

Week Beginning 11.05.20

This week we are reading chapters 25, 26 and 27.

Before reading the text:

How many characters can you name? Write as many as you can down. What do you know about the characters so far? Who do you like? Who are the 'goodies' and who are the 'baddies'? Does anyone not fit just in one category? Why or why not?

Whilst reading: This first chapter deals with a traumatic period of American history which had laws called Jim Crow Laws and saw the segregation of white people and black people - while you're reading, can you think of everything you know about this period of time? Who were some of the leading activists who tried to change this? What did segregation mean for people in those times? What impact has that had on society in America today?

After reading:

Looking Questions:

- 1) What were some of the ailments/ illnesses Sam's onion treatments could cure?
- 2) What was unusual about Sam's onion field?

Clue Questions

- 3) What kind of person was Sam? Make at least two points using evidence from the text to support your answer.
- 4) Why did the town react so awfully to Katherine kissing Sam?

Thinking Question

- 5) What themes have there been in the story so far? Remember that themes are often abstract nouns like 'love', 'trust' etc. Of the themes it includes, can you put them in order of what is most important to you? Then give an explanation of why you have chosen the most important one and the least important one.

"Thank you, Mr. Sir," he said.

## 25

There was a doctor in the town of Green Lake, one hundred and ten years ago. His name was Dr. Hawthorn. And whenever people got sick, they would go see Doc Hawthorn. But they would also see Sam, the onion man.

"Onions! Sweet, fresh onions!" Sam would call, as he and his donkey, Mary Lou, walked up and down the dirt roads of Green Lake. Mary Lou pulled a cart full of onions.

Sam's onion field was somewhere on the other side of the lake. Once or twice a week he would row across the lake and pick a new batch to fill the cart. Sam had big strong arms, but it

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H O L E S

would still take all day for him to row across the lake and another day for him to return. Most of the time he would leave Mary Lou in a shed, which the Walkers let him use at no charge, but sometimes he would take Mary Lou on his boat with him.

Sam claimed that Mary Lou was almost fifty years old, which was, and still is, extraordinarily old for a donkey.

"She eats nothing but raw onions," Sam would say, holding up a white onion between his dark fingers. "It's nature's magic vegetable. If a person ate nothing but raw onions, he could live to be two hundred years old."

Sam was not much older than twenty, so nobody was quite sure that Mary Lou was really as old as he said she was. How would he know?

Still, nobody ever argued with Sam. And

whenever they were sick, they would go not only to Doc Hawthorn but also to Sam.

Sam always gave the same advice: "Eat plenty of onions."

He said that onions were good for the digestion, the liver, the stomach, the lungs, the heart, and the brain. "If you don't believe me, just look at old Mary Lou here. She's never been sick a day in her life."

He also had many different ointments, lotions, syrups, and pastes all made out of onion juice and different parts of the onion plant. This one cured asthma. That one was for warts and pimples. Another was a remedy for arthritis.

He even had a special ointment which he claimed would cure baldness. "Just rub it on your husband's head every night when he's sleeping, Mrs. Collingwood, and soon his hair

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will be as thick and as long as Mary Lou's tail."

Doc Hawthorn did not resent Sam. The folks of Green Lake were afraid to take chances. They would get regular medicine from Doc Hawthorn and onion concoctions from Sam. After they got over their illness, no one could be sure, not even Doc Hawthorn, which of the two treatments had done the trick.

Doc Hawthorn was almost completely bald, and in the morning his head often smelled like onions.

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Whenever Katherine Barlow bought onions, she always bought an extra one or two and would let Mary Lou eat them out of her hand.

"Is something wrong?" Sam asked her one day as she was feeding Mary Lou. "You seem distracted."

"Oh, just the weather," said Miss Katherine. "It looks like rain clouds moving in."

"Me and Mary Lou, we like the rain," said Sam.

"Oh, I like it fine," said Miss Katherine, as she rubbed the donkey's rough hair on top of its head. "It's just that the roof leaks in the schoolhouse."

"I can fix that," said Sam.

"What are you going to do?" Katherine joked. "Fill the holes with onion paste?"

Sam laughed. "I'm good with my hands," he told her. "I built my own boat. If it leaked, I'd be in big trouble."

Katherine couldn't help but notice his strong, firm hands.

They made a deal. He agreed to fix the leaky roof in exchange for six jars of spiced peaches.

It took Sam a week to fix the roof, because he could only work in the afternoons, after school let out and before night classes began. Sam wasn't allowed to attend classes because he was a Negro, but they let him fix the building.

Miss Katherine usually stayed in the schoolhouse, grading papers and such, while Sam worked on the roof. She enjoyed what little conversation they were able to have, shouting up and down to each other. She was surprised by his interest in poetry. When he took a break, she would sometimes read a poem to him. On more than one occasion, she would start to read a poem by Poe or Longfellow, only to hear him finish it for her, from memory.

She was sad when the roof was finished.

"Is something wrong?" he asked.

"No, you did a wonderful job," she said. "It's

just that ... the windows won't open. The children and I would enjoy a breeze now and then."

