

"So you have no claim of authority over him?" asked Ms. Morengo.

"I didn't say that. He's in the computer. We just can't access his records. It's like they've fallen through a hole in cyberspace."

"A hole in cyberspace," Ms. Morengo repeated. "How interesting. When is his release date?"

"I don't know."

"How long has he been here?"

"Like I said, we can't—"

"So what are you planning to do with him? Keep him confined indefinitely, without justification, while you go crawling through black holes in cyberspace?"

The Attorney General stared at her. "He was obviously incarcerated for a reason."

"Oh? And what reason was that?"

The Attorney General said nothing.

Stanley's lawyer took hold of Zero's hand. "C'mon, Hector, you're coming with us."

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There never used to be yellow-spotted lizards in the town of Green Lake. They didn't come to the area until after the lake dried up. But the townsfolk had heard about the "red-eyed monsters" living in the desert hills.

One afternoon, Sam, the onion man, and his donkey, Mary Lou, were returning to his boat, which was anchored just a little off shore. It was late in November and the peach trees had lost most of their leaves.

"Sam!" someone called.

He turned around to see three men running after him, waving their hats. He waited. "Afternoon, Walter. Bo, Jesse," he greeted them, as they walked up, catching their breath.

"Glad we caught you," said Bo. "We're going rattlesnake hunting in the morning."

"We want to get some of your lizard juice," said Walter.

"I ain't a-scared of no rattlesnake," said Jesse. "But I don't want to come across one of those red-eyed monsters. I seen

one once, and that was enough. I knew about the red eyes, of course. I hadn't heard about the big black teeth."

"It's the white tongues that get me," said Bo.

Sam gave each man two bottles of pure onion juice. He told them to drink one bottle before going to bed that night, then a half bottle in the morning, and then a half bottle around lunchtime.

"You sure this stuff works?" asked Walter.

"I tell you what," said Sam. "If it doesn't, you can come back next week and I'll give you your money back."

Walter looked around unsure, as Bo and Jesse laughed. Then Sam laughed, too. Even Mary Lou let out a rare hee-haw.

"Just remember," Sam told the men before they left. "It's very important you drink a bottle tonight. You got to get it into your bloodstream. The lizards don't like onion blood."

Stanley and Zero sat in the backseat of Ms. Morengo's BMW. The suitcase lay between them. It was locked, and they decided they'd let Stanley's father try to open it in his workshop.

"You don't know what's in it, do you?" she asked.

"No," said Stanley.

"I didn't think so."

The air-conditioning was on, but they drove with the windows open as well, because, "No offense, but you boys really smell bad."

Ms. Morengo explained that she was a patent attorney. "I'm helping your father with the new product he's invented. He happened to mention your situation, so I did a little investigating. Clyde Livingston's sneakers were stolen some-

time before 3:15. I found a young man, Derrick Dunne, who said that at 3:20 you were in the bathroom fishing your notebook out of the toilet. Two girls remembered seeing you come out of the boys' restroom carrying a wet notebook."

Stanley felt his ears redden. Even after everything he'd been through, the memory still caused him to feel shame.

"So you couldn't have stolen them," said Ms. Morengo.

"He didn't. I did," said Zero.

"You did what?" asked Ms. Morengo.

"I stole the sneakers."

The lawyer actually turned around while driving and looked at him. "I didn't hear that," she said. "And I advise you to make sure I don't hear it again."

"What did my father invent?" Stanley asked. "Did he find a way to recycle sneakers?"

"No, he's still working on that," explained Ms. Morengo. "But he invented a product that eliminates foot odor. Here, I've got a sample in my briefcase. I wish I had more. You two could bathe in it."

She opened her briefcase with one hand and passed a small bottle back to Stanley. It had a fresh and somewhat spicy smell. He handed it to Zero.

"What's it called?" Stanley asked.

"We haven't come up with a name yet," said Ms. Morengo.

"It smells familiar," said Zero.

"Peaches, right?" asked Ms. Morengo. "That's what everyone says."

A short while later both boys fell asleep. Behind them the sky had turned dark, and for the first time in over a hundred years, a drop of rain fell into the empty lake.