

# 21. The Marble

You are being provided with a book chapter by chapter. I will request you to read the book for me after each chapter. After reading the chapter, 1. shorten the chapter to no less than 300 words and no more than 400 words. 2. Do not change the name, address, or any important nouns in the chapter. 3. Do not translate the original language. 4. Keep the same style as the original chapter, keep it consistent throughout the chapter. Your reply must comply with all four requirements, or it's invalid. I will provide the chapter now.

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21

## The Marble

ard C-1 had three shifts of attendants, and they seemed to change constantly, so it was a full five weeks before Dodo first saw Son of Man. He never saw him till he saw him, as they say, for the first days at Pennhurst were a blitz of shock from sorrow and suffering. His mind was drunk on hazy medicine for long stretches, which made focusing impossible. The overwhelming smell, the fear, the silhouettes of bodies that hovered over his crib to stare, munch at his food tray, pluck at his ears, occasionally wheel him out for this or that, change his bedding while grunting and cursing, all blended together in a kind of fuzz. Some of the activity came from curious patients. Others were attendants. In his drugged state, Dodo could not tell who was who.

Moreover, the transformation from living in his own room in the back of Miss Chona's grocery store with his own bed, lamp, comic books, and cardboard airplane that dangled on a string from the light bulb overhead to a ward of two hundred men in an institution that housed three thousand souls was such a shock that Dodo might have died in those first days were he not in traction. His immobility actually saved him, for he was an active, athletic child by nature, with arms and legs that lived in constant motion. But now he was in pain, drugged, and immobile, all of which kept him still and allowed his body to heal. While it did, he learned how to talk to Monkey Pants.

Their communication was helped by his near deafness. He could hear very little, thus his attention was not disrupted by the spine-curdling noises of the ward, which made sleep for normal-hearing newcomers just about impossible. The moanings, groanings, coos, burps, sighs, growls, yells, chirps, yelps, chortles, cacklings, farts, chatterings, and howlings of his fellow residents went over his head. They plundered his food tray when it was left by his bed until he learned to gobble it down immediately, and after that, most ignored him, wandering about the ward like ghosts, men in "johnnies," or hospital gowns, a few in their underwear, and one or two who tore their clothes off and marched about naked. Those first few days were the hardest, for civility from the overworked attendants was not wasted on the so-called lunatics. His linen changers were gruff, coarse men, shoving his tractioned and bandaged limbs aside impatiently, ignoring his howls of pain, mouthing what appeared to be oaths as they did so. Only after a few days did he realize that some of those changing his bedding and tossing him about as he sobbed pathetically were not attendants at all but rather fellow patients. His inability to execute even the most basic

functions, such as turning on his side and scratching his back while lying in traction in a steel crib in a room that stank horribly left him in a kind of horrified trance a good part of the time. But his body was only twelve. It wanted to live. It wanted to heal. And Monkey Pants turned out to be a curious soul, in possession of something that drew Dodo's mind out of its fog and depression, yanking him out of the dread that soaked him every second.

A marble. A blue one.

Monkey Pants produced it from beneath his pillow shortly after Dodo arrived, holding it in his left hand, over which he had some control and strength, as opposed to his right, which seemed nearly useless.

"Where did you get that?" Dodo asked.

Monkey Pants replied with a curling of the lip.

"Where?"

And so it began.