"I can fix that," said Sam.

She gave him two more jars of peaches and Sam fixed the windows.

It was easier to talk to him when he was working on the windows. He told her about his secret onion field on the other side of the lake, "where the onions grow all year round, and the water runs uphill."

When the windows were fixed, she complained that her desk wobbled.

"I can fix that," said Sam.

The next time she saw him, she mentioned that "the door doesn't hang straight," and she got to spend another afternoon with him while he fixed the door.

By the end of the first semester, Onion Sam had turned the old run-down schoolhouse into a well-crafted, freshly painted jewel of a building that the whole town was proud of. People passing by would stop and admire it. "That's our schoolhouse. It shows how much we value education here in Green Lake."

The only person who wasn't happy with it was Miss Katherine. She'd run out of things needing to be fixed.

She sat at her desk one afternoon, listening to the pitter-patter of the rain on the roof. No water leaked into the classroom, except for the few drops that came from her eyes.

"Onions! Hot sweet onions!" Sam called, out on the street.

She ran to him. She wanted to throw her arms around him but couldn't bring herself to do it.

Instead she hugged Mary Lou's neck.

"Is something wrong?" he asked her.

"Oh, Sam," she said. "My heart is breaking."

"I can fix that," said Sam.

She turned to him.

He took hold of both of her hands, and kissed her.

Because of the rain, there was nobody else out on the street. Even if there was, Katherine and Sam wouldn't have noticed. They were lost in their own world.

At that moment, however, Hattie Parker stepped out of the general store. They didn't see her, but she saw them. She pointed her quivering finger in their direction and whispered, "God will punish you!"

## 26

There were no telephones, but word spread quickly through the small town. By the end of the day, everyone in Green Lake had heard that the schoolteacher had kissed the onion picker.

Not one child showed up for school the next morning.

Miss Katherine sat alone in the classroom and wondered if she had lost track of the day of the week. Perhaps it was Saturday. It wouldn't have surprised her. Her brain and heart had been spinning ever since Sam kissed her.

She heard a noise outside the door, then suddenly a mob of men and women came

storming into the school building. They were led by Trout Walker.

"There she is!" Trout shouted. "The Devil Woman!"

The mob was turning over desks and ripping down bulletin boards.

"She's been poisoning your children's brains with books," Trout declared.

They began piling all the books in the center of the room.

"Think about what you are doing!" cried Miss Katherine.

Someone made a grab for her, tearing her dress, but she managed to get out of the building. She ran to the sheriff's office.

The sheriff had his feet up on his desk and was drinking from a bottle of whiskey. "Mornin', Miss Katherine," he said.

"They're destroying the schoolhouse," she said, gasping for breath. "They'll burn it to the ground if someone doesn't stop them!"

"Just calm your pretty self down a second," the sheriff said in a slow drawl. "And tell me what you're talking about." He got up from his desk and walked over to her.

"Trout Walker has—"

"Now don't go saying nothing bad about Charles Walker," said the sheriff.

"We don't have much time!" urged Katherine. "You've got to stop them."

"You're sure pretty," said the sheriff.

Miss Katherine stared at him in horror.

"Kiss me," said the sheriff.

She slapped him across the face.

He laughed. "You kissed the onion picker. Why won't you kiss me?"

She tried to slap him again, but he caught her by the hand.

She tried to wriggle free. "You're drunk!" she yelled.

"I always get drunk before a hanging."

"A hanging? Who—"

"It's against the law for a Negro to kiss a white woman."

"Well, then you'll have to hang me, too," said Katherine. "Because I kissed him back."

"It ain't against the law for you to kiss him," the sheriff explained. "Just for him to kiss you."

"We're all equal under the eyes of God," she declared.

The sheriff laughed. "Then if Sam and I are equal, why won't you kiss me?" He laughed again. "I'll make you a deal. One sweet kiss, and I won't hang your boyfriend. I'll just run him

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out of town."

Miss Katherine jerked her hand free. As she hurried to the door, she heard the sheriff say, "The law will punish Sam. And God will punish you."

She stepped back into the street and saw smoke rising from the schoolhouse. She ran down to the lakefront, where Sam was hitching Mary Lou to the onion cart.

"Thank God, I found you," she sighed, hugging him. "We've got to get out of here. Now!"

"What—"

"Someone must have seen us kissing yesterday," she said. "They set fire to the schoolhouse. The sheriff said he's going to hang you!"

Sam hesitated for a moment, as if he couldn't

quite believe it. He didn't want to believe it. "C'mon, Mary Lou."

"We have to leave Mary Lou behind," said Katherine.

Sam stared at her a moment. There were tears in his eyes. "Okay."

Sam's boat was in the water, tied to a tree by a long rope. He untied it, and they waded through the water and climbed aboard. His powerful arms rowed them away from the shore.

But his powerful arms were no match for Trout Walker's motorized boat. They were little more than halfway across the lake when Miss Katherine heard the loud roar of the engine. Then she saw the ugly black smoke ...

