

# An Abundance of Katherines



## INTRODUCTION

### BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF JOHN GREEN

John Green was born in Indianapolis but spent most of his childhood in Orlando, Florida. His time at a boarding school outside Birmingham, Alabama, has informed some of his fiction, which he has largely written for a young adult audience. Green attended Kenyon College in Ohio, which is known for its robust creative writing program. After graduating in 2000, he briefly enrolled in the University of Chicago's Divinity School and intended to become a chaplain; he never actually attended classes because he decided over the course of his time working with child hospital patients that he wanted instead to be a novelist. Later, his brief student chaplaincy became the basis for [The Fault in Our Stars](#), his sixth novel, which he published in 2012. The novel received wide acclaim and was adapted into a film in 2014. Green had a cameo in the film and was recognizable to fans because of his internet presence in several YouTube series. These include *Crash Course*, which features educational videos hosted by Green, and *Vlogbrothers*, in which he and his brother, Hank Green, explain and discuss subjects ranging from pop culture to politics. Green has also complemented his novels by writing book reviews for *The New York Times* and radio essays for NPR and WBEZ, Chicago's public radio station. Green, who has identified himself as a feminist, has been criticized for representing teenage girls and people of color without the same nuance he gives to the white teen boys in his novels. Still, he is often cited as a positive influence on teenagers and has received mostly positive reviews for his internet and radio outreach as well as his novels, which also include [Looking for Alaska](#), [Paper Towns](#), and [Turtles All the Way Down](#).

### HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Green published this book in 2006, about five years after the September 11, 2001, attacks on the World Trade Center in New York City. In the wake of these attacks, the United States saw an uptick in Islamophobia, or irrational fear or hatred of Muslim people and culture, because the attacks were carried out by a radical Islamic terrorist group. Green, who learned a bit about Islam during college and as a student chaplain briefly after college, has stated that he wanted to write Hassan as a Muslim character who was not fully defined by his religion but rather displayed the traits of a well-rounded character who also happened to be Muslim. It is also important to note that the early 2000s, when Green wrote *An Abundance of Katherines*, saw increasing internationalization and corporatization of businesses, especially with the rise in internet shopping. This

shift made it more difficult for local businesses to thrive, which is why the textile factory in Gutshot, Tennessee, runs into financial problems. The novel explores some of the real-world ramifications for people in rural communities whose economies rely on the market for the goods they produce. The novel was published in 2006, but its semi-political treatment of the conflict between big business and the average citizen anticipates the United States Supreme Court's controversial 2010 ruling known as "Citizens United," which expanded the rights of corporations and stated that massive corporations are allowed to fund election campaigns with donations that private citizens cannot hope to equal.

### RELATED LITERARY WORKS

On his author website, Green cites David Foster Wallace's [Infinite Jest](#) as one of his inspirations for his writing style in *An Abundance of Katherines*, which involves a great deal of footnotes. He says that footnotes are where an author's voice shines through, and notes that in [Infinite Jest](#), Wallace's voice is so present that the narrative is sometimes muddled in a way that reflects Colin's inability to tell a clear, concise story. The coming-of-age rebellion at the heart of *An Abundance of Katherines* also echoes J.D. Salinger's [The Catcher in the Rye](#), although Green is conscious of the way in which Colin, as an incredibly smart teenager, also recalls the children in another J.D. Salinger work, the Glass family series. This series deals with a family of seven child prodigies.

### KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *An Abundance of Katherines*
- **When Written:** 2003-2006
- **Where Written:** New York City
- **When Published:** 2006
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary
- **Genre:** Novel, Young Adult Fiction
- **Setting:** Chicago and Gutshot, Tennessee
- **Climax:** At the end of the hunting trip, Colin and Hassan find TOC cheating on Lindsey with Katrina. The incident precipitates a big fight in which Colin, Hassan, Lindsey, SOCT, and JATT join forces against TOC, and Colin realizes that the obelisk dedicated to the Archduke Franz Ferdinand is a fake.
- **Antagonist:** Colin Singleton
- **Point of View:** Third person

### EXTRA CREDIT

**Internet Activism.** John Green and his brother Hank have a base of internet fans who call themselves “nerdfighters,” and who pursue activist projects to decrease what the two brothers refer to as “worldsuck.” In this capacity, Green is also affiliated with the activist organization called the Harry Potter Alliance, which harnesses fan energy to complete projects like collecting book donations for underserved communities and getting Warner Brothers to use Fair Trade chocolate for all its Harry Potter-related chocolate products.

