24. Duck Boy

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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Duck Boy
weet potato pie was the bait. Everybody on the Hill knew Paper cooked it like no tomorrow. So assembling Nate, Addie, Rusty, and Fatty at the table in her kitchen two days after visiting Miggy on Hemlock Row was easy. But getting Miggy, who worked at Pennhurst seven miles away, was more difficult.
She was the last to arrive. She came by bus, and when she walked in, the oracle of Hemlock Row that Paper had seen dressed to the nines the previous week was gone. In her place was a neatly clad health care attendant dressed all in white—white dress, shoes, and stockings. She moved with the air of a professional, with quiet confidence, until her gaze hit Nate seated at the table sipping coffee.
She froze in the doorway.
"You didn't tell me who was coming, Paper," she said.
"Miggy, we're family here."
Miggy hesitated a moment longer, then took a seat next to Fatty at the far end of the table. "This pie better be worth it," she said.
"It is," Paper said, quickly pulling the warming pie out of the stove and chatting to smooth matters out. "Miggy here works at Pennhurst," she told the others. "She tells futures, too."
"Can you tell mine?" Fatty piped up.
"No, but I could blind you," Miggy said.
It was as if a barrel of sardines had suddenly fallen from the ceiling, for Fatty's smile vanished. Paper thought she saw a faint, thin smile work its way across Nate's lips as Fatty sat back, cowed. "I'd rather you didn't do that, miss," he said.
Miggy chuckled. "Not with a spell, honey. I drink with my pinkie out. Every time I sip, I blind the person setting to my right. You serving coffee with that pie, Paper?"
Paper chuckled as she turned to grab cups from the cupboard while Miggy took a deep breath, held her hands out to admire her nails, cleared her throat, and finally said coolly, "I'll try not to be so big a fool as to imagine that you remembers me, Mr. Nate."
"You was but a knee-high child back in them years, but yes, I remembers you. And your daddy, too. I heard he passed," Nate said.
"He always liked you. You done us a service over at the Row is how he felt about matters," Miggy said.
"Ain't no profit in going into that now," Nate said. "That's all done and over with. Paid in full."

Fatty felt a slight icicle slice through his gut and found himself spinning back to Graterford, remembering Dirt, his old cellmate, telling him, “I wouldn’t cross old Nate for all the money in the world.” What had Nate done over in Hemlock Row? What was all paid for?

He would’ve drifted further in that thought had not Paper laid slices of pie in front of everyone and said, “Miggy, we ask you to come on account of—”

Miggy cut her off. “The who-shot-John part of your mess ain’t my business,” she said. “I don’t want to know. ’Cause when the white man lays down his lying laws, he dines on the lie part of that fat meat while you and I get turned this way and that munching on the truth part. Howsoever that meal ends, when the table is cleared, one or more of us will likely leave hungry. I just come to talk about my life.

“I’m speaking about what happens to me from the time the sun goes up to when it goes back to rest. It all goes together, my life. And if there’s anything you can learn from my life that might help you in whatever that cause may be, well, that’s all the better, for I live in a land that don’t want me. My job is to try to live right, which to me means coming over here after work to get a piece of sweet potato pie, which I favors, with an old friend and some of her people.”

She dug into her pie, cutting a bite. “Now, while I’m eating this pie, should I happen to talk about my job can’t nobody tell me later that I planned up some backdoor, unjust nonsense to hurt this or that part of the good state of Pennsylvania. And if I was to tell someone what they might do or do not do in a place that happens to toss me a few coins every week for my services, there ain’t no law against that to my knowing. That’s the truth, which is how I try to live. It’s how all God-fearing people should try to live.”

“All right then,” Paper said. “What’s your job?”

“I’m a cleaner,” Miggy said. “I cleans things. I cleans my house. I cleans outside my house and inside. I cleans the yard and the kitchen and all manner of things. On the job, I cleans beds, and bed pans, and people. Mostly people. Mostly men. I don’t like working with the women on my job. Some of ’em are nastier than the men. They throw things at you—their waste and all. The men ain’t no bother, really.”