At first, it seemed impossible, for neither boy knew sign language. But Dodo could speak and Monkey Pants could hear, and just the act of trying to communicate with someone, anyone, brought Dodo a bit of light. Before Pennhurst, other than occasional forays into Miss Bernice's yard next to the store, he'd lived mostly in a world of adults, ignored by most of them save Uncle Nate, Aunt Addie, and Miss Chona. With Monkey Pants, he found himself the center of attention with someone close to his age. And while their communication was crude at first, their unwritten understanding that a thousand thoughts lay in the head of the other forged their common ground. In the beginning, Monkey Pants did most of the talking, for he was curious with many questions, whereas Dodo was depressed and withdrawn. But eventually curiosity took over, and after a few days of Monkey Pants's squirming and grunting efforts to communicate, Dodo took over, interrupting him with many questions. Monkey Pants's responses, gestures, and facial expressions at first seemed meaningless, and several times the two were halted in the middle of their discourse by Dodo suddenly bursting into tears, at which point Monkey Pants would patiently wait till the bawling stopped and begin again with a series of gestures and wiggles. The gestures were earnest and insistent and forced Dodo to answer, even though he was often unsure of what his new friend meant. But they had hours to while away in those first days, and by the end of the first week, the two established a few crude modes of talking.

Raised eyebrows from Monkey Pants meant "yes," furrowed eyebrows meant "no." "Maybe" was a slight raising of the left forearm. A balled left fist and forearm across the chest meant "watch out," "bad," or an expletive. A more pronounced lip with the same meant "really watch out," "pain," or "trouble." Crossed forearms, with the left hand pinning the right hand down on the chest meant "danger." The showing of teeth meant "good" or "tastes good" or "okay." Monkey Pants could not control his spasms, which kept his head and every limb of his body in some sort of shake. His right hand was hopelessly curled into a useless fist, and his legs would occasionally spasm uncontrollably. But he could, with effort, control his left hand, left wrist, and left forearm all the way up to his shoulder, which gave him the use of all five fingers—a valuable tool, for it was that hand that poked out of his crib and gestured through the bars to Dodo and shook his crib to awaken him when Monkey Pants felt the need.

It was from that left hand that the miracle of communication occurred.

It began with the marble. After producing the marble and allowing Dodo

to hold it several times and demanding it back by gesture, Monkey Pants sought to communicate something about it. He was unsuccessful each time. Dodo, for his part, countered with questions of his own that brought on further frustrated communicative gestures from Monkey Pants until the two gave up. Were it any other subject, Dodo would have let the matter drop. But he loved marbles. They reminded him of Miss Chona—who'd provided him with so many marbles he had to store them in a jar—and his aunt and uncle, whom he missed so dearly. He presumed all three were angry at him for what had happened at the store, for not one of them had come to fetch him or even see him. He deluded himself that perhaps the three were busy gathering all kinds of marbles to bring him as a special gift so he might heal faster and get out. But that delusion faded more and more each day, and most nights he fell asleep with tears in his eyes.

Only the marble kept him hopeful, for despite his guilt, a tiny part of him believed that the kind woman who doled out so many of those precious marbles to him would forgive him. So each day Dodo asked Monkey Pants to produce the marble from beneath his pillow, and inquired as to where he got it. After several hundred gestures and facial expressions from his friend, Dodo surmised that Monkey Pants had gotten the marble as a kind of gift from someone. Who that person was, he was unable to determine. That frustrated him, and one afternoon while Dodo was poking for answers, Monkey Pants became frustrated and turned his head away in bored irritation.

Dodo, though he could not hear his own voice, knew how to raise it, for the vibrations in his head told him so, so he spoke loudly. "Stop being stupid!" he said.

Monkey Pants turned back to him, facing him through the bars of the crib, his spastic head shaking back and forth, his expression saying, "What do you want me to do? I can't make you understand."

"We're not finished," Dodo said.

So they went at it again, driven only by the aching loneliness of their existence, two boys with intelligent minds trapped in bodies that would not cooperate, caged in cribs like toddlers, living in an insane asylum, the insanity of it seeming to live on itself and charge them, for despite the horribleness of their situation, they were cheered by the tiniest of things, the crinkle of an eyelid, an errant cough, an occasional satisfied grunt or burst of laughter as one or the other bumbled about in confused impatience at the other, trying to figure out how to communicate the origins of Monkey Pants's precious marble. It was outrageous.