**Punny Origins.** Green says that he chose the name Colin because the character is constantly “callin’” his ex-girlfriends.



## PLOT SUMMARY

The day after his graduation from high school finds Colin Singleton sitting in the bathtub, thinking about how he is getting too old to be a child prodigy, and how he wishes his ex-girlfriend, who dumped him the night before, would call him. Katherine, or more specifically, Katherine XIX, was the nineteenth girl Colin has dated. They have all been named Katherine, and all of them have broken up with him. Colin, who has always been called “special,” feels like he does not matter to anyone. Once he finishes his bath, he asks his parents to leave him alone so that he can lie abjectly on the floor, worrying that he will never have a **“Eureka” moment** in which he makes a new discovery, proving that he is an adult genius and not simply a washed-up child prodigy.

Colin’s best friend, Hassan Harbish, finds Colin stewing in his room and convinces him that they should go on a summer road trip so that Colin can get over Katherine. Colin agrees. Colin’s parents are easy to convince to allow him to go, in part because their parenting philosophy includes giving Colin the freedom to make his own decisions. (This allowance of freedom is how Colin got their permission last year to go on a television game show called *KranialKidz*, on which he won the ten thousand dollars that are now going to finance the road trip.) Still, they express disappointment that Colin is giving up his summer, which he could have used to take some college classes ahead of time now that he won’t have Katherine as a distraction. Colin’s father even suggests that Colin is “giving up” on his entire future. It is the first time Colin has disappointed his parents. Hassan, on the other hand, has been worrying his parents because he is a year out of high school, and although he has been accepted to college, he shows no interest in doing anything other than watching *Judge Judy*. Colin, with his better parental track record, convinces Hassan’s parents that he will be a good influence on Hassan and help him get a job. Their parents having reluctantly approved the plan, Colin and Hassan take off driving toward nowhere in particular in Colin’s Oldsmobile, which they call **“Satan’s Hearse.”**

While they drive, Colin thinks about the feeling he has in his gut

regarding Katherine. It is as though she has taken a piece out of him, leaving behind a **hole**. His brain drifts to other historical and literary figures he knows of who have had holes in their guts. Namely, he thinks of the **Archduke Franz Ferdinand**. When he sees a sign on the road for the grave of the Archduke, he feels compelled to stop and visit it. Hassan, only wanting to stop somewhere, agrees.

The pilgrimage to the Archduke’s grave brings Colin and Hassan to the small town of Gutshot, Tennessee. There, they meet a girl their age named Lindsey Lee Wells who has dated only one boy, and coincidentally, he happens to be named Colin. Hassan and Colin decide that he will be The Other Colin, or TOC. Colin and Hassan end up staying in Gutshot with Lindsey and her mother, Hollis, who owns the local textile factory that produces mainly tampons. Hollis employs them as interviewers for a project on the history of Gutshot. When they are not working as interviewers, Hassan gets to know Lindsey’s friends while Colin works obsessively on a **Theorem**, which he believes will be his stroke of genius, to predict the course of any romantic relationship. However, over the course of their stay in Gutshot, Colin develops feelings for Lindsey that eclipse his obsession with the Katherines.