She carefully lifted the bite of her pie, raised it to her face, and peered at it.

Fatty couldn’t stand it. “Are you gonna write a sermon on that thing ’fore you eat it?” he asked.

Paper shot Fatty an icy look. “Don’t mind him, Miggy. Sometimes real thoughts work their way up to his mouth.”

“It’s all right.” She turned to Fatty. “It’s my pie, honey. You against me eating it like I want?”

“Not at all. But I’ll be in the cacklehouse if I have to set here waiting for you to tell us a way to do uh . . . what Paper wants done.”

“Is it just Paper that wants it to be done?”

Fatty fell silent. He felt Nate’s eyes boring into him. He cleared his throat. “I’m here ’cause Paper asked me to come,” he said.

“And I’m here to eat pie,” Miggy said. “And I will do it in the manner I please.” She placed the forkful of sweet potato pie in her mouth, chewed slowly, swallowed, then continued.

“Now there’s man’s understanding and there’s women’s understanding. There is white folks’ understanding and Negroes’ understanding. And then

there is just plain wisdom. Every child that breathes their first on this earth will drive their fist through the air and strike nothing. But all children are born with will. I was not a particularly willful child nor a particularly smart one. I was raised on the Row. I'm a Lowgod. We is raised to believe that for any child to be righteous, it must have a love for those things which brings knowledge. Before I come to Pennhurst, I laundered, which is how I come to know Paper here. After I got tired of laundering, I did days work for a white family over in Pennsbury. The father was a judge. His wife was lazy and weak-willed. They were both trained to ease and unjust. An unjust parent will raise an unjust child who is a snare to righteousness. The truth is, I raised their child more than they did, but I did not raise him long. For if I was to raise a child, I would teach that child to love what I love and hate what I hate. That is why your colored from Hemlock Row are not good day workers. We are too close to the earth. We bang the drum of the old country too much. Even our church is different. We don't sing with a piano. We chant the old songs and dance in circles, and we don't cross our feet when we dance, for that is worldly dancing. Why we do these things, I do not know. It's one of the many things passed down to us from the old people. But it makes us odd and strange, even to some of our own people, like y'all on this Hill.

"Your basic Lowgod from the Row is all from the same bloodline. Same father and mother from many years past when we was first brung to this land. How that worked out, why the Lowgods come to the Row from the Low Country, and who married one another and so forth, I do not know, for the old people don't favor talking about yesterday. But there ain't but two families on the Row. The Lowgods and the Loves. Mostly Lowgods. The Loves"—and here she cast a quick glance at Nate—"there ain't many Loves left."

And once again Fatty felt his memory spinning back to Graterford. "Nate Love," Dirt had said. Nate was a Love, from the Love family. He couldn't resist. "What happened to the Loves?" he asked. He was afraid to even look at Nate.

Miggy shook her head. "That's a story that I do not know the whole of. The Lowgods and Loves are not that different. They are close in nature. They travel straight on. They cannot drive a side road or a curve. If a Lowgod is with you, they with you. If they not, they not. They can't do otherwise. They move to truth, for they fear God more than you then. It's been banged into 'em. So if you on the other side of that, shame on you then. It won't be good then, in your dealings with 'em."

Here she cut off another bite of pie, raised it, eyed it, cut a slow glance at Fatty to see if he had any further questions, and once she was satisfied he had none, she continued.

"I come to Pennhurst like this: A lady on the Row named Laverne got hired to sweep out the baggage and cheer up the tide out there. She gived word on the Row they was looking for people to do what she did, so I went over and got hired. There was already a bunch of Lowgods working there. The white folks out there ain't allergic to colored, not for what they want us to do. Did I say I cleaned? I cleaned from that day to this. But what I clean. That is the question."

She glanced around the room and continued.