Fortunately, time was something they had a great deal of, and they made good use of it. They had nothing to do all day during those first weeks, for the deadening routine was the same. The patients were awakened at seven. Linen, diapers, and hospital gowns were removed and changed—or sometimes not. Those who could be washed were washed. Others who could be washed sometimes weren't. Those who were mobile were paraded to the toilet by an attendant. After the toilet, the parade of so-called lunatics was led to the cafeteria by two day-shift attendants, then directly to the day room down the hall, where they stayed till just before lunch. They were then marched back to the ward briefly, then to the cafeteria for lunch, then to the day room again until dinner. After dinner, there was a rare activity that usually was nothing but going to the day room again, then all were put to bed by 8 p.m. The two boys in cribs were fed where they lay, along with a third patient, a young man who lay totally unmoving and moaning in a

crib at the far end of the ward near the day attendants' desk. Usually, the two attendants on duty switched off, one manning the desk in the morning while the other led the patients to the cafeteria and the day room, then they switched in the afternoon, leaving the desk manned with one attendant who normally slept or read while the other did the heavy lifting of leading the ward around. The desk was always staffed by one attendant, and whoever was there seemed satisfied that the boys spent the day amusing each other. They were not a bother. They were one less thing to do.

But the boys were solving a puzzle. And after the third week, the breakthrough came when Monkey Pants pointed with his finger to Dodo's cast and made several gestures. Dodo deduced, incorrectly, that Monkey Pants wanted to ask him what happened and why he was wearing the cast, which brought back the whole business of what happened at Miss Chona's store, and he burst into tears.

"I want to go home," he cried.

Monkey Pants stared at him, his eyes immobile, seemingly unmoved. Seeing this made Dodo angry. "Forget your dumb marble, Monkey Pants." He closed his eyes, shutting him out.

Monkey Pants reached over and shook Dodo's crib.

Dodo opened his eyes. "What!"

Monkey Pants tapped the bars of his crib five times.

"So what. You can count to five."

Monkey Pants shook his head, insistent. He tapped again on the crib bars. Five times. Then held up the marble. Then held up his thumb.

This piqued Dodo's interest. "Do it six times if you're so smart."

Monkey Pants frowned a "no," and tapped five times again.

"What you want, Monkey Pants?"

Monkey Pants tapped again and again, pointed to the marble, to his mouth, then reached across into Dodo's crib and pinged Dodo with his first finger and thumb.

Dodo, irritated, snapped, "Hey!"

Monkey Pants went wild with enthusiasm, his head bouncing on his pillow.

"Hey what?"

Several shakes of "no."

"What?"

Monkey Pants's head shook a "no." He moved his mouth, and Dodo, seeing his mouth move, took a wild guess, knowing vowel sounds looked alike, thinking he'd said, "Hey," so he retorted. "Hey yourself."

More enthusiastic wild gestures by Monkey Pants.

"Hey?" Dodo said.

Yes. Monkey Pants nodded.

"Hey what?"

No. Monkey Pants shook his head.

"Just hey?"

Yes. A nod.

It took all day, with Monkey Pants pantomiming, grunting, grinding, and pointing, for Dodo to figure out that Monkey Pants was not nodding "yes" to "hey" but rather to "A," the first letter of the alphabet, which he finally made clear by pointing to one of the attendants seated at his station eating an apple.

"Your thumb means 'A'?"

Monkey Pants pointed to the man and raised his eyes, which meant

“yes!” and shook his head wildly. It was a breakthrough. The first letter of the alphabet!

It took two more days for Dodo to figure out that the letter B was the first thumb also. So were the letters C, D, and E.

From there, the rest of Monkey Pants’s one-handed formula rolled out quickly.

His thumb represented letters A through E.

The next finger represented F to J.

The middle finger, K to O.

The fourth finger, P to T.

The pinkie covered the last six letters, U to Z.