As a favor to Hassan, who has been feeling as though he lives in Colin’s shadow and as though Colin is resentful of him for making friends with the local Gutshot kids, Colin agrees one day to go on a wild hog hunt. Lindsey takes him out ahead of time to practice shooting, and they bond over their mutual feeling that they don’t matter. The day of the hunt, Colin and Hassan take a break in the forest. Colin calls Katherine III, who is giving him trouble with the Theorem. He finds out that contrary to his belief that every Katherine has decided he is not important enough to date, he is the one who broke up with Katherine III. Right after this revelation, a wild hog appears and begins charging Colin and Hassan. Colin accidentally shoots a hornets’ nest instead of the hog. They run out of the forest, pursued by hornets, and make their way to the graveyard, which is the only landmark they recognize. There, they find TOC and Katrina, the girl Hassan has just started dating, having sex on one of the graves. The two swear Colin and Hassan to secrecy. A while later, once Lindsey and TOC’s other friends show up, TOC is rude, and Colin (who has realized that he has feelings for Lindsey) decides to reveal that TOC has been cheating on Lindsey with Katrina. Everyone gets in a big fight, TOC kicks Colin in the groin, and Colin realizes in his dazed state that Franz Ferdinand is an **anagram** for the name of Lindsey’s great grandfather, Fred N. Dinanzar.

A few days later, Lindsey brings Colin and Hassan on an espionage mission to find out the truth behind a rumor that Hollis is selling some of her land. They drive to the factory warehouse in Memphis, where they discover some of the factory workers burying huge boxes of tampons. Hollis shows up and explains that the factory is doing poorly because of

overseas competition. Not wanting to fire anyone (to do so would be a massive blow to the Gutshot economy, not to mention the individual workers to whom Hollis feels an allegiance), she has been burying the unsold tampons so that her employees will not notice them stacking up. In the meantime, she has been trying to find alternative ways to bring in revenue, including selling land, and, as Colin and Lindsey discuss later, advertising the grave of her grandfather as the grave of the Archduke Franz Ferdinand to bring in tourist revenue.

That night, Lindsey and Colin escape to Lindsey's secret hideout and discuss how selfless Hollis has been and how they both feel too selfish. They decide that in order to matter, they need to care more about things that really matter instead of the old grudges and obsessions that have dictated so much of their behavior up to this point. They have their first kiss in the dark in Lindsey's secret hideout, and from then on out they begin dating in earnest. Hassan is happy for Colin, but has decided that for himself, he is no longer going to date anyone until he is ready to get married. He has also decided to register for some college classes and start taking a more active role in his own life. The world seems balanced again, except that Colin is now dating a Lindsey instead of a Katherine.

The only problem is that the Theorem Colin has worked so hard to perfect seems to indicate that Lindsey will break up with Colin in four days. On the morning of the predicted breakup, Lindsey leaves Colin a note saying that she has run off with Hassan. "P.S.," she writes, "Just kidding." Colin then has his greatest "Eureka" moment when he realizes that the Theorem might work to model past relationships, but that there is no way to predict the future. He decides to relinquish some of his control and just let life happen: once he lives it, he can rearrange the events to tell any story he wants, just like he rearranged the events with Katherine III to fit the story of his perpetual "Dumping." The novel ends with Colin, Hassan, and Lindsey driving down the highway, going nowhere in particular and excited to see where they will find themselves.

(especially his father) have been obsessed with getting Colin the most top-notch education they can offer him. Colin's mother constantly tells him how "special" he is, and his father pushes him to be a high achiever, learning languages, math, philosophy, history, and other subjects as rapidly as possible. While Colin is called a "child prodigy," he is only one year ahead in school because his mother did not want him to have too many social problems (although he has endured bullying anyway; his mother has always told him that it is because the other kids are jealous of how smart he is). Colin has thus undergone many of the growing pains of adolescence right alongside his peers. Colin's parents see his dating life as a distraction from his studies, and do not recognize that when Katherine XIX breaks up with him on graduation night, just prior to the start of the novel, he needs some time to deal with the breakup before diving into summer studies. Colin thus starts off the novel feeling romantically lost but as though there is enormous pressure on him, now that he is growing up and heading off to college, to do something in order to earn the qualifier of "special" that his parents have always given him freely. He decides that his stroke of genius will be the creation of a **Theorem** to predict relationship outcomes. Colin keeps failing to write an accurate Theorem, however, and eventually undergoes the much more significant growing process of realizing that relationships have too many variables to predict in this way, and that he has been limiting himself by thinking that he and his relationships must conform to a certain mathematical model.