"Pennhurst is a city. Thirty-four buildings spread over two hundred acres. It's got its own power plant. Its own farm. Its own police. Got its own railroad, houses, stockyards, clothing factory, farm animals, tractors, trucks,

wagons, wards, everything. It's bigger than all of Hemlock Row and Chicken Hill together. It looks right clean and pretty on the outside. But on the inside, well . . . that's where the devil does his work."
She put down her fork and took a sip of coffee.
"I can't say that in these past years I've walked out of Pennhurst on any given day not wishing that the Good Lord would press His finger upon the place and crumble it to dust and take the poor souls in there home to His heart, for many of 'em's the finest people you'd ever want to meet. Their illness is not in their minds, or in the color of their skin, or in the despair in their heart, or even in the money that they may or may not have. Their illness is honesty, for they live in a world of lies, ruled by those who surrendered all the good things that God gived them for money, living on stolen land, taken from people whose spirits dance all around us like ghosts. I hear the red man hollering and chanting in my dreams sometimes. This is my punishment for being an oracle. For those locked up at Pennhurst, it's too much. The truth has driven them mad. And for that, they are punished.
"What I seen is not fit for any person to see. It's not the filth, or the buck-naked folks running about banging their heads on the wall, or even the smell, which stays in your nose for the rest of your life. A yard dog living on a chain is better off than any poor soul living in Pennhurst. You ain't seen suffering till you seen forty grown people setting around a day room all day long for years, clawing to get a glimpse out the window. Or seen a full-grown educated man peeing on a radiator while pretending to be a radio announcer because he's afraid to ask an attendant to go to the bathroom, or a teenager girl wheedling a grown man attendant for a cigarette by showing him her private parts. I seen women locked in solitary in straitjackets for days at a time out there, locked in so tight that when you pulls the jacket off, the marks left behind last the rest of their lives, which sometimes ain't that long.
"On the wards, the attendants run everything. They can restrain a patient long as they want, for hours or days or even weeks, so long as they write in the logbook exactly how long they done it. They restrained this poor woman for six hundred fifty-one hours and twenty minutes. I happens to know the woman, and if I was in charge, I would put those that done that to her in the straitjacket and give her the key. And were I not a God-fearing woman, I'd give that woman a little bit of my own body dirt to toss at them that done that to her, along with whatever she could come up with, for some of them attendants are evil somethings. They got to watch their points, some of them. Because a lot of them patients, they do not forget."
With that, Miggy paused and looked about the room. "Have I given you something to chew on?"
Paper nodded. "You have. But . . . we . . ."
"You need to hear more about my life?"
"Yes. Tell us more about your . . . can you tell us about the children in your life?"
"I got none."
"Other children you might have seen? Or know."
"It ain't the children, honey. It's the doctors. They're mostly foreigners. You can't make heads or tails of what they say. They come round the wards from time to time, recommend this or that medicine, scratch a few things down on a pad, and go away. A month later they're gone and a different doctor comes back and he don't know what the first has done. Nobody gets punished for nothing. There's mules on Hemlock Row that live better than

