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“What’s so funny?” Zero asked.

It startled him. He thought Zero had gone to dinner with the others.

“Nothing. Just something my mom wrote.”

“What’d she say?” Zero asked.

“Nothing.”

“Oh, sorry,” said Zero.

“Well, see my dad is trying to invent a way to recycle old sneakers. So the apartment kind of smells bad, because he’s always cooking these old sneakers. So anyway, in the letter my mom said she felt sorry for that little old lady who lived in a shoe, you know, because it must have smelled bad in there.”

Zero stared blankly at him.

“You know, the nursery rhyme?”

Zero said nothing.

“You’ve heard the nursery rhyme about the little old lady who lived in a shoe?”

“No.”

Stanley was amazed.

“How does it go?” asked Zero.

“Didn’t you ever watch *Sesame Street*?”

Stanley asked.

Zero stared blankly.

Stanley headed on to dinner. He would have felt pretty silly reciting nursery rhymes at Camp Green Lake.