**Hassan Harbich** – Hassan is Colin's best friend. He and Colin take a road trip together to deal with Colin's breakup with Katherine XIX. While Colin pays for the road trip with money from a television quiz show he won, Hassan demonstrates his loyalty by sacrificing his entire summer to take the road trip with his friend. Hassan is described as not very attractive and not very smart or remarkable compared with Colin. For the most part, though, Hassan does not mind playing the part of Colin's sidekick. He is constitutionally somewhat lazy, and prefers watching *Judge Judy* to most forms of productivity. However, over the course of the novel, it becomes clear that Hassan also needs the road trip to figure out who he is and what he wants. He has been raised Muslim, and his faith is important to him, but he also wants to gain some independence from his parents and do a few of the things, such as drinking, that are forbidden by his faith. Hassan also wants to climb out from behind Colin's shadow when it comes to dating and being seen as an interesting person. Hassan manages to do a few of these things on the road trip by dating Katrina and befriending TOC. These relationships do not work out, but they are nonetheless growing experiences for Hassan. Hassan's easy recognition of his "failed" relationships as still an important part of his life contrasts with Colin's perpetually pessimistic attitude toward all his breakups. By the end of the novel, Hassan has decided for himself that he should try going to college, not



## CHARACTERS

### MAJOR CHARACTERS

**Colin Singleton** – Colin is the protagonist of *An Abundance of Katherines*, and he is also his own antagonist. The novel's title comes from the fact that Colin has dated nineteen girls, and all of them have been named Katherine. Over the course of the novel, with the help of his best friend Hassan and the characters they meet while road tripping through Gutshot, Tennessee, Colin comes to the conclusion that it is time to break his Katherine streak to try dating Lindsey Lee Wells. When Colin was a toddler, he surprised his father by reading aloud off the back of the newspaper. Ever since, his parents

because it is what his parents and Colin want him to do, but rather because it will open more opportunities to him.

**Lindsey Lee Wells** – Lindsey Lee Wells is a resident of Gutshot, Tennessee, and is Colin’s primary love interest after the Katherines. Born and raised in Gutshot, Lindsey does not want to leave even though her mother, Hollis, is pushing for her to go to college out of town. To Hollis’s chagrin, Lindsey is dating TOC, a popular boy who used to refer to Lindsey as “Lassie” and once dropped off a Valentine box full of dog food on her front porch. Lindsey has made it her life’s mission to date and eventually marry TOC, because she wants to be in control of her own social status. Lindsey appears to be part of the popular crowd, but she confides in Colin that she thinks she is “full of shit.” She struggles to identify who she really is. Over the course of the novel, she realizes that she does matter to many of the local people, not just TOC. She decides to spend more time and attention on the people and things that really matter to her. As part of this decision, she decides to date Colin instead of TOC, and she decides to be easier on her mother, who is doing all she can to keep Gutshot’s economy running for the good of all its residents.

**Hollis Wells** – Hollis is Lindsey’s mother. She runs the Gutshot textile factory and takes in Colin and Hassan on their road trip. Lindsey is often frustrated by her mother’s attempts to get her to go to college out of town. By the end of the novel, it is clear that Hollis is doing everything she can to save Gutshot, but that the town is likely to die soon because the textile factory is doing poorly. Hollis wants her daughter to leave because she wants her to have a future outside of her declining hometown.

**Katherine Carter (Katherine I/XIX)** – Katherine I is the daughter of Colin’s tutor, Krazy Keith. She was Colin’s first love interest, and she broke up with him after two minutes. Colin remembers her throughout most of the novel as the first girl he kissed, but later, he tells Lindsey that Katherine V was actually the first girl he kissed. In the wake of Katherine I, Colin exclusively dates girls named Katherine. Katherine XIX, who breaks up with Colin just before the action of the novel begins, is Colin’s longest-term girlfriend. They dated for almost a year, and Colin is determined to use the **Theorem** to prove his genius and win her back. It eventually becomes clear that Katherine XIX is the same girl as Katherine I, bringing Colin’s dating life full circle.