folks out there at Pennhurst."
And here she sighed, then said, "But you wanna know about the children."
"Yes," Paper said.
Miggy nodded. "All right then. I'll tell you about a child I knowed. But first, gimme another slice of that pie."
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AFTER RECEIVING HER second slice of pie, Miggy slid it toward herself, but instead of eating it, she sat back, folded her fingers together, and continued.
"There was a little boy once, nice little fella, a white boy, 'bout eleven or twelve. He quacked like a duck. Couldn't speak a lick. I don't know what his problem was on the inside, but he was a smart child other than he quacked like a duck. He didn't do nothing wrong on God's green earth that I could see other than he quivered and shook a lot when he walked and didn't know how to speak proper. His parents seed there wasn't nothing they could do for him, I reckon, and dropped him off there and didn't come back. Never came to visit him once in all the time he was there.
"Well, he didn't like that, and after a while, he made a fuss about staying there, and before you know it, they dropped him down from the higher wards to what they call the low wards. V-1, 2, and 3. And finally C-1. Them V wards is bad. But C-1 is the worst. He went from bad to worse down there. Went from the worst to the very worst when he got to C-1.
"He was a smart little thing, quick—a funny child. Liked to smile. Well, I took to him and looked in on him when I was down there on C-1 working and cleaning. At first, he was all right. But after a few weeks, I seen something gone wrong with him. Somebody had been at him. I don't work the night shift, and they only sent me down to C-1 once a week in the mornings, but I'd always look in on him and I could see it when I come to him. This is in the morning now, for I don't work at night—but I seen he was afraid of this one attendant. Every time that man come close to him, he'd shrivel up. He took to running behind me.
"Now I knew this fella, this attendant. Knowed him well. And he's rough work. So I tried to stay clear of it. But the boy was doing so bad, I couldn't stand it no more after a while. So I told the feller, 'You watch yourself. I'm watching you. Remember, I tell futures. And your future ain't bright.'
"What I done that for? This feller made it hell for me down there. He was a Lowgod, see. One of us. I knowed him from the time he was a boy. He's a grown man now. A big, strong young fella. Calls hisself Son of Man. I won't bother to call out his real name, for it's a blight to his parents and a shame to them. He's a good-looking man, a pretty feller. He could have his way with all the girls he wanted. But his mind is twisted.
"He made it hell for me down there. He got the white folks drummed up against me, telling them lies this way and that, for he's a smooth talker. And one day when I got on him about going after that youngster, he buggied up to me, sneaked up on me one day when I was in a broom closet, pushed in close, got tight on me, saying, 'If you open your mouth wrong again, I'll jam a knife down your throat. I'll send the wind whistling through your neck.'
"Well, I let off him then. There was an evil to him when he touched me. It was strong in him, and it made me afraid. Weren't no use complaining or telling the white folks. He got the run of things down there. The white bosses love him on account of his size and his tongue, for he is a smooth-talking devil. But when they ain't looking, he runs them patients and the

other attendants like a gang. He works the evening and overnight shifts, sometimes both, for he's a king down there. He got the run of that ward. Every patient there will do whatever he says, white and colored. They will turn on each other for him. They'll steal for him. They're terrified of him—and they oughta be, for he'll send his knife rambling or, even worse, turn 'em around so they hurt their own selves, hang themselves and so forth. He's a walking witch. Got nerve enough to call hisself Son of Man. Son of the devil is what he is."

At that point, she turned to Nate. "I'm wondering if it's God's purpose that you might be bothered with all this. Maybe that's the reason behind it, to make you come back. Is you coming home?"

Nate looked at Addie.

"I am home," he said.

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AFTER SHE PAUSED and took a drink of water, Miggy's pie lay untouched, but she continued.

"The patients at Pennhurst love me when they see me, for I understands 'em. They're like everybody else. They want to live. They want to be happy. They want friends. And when it come to following nature's ways, loving and all, they're sick but they're not that sick. This evil, rotten man gived it to the duck boy in the worst way. They had to put that child in the hospital behind what that twisted rascal done. He ripped that boy up inside, and when the boy was done healing, he turned a few screws so them white folks got the excuse to send the child right back to the same ward, so he could tear up that little sprout some more.

"Well, I couldn't stand it. But me talking to doctors and nurses about things, I'd have better luck talking to that wall over there than to get them to listen to me. So I prayed on it, and don't you know, a few weeks later that little duck boy went missing."

And here she looked at Nate and began cutting into the second piece of pie. She cut it carefully into pieces, then said, "If you was a mouse and there was a cat about and you wanted to get out this way, would you take this route here?"

And she pointed to a tiny alley in one piece of pie she had cut.

"Or this route here?" And she pointed to an opening near a second piece on the other side of her plate.

"I think you'd want to go that way," she said carefully, pointing with her fork to her original piece. "But being that way is blocked, you might want to go here."

She hovered her fork over the pieces and shifted them around a bit, drawing a map. "Now, to get out this way," she said, pointing, "you'd have to pass this, this, and this. So that's no good. So where would the mouse go? Knowing that the cat is nearby and he ain't got but so much time 'fore that cat hunts him down, and knowing there ain't but one way out, which is here"—she pointed at the top of her plate—"that's the way out. What's he gonna do? He got to move."