Twenty-six letters of the alphabet. Five fingers. Five per finger. Six for the pinkie. Dodo was exhausted from figuring it out, for it had taken them several days of two steps forward and one step back, using the word “apple” as a start. But within days, he became sure of the code. They checked it and rechecked it using various words, “man,” “food,” “cake,” “ice cream,” and, of course, “marble,” a word of the greatest interest to Dodo. When he deciphered that word correctly three times, and it was clear to them that they were both solid on their new language, Dodo declared, “Monkey Pants, you’re so smart!”

Monkey Pants waved his hand impatiently, for he was starving to talk.

He began waving his palm and fingers one through five again, motioning for Dodo to hurry up and decode the letters he’d spelled. He began by asking Dodo his name in their sign language, but Dodo ignored that, for while he, too, was excited, there was the question that had fired their friendship from the very first. So he ignored Monkey Pants’s extended fingers and asked impatiently, “Where did you get the marble?”

Monkey Pants rolled his eyes and patiently spelled out as Dodo spoke the letters. He held up his middle finger.

“K? . . . L? . . . M?”

Raising of the eyes. Yes. Then he held up his fifth finger.

“U? V? W? X? Y? Z? . . . Y?”

Raising of the eyes. Yes.

“Y.”

Then closing of the eyes.

“New word?”

Raising of the eyes. Yes.

Monkey Pants began spelling the rest. Dodo’s eyes carefully scanned the fingers and his lips moved as Monkey Pants spelled M.Y. M.O.T.H.E.R. It was taxing, but the riddle was solved. Dodo sighed happily, then asked, “Where is she?”

But Monkey Pants did not answer. Instead, his eyes shifted to something past Dodo, then widened in fright. He balled his fist and crossed both his forearms over his chest, the sign for “danger.”

Dodo looked behind him as a shadow crossed the window and blocked the barren light for a moment, then moved past the edge of his crib to the foot. Dodo glanced at Monkey Pants, but he’d turned away and his knees drove up toward his face and his body took a curled stance, which Dodo had learned was Monkey Pants’s position of fear.

Dodo looked down at the foot of his crib to see a slim, dark figure standing there, staring.

He was a tall black man, handsome, with deep brown skin and a long mark on his forehead from an old wound of some type. His skin was

smooth, his hands long and bony. Thick arms and shoulders filled his white attendant's uniform and his broad chest roared out from beneath it. He was a man of strength, clearly, with a face that bore a gentle sardonic grin, as if to say "I'm here now and everything will be fine." His deep-set eyes were calm, but there was something behind them, a muted wildness and thirst that awakened a terrible fright in Dodo, for he was a child who lived by sight and vibration.

"You the new boy?" the man asked.

Dodo stayed mute, feigning misunderstanding.

"You lip-read? That's what they say. They say you read lips."

Dodo stayed still.

The man reached out a huge hand and stroked Dodo's forehead. It was the first kind gesture he'd felt in weeks. And Dodo would have normally wept with joy at the first kind hand that didn't flip him over, turn him this way and that, and grunt with displeasure after cleaning his rancid sheets, for while one leg had been moved out of traction and was healing, the second still remained in a cast. The white attendants appeared afraid to touch him, and that hurt, for he was a child of touch and feel. He was starving for a loving touch. But there was something about the gentle stroke of the man's hand that ran across his face, down his cheek, across his chest, down his navel, and toward his pelvis before slowly lifting away that terrified him.

"What's your name?"

Dodo shrugged.

The man smiled.

"Don't matter," he said, running his large finger across Dodo's head.

"We'll get to it." Then with a quick glance over his shoulder at the nurses' station, which was empty, he suddenly grabbed Dodo's good leg at the thigh, lifted him off the mattress with one hand, snatched the hospital johnnie up high with the other, and peered at his soft, smooth bottom. "You pretty as a peacock, boy." Then he gently lowered him.

"Pretty as a peacock."

Then he left.

No sooner had the man turned away than Monkey Pants was rattling his crib with his strong hand, his left, his fingers gesturing wildly, his eyes wide with fright.

"Who is he?" Dodo asked.