

## CHAPTER 15

"What happened?" the attendant asked in a scared, dumb voice.

"Call an ambulance!" I yelled. He looked at me for a moment as though what I said was too complicated to understand, and then he was off.

"You'd better get out of here," I said to Lorraine. When I touched her she burst into tears and ran out of the monkey house. If she had gotten involved as a witness after all that had happened, I knew her mother would've shipped her off to a Tibetan convent for ninety-six years.

The lady with the baby in her arms just sneaked out a door.—You could tell her motto was "When trouble strikes—vanish." Then it was just me on my knees next to Mr. Pignati, and just as suddenly as the monkeys had started screaming they shut up. One tiny monkey with yellow frames around his eyes pressed against the bars of his cage to watch me take the Pigmán's wrist. I felt for a pulse, but

there was nothing. Lorraine had dropped her sunglasses, so I crawled the short distance over to them and back to Mr. Pignati's side. When I held one of the glass ovals near his mouth, there was no breath to cloud the surface.

Did you have to die? I wanted to bend down and whisper in his ear. They say when you die your brain lives for awhile longer, and maybe he could've heard me.

A small trickle of saliva had started from the corner of his mouth, and I placed my handkerchief against it and turned his head slightly. What would there be to say even if he could've heard me?

"Is Mr. Pignati all right?"

"What do you care?" Lorraine had said that morning.

But I did care. She thinks she knows everything that goes on inside me, and she doesn't know a thing. What did she want from me—to tell the truth all the time? To run around saying it did matter to me that I live in a world where you can grow old and be alone and have to get down on your hands and knees and beg for friends? A place where people just sort of forget about you because you get a little old and your mind's a bit senile or silly? Did she think that didn't bother me under-

neath? That I didn't know if we hadn't come along the Pigman would've just lived like a vegetable until he died alone in that dump of a house?

"Do you think you'd like to go to the zoo with me tomorrow, Mr. Wandermeyer and Miss Truman?"

"Please. . . ."

"Please."

Didn't she know how sick to my stomach it made me feel to know it's possible to end your life with only a baboon to talk to? And maybe Lorraine and I were only a different kind of baboon in a way. Maybe we were all baboons for that matter—big blabbing baboons—smiling away and not really caring what was going on as long as there were enough peanuts bouncing around to think about—the whole pack of us—Bore and the Old Lady and Lorraine's mother included—baffled baboons concentrating on all the wrong things.

Everything was so screwed up.

"Your problem is you've got too much spare time."

That was the secret—don't have any spare time. Watch the little things in life, the ones you have control over. Keep your eyes glued to the peas and every speck of dust on the floor.

"Kenneth is doing very nicely."

To @ # \$ % with Kenneth. To @ # \$ % with marching along with an attaché case swinging in the breeze.

The tile floor was cold and uncomfortable, and the attendant had dripped some water near me. As I stood up, a hundred thoughts raced through my mind at the same time, one of which was to check Mr. Pignati's wallet to make sure the police could identify him when they got there. Then I wouldn't have to get involved at all. I was ashamed of thinking about myself, though actually it was Bore that I was thinking of now. The position of Mr. Pignati's head on the floor made his face look a little like my father's, and I didn't like the feeling it gave me. Up until then I had never been particularly disturbed about seeing a corpse—even when I'd had to sit for an hour or so at a funeral parlor when some relative had died. To me the dead body just looked like a doll, and all the flowers stuffed around here and there were sort of nice. It gave me a feeling like being in Beekman's toy department to tell the truth—everything elaborately displayed. So many things to look at. Anything to get away from what was really happening.

I lit a cigarette and watched the smoke climb toward a light in the ceiling. There was such a chill in me I couldn't stop my legs from shaking,

and although I was standing in the same spot, I felt as if I were moving forward. My thoughts jumped from Mr. Pignati to wondering if Lorraine were waiting for me, to knowing I was standing in a monkey house stuck on top of a small planet whirling through space. Moving forward. It was like Lorraine's nightmare, where something forced her toward the room with the black curtains.

Then I knew.

I was not in a monkey house. For a moment it was something else—something I was glimpsing for the first time—the cold tiles, the draft that moved about me, the nice solid fact that someday I was going to end up in a coffin myself.

My tomb.

I took a puff on the cigarette, and I could hear Lorraine's voice saying I was killing myself. As if I didn't know it! Did she think I thought smoking and drinking were supposed to make me live longer? I knew what it was doing to me.