She considered this. "Well, that mouse could . . . eat his way through this big piece of pie, and that piece, and that piece, but by the time he got here, here, and here, all the other mice, they'd be on him, following behind him, making noise and all, because it's crowded in pie country, with lots of other mice that wants out, plus there's cats and all. Your mouse can't fly. He can't go over the top . . . but . . ."

And here she laid her fork in a direct line from her large piece of pie to

the crust's edge over several of the pie pieces cut to represent buildings, where she indicated an exit.
"If the mouse could tunnel from the large piece of pie here, he could make a straight line to the get-out door. Then he'd be home free in no time."
She placed the fork down, glanced at Nate, folded her hands, and rested her elbows on the table. With her hands folded before her face, she spoke slowly.
"There's tunnels all about Pennhurst. Miles of 'em. They used 'em in the old days to carry food and supplies and even coal from the old powerhouse during wintertime. Most of 'em ain't been used in years. Big empty tunnels. Lots of 'em. Going every whichaway."
She slid the plate with the pie pieces away from her and continued.
"They moved heaven and earth trying to find that little duck boy when he went missing. Looked all over. Couldn't find him. Somebody said they heard quacking from what might be a tunnel beneath Ward C-1 where the boy had maybe escaped from. But nobody knows for sure if there really is a tunnel below C-1, for it's one of the older buildings, far from the main buildings. They say the boy mighta got out that way, for the rumor is that if there's a tunnel below C-1, it leads out to the railroad yard that was used in the old days to bring coal to the old furnace house. The old furnace house is right next to C-1. They don't use it no more. They built a new furnace building on the west side of the campus. So he might'a gone that way, if there was a tunnel there. But who knows? Nobody at that hospital knows. Whoever built them tunnels is long gone. You'd have to be a brave soul, you'd need God on your shoulder, to even think of walking through one of them old tunnels anyway."
She sighed and sipped her coffee.
"They never did find that boy. They looked for him awhile, then said, 'Well, he's probably dead, wandered off, or murdered maybe, who knows.' Or . . ."
She paused and a sly smile crossed her face.
"I gived this a lot of thought," she said. "I got to thinking. I said, 'Now how could a little ol' boy who don't even know how to speak for hisself, who quacks like a duck, how could he figure out how to get out them tunnels?' Somebody said, 'He probably got a map.' But nobody's ever mapped them tunnels. They made them tunnels a hundred years ago when Pennhurst was new. Then they added new buildings piecemeal, one at a time, one tunnel here, another there, closing 'em off, opening 'em up here and there, the tunnels going every whichaway. Most of 'em are closed off, I'm told, except the ones near the administration building. So how could a lil ol' boy know them tunnels? Impossible.
"But if he did know them tunnels"—she pointed at the pie plate—"he'd know that the tunnel under this building here"—she pointed to the biggest piece of the pie—"was the north section of Pennhurst where the administration building and hospital are. And the tunnel under this one"—she pointed again—"would let you out to a manhole on the west where there's nothing but woods and nobody can escape there because it's been tried many times. And this"—she pointed to the far corner where her fork was—"is Ward C-1, where he was, which if there was a tunnel, it would take him to this"—she pointed to the edge of her plate, connoting an exit—"the railroad yard.
"He could have made it out that way. To the railroad track. And then walked two miles on the track to the road and got picked up by a buggy, or