**Katherine Mutsenberger (Katherine III)** – Katherine III is one of the girls Colin dated at “smart-kid camp” for a very brief period. He thinks about her a lot because he cannot fit her into the **Theorem**. He finally calls her and finds out that the reason he has been having trouble with her and the Theorem is that he actually broke up with her, but convinced himself that she broke up with him, like all the other Katherines.

**The Other Colin (TOC)** – “The Other Colin” is Lindsey’s boyfriend throughout most of the novel. There is animosity

between TOC and Colin because they are jealous of one another. Hassan makes friends with TOC, until it becomes evident that TOC and Katrina, Hassan’s girlfriend, are cheating on their respective partners with each other. The climax of the novel occurs when Colin and TOC get in a fight.

**Mrs. Singleton / Colin’s Mother** – Mrs. Singleton is Colin’s mother. She is less focused on holding her son to lofty expectations than Mr. Singleton is, but she also sets an impossible goal post for Colin by referring to him constantly as “special.” She thinks she is paying him a compliment, but really she makes him feel as though he will never quite live up to how “special” she thinks he will become one day.

**Mr. Singleton / Colin’s Father** – Mr. Singleton is Colin’s father. He has been obsessed with Colin’s achievement ever since Colin read aloud part of the newspaper to him, unprompted, as a toddler. He loves his son, and the way he shows his love is by pushing Colin to succeed. While Colin does learn rapidly as a result, he feels a constant sense of failure because his father seems always to be moving the mark of success farther away.

## MINOR CHARACTERS

**Katrina** – Katrina is described as the most attractive girl in Gutshot. She is the first girl Hassan kisses and is his girlfriend for a short while, until it becomes evident that she is cheating on him with TOC.

**Chase (JATT)** – Chase is one of TOC’s friends. Hassan and Colin refer to him as “Jeans Are Too Tight,” or “JATT.” He surprises Colin by turning on TOC when news of his cheating comes out.

**Fulton (SOCT)** – Fulton is one of TOC’s friends. Hassan and Colin refer to him as “Short One Chewing Tobacco,” or “SOCT.” He surprises Colin by turning on TOC when news of his cheating comes out.

**Mr. Lyford** – Mr. Lyford is TOC’s father. He leads the wild hog hunt.

**Mabel** – Mabel is one of the “oldsters” Lindsey knew in childhood. When Lindsey, Colin, and Hassan go to interview her, Lindsey realizes that people like Mabel are the ones who really matter. She decides to visit Mabel more often as part of her decision to refocus her life.

**Mrs. Harbish** – Mrs. Harbish is Hassan’s mother. She wants him to go to college, but convinces Mr. Harbish that a road trip with Colin will not hurt Hassan. In fact, she argues, Colin’s ambition might rub off on him.

**Mr. Harbish** – Mr. Harbish is Hassan’s father. He worries that his son is wasting his life watching *Judge Judy*.



## THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.



## ACHIEVEMENT AND MORTALITY

Colin Singleton has recently graduated high school when the novel starts. For most young adults, high school graduation is a moment of triumph, a step toward becoming who they want to be. But for Colin, who learned to read at two years old and has long been considered — by his parents, by himself, and by others — to be a child prodigy, the step into adulthood that is a part of graduation thrusts him into an identity crisis because the title of “child prodigy” is no longer available to him now that he is not a child. Further, a child prodigy is seen as someone with immense potential, as someone who will achieve great things, and so now as he enters adulthood Colin must also confront his sense that he now has to start achieving those things, and that he only has limited time to do it because he will, eventually, die. The novel opens, then, with Colin in crisis because of the pressure he feels around achievement and death. The novel, though, isn't interested in whether or not Colin actually achieves the “greatness” he believes he both should and must attain. Rather, across the arc of the narrative, Colin learns that the way he has conceived of achievement has been both limited and damaging — and that, as connected as it was to death, interfered with his ability to actually live his life.