"You must want to die," she had said once, and maybe that was true. Maybe I would rather be dead than to turn into the kind of grown-up people I knew. What was so hot about living anyway if people think you're a disturbing influence just because you still think about God and Death and the Universe and Love. My poor mother and father—I

wanted to tell them that they no longer wonder what they're doing in the world while I stand here going out of my mind.

I stayed until the ambulance doctor gestured that the Pigman was dead. A whole crowd of people had gathered to crane their necks and watch them roll a dead man onto a stretcher. I don't know where they all came from so quickly. It must have been announced over the loudspeaker. Hey everybody! Come see the dead man in the monkey house. Step right up. Special feature today.

"Good-bye, Mr. Pignati," I said, hardly moving my lips. The police and attendants moved calmly, surely, as if they were performing a ritual and had forgotten the meaning of it. I don't think they ever *knew* the meaning of it. I thought of machinery—automatic, constant, unable to be stopped.

The sun had come out, and I had to cover my eyes. Finally I saw Lorraine sitting on a bench in the large center mall near the entrance of the zoo. There was a long pond that was heated in some way so the water wouldn't freeze and kill the fish, and she looked strange surrounded by the mist that rose from its surface.

"Here's your glasses."

She didn't answer at first—just kept looking at

the ground. Then she struck out at me, as though trying to punch me.

"We murdered him," she screamed, and I turned away because I had been through just about all I could stand.

"Here's your glasses," I said again, almost hating her for a second. I wanted to yell at her, tell her he had no business fooling around with kids. I wanted to tell her he had no right going backward. When you grow up, you're not supposed to go back. Trespassing—that's what he had done.

I sat down next to her and lit up another cigarette. I couldn't help but look at the flashing light on top of the ambulance. They had driven it right up to the entrance of the monkey house, and it looked weird because it didn't belong. Right in the bright sunlight you could see the flashing dome going like crazy, pulsing like a heartbeat.

Then I saw this ridiculous sight running toward us from the other end of the mall—a great big fat man in a stupid-looking uniform, clutching a fistful of strings attached to helium balloons that bobbed in the air behind him. He was hobbling as fast as he could go, right toward the monkey house, with this sign around his neck: *BUY YOUR FUNNY-FACE BALLOONS HERE!*

Lorraine lifted her head slightly and watched

him go by. Then she broke down crying again and turned away so she was facing the pond and didn't have to look at me. I noticed a whole school of goldfish practically sticking their noses out of the water because they thought someone was going to feed them. In the deep center a large carp flipped its tail and then disappeared as quickly as it had surfaced.

"Let's go, Lorraine," I said softly, standing beside her. I lowered the sunglasses, and she took them, almost dropping them again trying to get them on.

Her hand lingered near mine, and I took it gently. She seemed funny peering up at me over the thin metal rims. We looked at each other. There was no need to smile or tell a joke or run for roller skates. Without a word, I think we both understood.

We had trespassed too—been where we didn't belong, and we were being punished for it. Mr. Pignati had paid with his life. But when he died something in us had died as well.

There was no one else to blame anymore. No Bores or Old Ladies or Nortons, or Assassins waiting at the bridge. And there was no place to hide—no place across any river for a boatman to take us.

Our life would be what we made of it—nothing more, nothing less.

Baboons.  
Baboons.

They build their own cages, we could almost hear the Pigman whisper, as he took his children with him.

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## NOTES BY FRANK KELLY

### Specific Questions

The following questions are designed as an aid to your understanding of particular sections of the novel. Some will involve discussion and interpretation. Others will require that you find specific references in the book to reinforce your opinions. Keep your answers in an orderly arrangement in your notebook and you will gather together many pertinent facts and opinions which you will use later in the section of general interpretations and discussions.

#### Chapter 1

1. "The good author catches the interest of the reader with a strong opening which arouses curiosity, introduces at least one main character, establishes setting, and generally fixes the tone of the book. If he has interested you with the first few pages, you will probably read on." Was Zindel successful in the opening six pages of *The Pigman*? If so, why? Be specific in answering.

#### Chapter 2

1. By the end of this chapter you have had a full introduction to the two narrators. Write a detailed note on the effectiveness of using two story-tellers. Include a comment on the fact that the story is told in the *first* person. Is this usual in books about young people?
2. Describe John and Lorraine as you see them at this point in the story. Are they typical teenagers? Compare them with your friends. Include an assessment of attitudes to school,