a car, or a horse and cart. Or maybe even hopped on one of the train cars that hauls goods in and outta the hospital once a week."
She shrugged. "But how could he? He was but a child. And you'd have to really know those tunnels."
"Who would know those tunnels?" Fatty asked.
Miggy shrugged.
"Then why you wasting air talking on 'em?" Fatty said.
"Because of eggs."
"What?"
"Eggs."
"What's eggs got to do with the tunnels?"
She looked at Fatty for a long moment and smiled serenely. "That's the difference between the coloreds on the Hill and us on the Row. We believe in God like ya'll do. We pins our hope on Jesus just like you. But on the Row, we is connected by a past that we has been trained to believe in whether we likes it or not. When we go to church, we prays not just to God, but to the ones who come before us, from a land far distant, who speak to us in ways that we don't understand but still believe in. For us, everything in life—all God's creatures and things—is connected. Here on the Hill, y'all just scream and shout."
She turned to Fatty. "Eggs got everything to do with tunnels. Everything got everything to do with everything."
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IT WAS SEVERAL more minutes before Miggy continued, for she had decided that some more warm coffee was needed, which Paper quickly provided. After a few sips in silence, with her head thrown back and her eyes closed, she took a deep breath and continued.
"Pennhurst makes its own food," Miggy said. "They got a farm. The patients work it. They grow vegetables of every type out there. Corn, okra, potatoes. But the one thing they can't grow is eggs. Eggs means chickens. For three thousand people, that's too many chickens to look after for a state hospital. You can't have people that's looking after the chickens when you got to watch the people, too. For eggs they got to have them brung in from outside.
"There's an egg farm about two miles north of Pennhurst. Every day that farm sends a wagon full of eggs to the hospital. Four thousand eggs. That's a lot of eggs. The man who moves 'em uses a mule and cart. He drop off eggs and hot coffee to every ward in the hospital. It's a great distance between the wards," she said, pointing at the pieces of pie on her plate with her fork. "The main buildings here"—she pointed—"where security and all is, that's a good two miles of trailing roads from where the lower wards are. The newer buildings, the administration and the hospital, they got full kitchens and cold iceboxes and all the things they need to warm food and cook big. But them lower wards ain't got hot kitchens in the morning. Only lunch and dinner. Well, in the morning, the staff there want the same thing the folks in bigger new buildings get: hot eggs and hot coffee. They don't want cold eggs and cold coffee or the cold porridge they serve the patients. They want to have their own good, hot eggs and coffee for breakfast."
She raised her fork, then stabbed it down into the crusted piece of pie at the far edge of her plate. "Ward C-1" she said. "That's Son of Man's little kingdom." Then she continued.
"The feller who runs them eggs from the farm to Pennhurst is a Negro. A Lowgod. He gets hot eggs and coffee to every building on the lower ward

side of Pennhurst by 6 a.m. every morning. That's fourteen buildings. Imagine that. Must be four miles of running up and down hills, taking stairs, upstairs to this kitchen, down to that one. How does he get them hot scrambled eggs and hot coffee to fourteen buildings when they're so far apart, him having all them eggs and coffee in place by 6 a.m.? A car couldn't move that fast up and down them roads, going around corners, taking stairs to the second floor in this ward and out the next. Not even on the sunniest day with the clearest road could a car do it. And in winter when there's snow? All them buildings? All that distance? Been doing it for thirty-six years, too. How's he do it so fast? You'd need God to move that fast. Or tunnels. That's my thinking."

Nate spoke. "Do you know him?"

Miggy shrugged and said coolly, "I told you I'd talk about my life, not go to the penitentiary for you. But I reckon someone here might have met him a day or two past."

And here she glanced at Paper and let that sink in, then continued.

"Now I heard—it's been said—that my little quacking friend got abused by Son of Man so bad that somebody felt sorry for him and put him onto the man who runs them eggs in his egg cart, who took him through one of them tunnels right under Ward C-1 where Son of Man lurks, and got him to that railroad yard. And from there, some of them railroad fellas, them union Jews who likes to raise hell, put him on one of them freight trains to New York with a paper sack full of food and twenty dollars, and they say that boy's been in New York City quacking like a duck ever since."

"What about that fella you spoke of?" Nate asked. "Is he still there?"

"Son of Man is yet there, I am sorry to say. And while I keeps off his ward these days, I heard a new boy has come to his ward three weeks ago. A Negro child. Deaf and maybe dumb. Don't know if he can talk or not. But I heard the boy was hurt some kind of way. They had him in traction. He's better now, I'm told. Healed up. His casts is off, from what I hear. Which cannot be good for him."

A cone of silence worked its way into the room. Finally, Nate spoke. "Is you done with that pie?" he asked Miggy.

"I am," she said.

Nate slid the plate over and stared at it. It was a diagram. Of buildings, roads, and walkways. He studied it closely, then closed his eyes, as if memorizing it.

"Eat that pie or give it to me," Paper said. "Don't waste it."