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These are the facts:

The Walker boat smashed into Sam's boat.

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Sam was shot and killed in the water. Katherine Barlow was rescued against her wishes. When they returned to the shore, she saw Mary Lou's body lying on the ground. The donkey had been shot in the head.

West.

That all happened one hundred and ten years ago. Since then, not one drop of rain has fallen on Green Lake.

You make the decision: Whom did God punish?

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Three days after Sam's death, Miss Katherine shot the sheriff while he was sitting in his chair drinking a cup of coffee. Then she carefully applied a fresh coat of red lipstick and gave him the kiss he had asked for.

For the next twenty years Kissin' Kate Barlow was one of the most feared outlaws in all the

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Stanley dug his shovel into the ground. His hole was about three and a half feet deep in the center. He grunted as he pried up some dirt, then flung it off to the side. The sun was almost directly overhead.

He glanced at his canteen lying beside his hole. He knew it was half full, but he didn't take a drink just yet. He had to drink sparingly, because he didn't know who would be driving the water truck the next time it came.

Three days had passed since the Warden had scratched Mr. Sir. Every time Mr. Sir delivered water, he poured Stanley's straight onto the

ground.

Fortunately, Mr. Pendanski delivered the water more often than Mr. Sir. Mr. Pendanski was obviously aware of what Mr. Sir was doing, because he always gave Stanley a little extra. He'd fill Stanley's canteen, then let Stanley take a long drink, then top it off for him.

It helped, too, that Zero was digging some of Stanley's hole for him. Although, as Stanley had expected, the other boys didn't like to see Stanley sitting around while they were working. They'd say things like "Who died and made you king?" or "It must be nice to have your own personal slave."

When he tried pointing out that he was the one who took the blame for the sunflower seeds, the other boys said it was his fault because he was the one who spilled them. "I risked my life

for those seeds," Magnet had said, "and all I got was one lousy handful."

Stanley had also tried to explain that he needed to save his energy so he could teach Zero how to read, but the other boys just mocked him.

"Same old story, ain't it, Armpit?" X-Ray had said. "The white boy sits around while the black boy does all the work. Ain't that right, Caveman?"

"No, that's not right," Stanley replied.

"No, it ain't," X-Ray agreed. "It ain't right at all."

Stanley dug out another shovelful of dirt. He knew X-Ray wouldn't have been talking like that if *he* was the one teaching Zero to read. Then X-Ray would be talking about how important it was that he got his rest, *right*? So

he could be a better teacher, *right*?

And that was true. He did need to save his strength so he could be a better teacher, although Zero was a quick learner. Sometimes, in fact, Stanley hoped the Warden was watching them, with her secret cameras and microphones, so she'd know that Zero wasn't as stupid as everyone thought.

From across the lake he could see the approaching dust cloud. He took a drink from his canteen, then waited to see who was driving the truck.

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The swelling on Mr. Sir's face had gone down, but it was still a little puffy. There had been three scratch marks down his cheek. Two of the marks had faded, but the middle scratch must have been the deepest, because it still remained.



It was a jagged purple line running from below his eye to below his mouth, like a tattoo of a scar.

Stanley waited in line, then handed him his canteen.

Mr. Sir held it up to his ear and shook it. He smiled at the swishing sound.

Stanley hoped he wouldn't dump it out.

To his surprise, Mr. Sir held the canteen under the stream of water and filled it.

"Wait here," he said.

Still holding Stanley's canteen, Mr. Sir walked past him, then went around the side of the truck and into the cab, where he couldn't be seen.

"What's he doing in there?" asked Zero.

"I wish I knew," said Stanley.

A short while later, Mr. Sir came out of the truck and handed Stanley his canteen. It was

still full.

"Thank you, Mr. Sir."

Mr. Sir smiled at him. "What are you waiting for?" he asked. "Drink up." He popped some sunflower seeds into his mouth, chewed, and spit out the shells.

Stanley was afraid to drink it. He hated to think what kind of vile substance Mr. Sir might have put in it.

He brought the canteen back to his hole. For a long time, he left it beside his hole as he continued to dig. Then, when he was so thirsty that he could hardly stand it anymore, he unscrewed the cap, turned the canteen over, and poured it all out onto the dirt. He was afraid that if he'd waited another second, he might have taken a drink.

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After Stanley taught Zero the final six letters of the alphabet, he taught him to write his name.

"Capital Z – e – r – o."

Zero wrote the letters as Stanley said them. "Zero," he said, looking at his piece of paper. His smile was too big for his face.

Stanley watched him write it over and over again.

Zero Zero Zero Zero Zero Zero Zero ...

In a way, it made him sad. He couldn't help but think that a hundred times zero was still nothing.

"You know, that's not my real name," Zero said as they headed to the Wreck Room for dinner.

"Well, yeah," Stanley said, "I guess I knew that." He had never really been sure.

"Everyone's always called me Zero, even

before I came here."

"Oh. Okay."

"My real name is Hector."

"Hector," Stanley repeated.

"Hector Zeroni."