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Stanley had no trouble falling asleep, but morning came much too quickly. Every muscle and joint in his body ached as he tried to get out of bed. He didn't think it was possible but his body hurt more than it had the day before. It wasn't just his arms and back, but his legs, ankles, and waist also hurt. The only thing that got him out of bed was knowing that every second he wasted meant he was one second closer to the rising of the sun. He hated the sun.

He could hardly lift his spoon during breakfast, and then he was out on the lake, his spoon replaced by a shovel. He found a crack in the ground, and began his second hole.

He stepped on the shovel blade, and pushed on the very back of the shaft with the base of his thumb. This hurt less than trying to hold the shaft with his blistered fingers.

As he dug, he was careful to dump the dirt far away from



the hole. He needed to save the area around the hole for when his hole was much deeper.

He didn't know if he'd ever get that far. X-Ray was right. The second hole was the hardest. It would take a miracle.

As long as the sun wasn't out yet, he removed his cap and used it to help protect his hands. Once the sun rose, he would have to put it back on his head. His neck and forehead had been badly burned the day before.

He took it one shovelful at a time, and tried not to think of the awesome task that lay ahead of him. After an hour or so, his sore muscles seemed to loosen up a little bit.

He grunted as he tried to stick his shovel into the dirt. His cap slipped out from under his fingers, and the shovel fell free.

He let it lie there.

He took a drink from his canteen. He guessed that the water truck should be coming soon, but he didn't finish all the water, just in case he was wrong. He'd learned to wait until he saw the truck, before drinking the last drop.

The sun wasn't yet up, but its rays arced over the horizon and brought light to the sky.

He reached down to pick up his cap, and there next to it he saw a wide flat rock. As he put his cap on his head, he continued to look down at the rock.

He picked it up. He thought he could see the shape of a fish, fossilized in it.

He rubbed off some dirt, and the outline of the fish became clearer. The sun peeked over the horizon, and he could actually see tiny lines where every one of the fish's bones had been.



He looked at the barren land all around him. True, everyone referred to this area as "the lake," but it was still hard to believe that this dry wasteland was once full of water.

Then he remembered what Mr. Sir and Mr. Pendanski had both said. If he dug up anything interesting, he should report it to one of them. If the Warden liked it, he would get the rest of the day off.

He looked back down at his fish. He'd found his miracle.

He continued to dig, though very slowly, as he waited for the water truck. He didn't want to bring attention to his find, afraid that one of the other boys might try to take it from him. He tossed the rock, face down, beside his dirt pile, as if it had no special value. A short while later he saw the cloud of dirt heading across the lake.

The truck stopped and the boys lined up. They always lined up in the same order, Stanley realized, no matter who got there first. X-Ray was always at the front of the line. Then came Armpit, Squid, Zigzag, Magnet, and Zero.

Stanley got in line behind Zero. He was glad to be at the back, so no one would notice the fossil. His pants had very large pockets, but the rock still made a bulge.

Mr. Pendanski filled each boy's canteen, until Stanley was the only one left.

"I found something," Stanley said, taking it out of his pocket.

Mr. Pendanski reached for Stanley's canteen, but Stanley handed him the rock instead.

"What's this?"



"It's a fossil," said Stanley. "See the fish?"

Mr. Pendanski looked at it again.

"See, you can even see all of its little bones," said Stanley.

"Interesting," said Mr. Pendanski. "Let me have your canteen."

Stanley handed it to him. Mr. Pendanski filled it, then returned it.

"So do I get the rest of the day off?"

"What for?"

"You know, you said if I found something interesting, the Warden would give me the day off."

Mr. Pendanski laughed as he gave the fossil back to Stanley. "Sorry, Stanley. The Warden isn't interested in fossils."

"Let me see that," said Magnet, taking the rock from Stanley.

Stanley continued to stare at Mr. Pendanski.

"Hey, Zig, dig this rock."

"Cool," said Zigzag.

Stanley saw his fossil being passed around.

"I don't see nothing," said X-Ray. He took off his glasses, wiped them on his dirty clothes, and put them back on.

"See, look at the little fishy," said Armpit.