Colin's drive to achieve is not about fulfilling any particular passion. Rather, it stems from the need, instilled by his parents, to mark that he truly is “special” by showing tangible markers of success to the world. Colin's intensive “child prodigy” education begins when he is a toddler, and his father discovers that he can already read the newspaper. From then on out, his parents (particularly his father), focus on getting Colin to learn and memorize immense amounts of information. One of the ways in which Colin's father teaches his son to assess his own achievement is by setting “markers” of success. Setting such goals or markers seems intuitive, but the novel shows how they can lead to perverse outcomes in the way that Colin views success. For instance, when Colin fails to reach a marker, such as when he memorizes the conjugations of twenty-three instead of twenty-five Latin verbs in a day, he thinks of himself as failing. This sort of mindset even infects Colin's love life. As he gets older, Colin keeps trying to date girls named Katherine because he considers each of his ended relationships a failure and feels he must start over and get it right. While Colin could focus on the Latin conjugations he has successfully learned or on the joy he experienced and personal growth he has

undergone in each of his relationships with a Katherine, he instead always focuses on the ways in which he has *not* lived up to expectations (his own, his father's, or society's). This way of seeing the world and himself suggests that Colin is invested not so much in the actual learning to be done on the way to his goals as he is in the result he wants to show once he has ticked off the boxes of learning Latin or having a girlfriend.

Through much of the novel, Colin constantly compares himself to dead geniuses and historical figures, both famous and infamous. These comparisons highlight that, because of his status as a child prodigy, Colin feels immense pressure to live up to his early promise by himself becoming a historical figure. This sort of ambition, though, connects Colin to regular thoughts of death. This is not to say that he thinks of suicide. Rather, he is constantly assessing his life against the dead, and also constantly assessing his own life as if from the vantage point of it being over and trying to ensure that, when he does eventually die, he is seen as he wants to be seen. However, the events of the novel and Colin's adventures with regard to one particular dead historical figure, the **Archduke Franz Ferdinand**, help him to understand that he ultimately has no control over how people will see him after his death. Death is inevitable, but his life is what he makes of it. Before and during his road trip with Hassan, Colin frequently thinks about Archimedes, Einstein, Locke, Mozart, and other great thinkers and whether or not they were child prodigies. Colin is constantly worried about how he measures up against these great dead men.

The name of Colin's car, “**Satan's Hearse**,” adds a sense of urgency to his comparisons with these dead men. A “hearse” is a car that brings a body to a funeral, and Colin's self-comparison with the dead illustrates how he constantly measures his own life almost as if looking back from his own funeral. That Colin calls the car “Satan's Hearse,” seems to be joke, but at the same time can be seen as indicating Colin's sense of his own lack of self-worth, or of the sort of pressure he constantly feels such that it makes his life a kind of hell. During the road trip, Colin becomes particularly interested in the Austro-Hungarian Archduke Franz Ferdinand, whose assassination at a young age sparked World War I. Colin's interest is sparked by the fact that he sees a sign indicating that Ferdinand's grave is in Gutshot, Tennessee, and he insists that he and Hassan drive there. Colin is apparently both fascinated with the idea of the Archduke's infamy, attained by dying young, and afraid that should he, Colin, die young, he will have nothing to show for his life in the way Einstein and Mozart do. As the events of the novel unfold, though, Colin realizes that the Archduke's grave never actually contained the Archduke at all. Rather, Hollis Wells, the woman who maintains the grave and claims that the town purchased the Archduke's body, has spread false information in an effort to turn the grave into a tourist spot as a way to make money for the town and support

the people who work in the factory founded by her grandfather. For Colin, this (somewhat outlandish) turn of events reveals to him important things about history and accomplishment. First, it makes him see how much of history is dependent on the interpretation and even the lies of the living. This, in turn, makes him realize the tenuousness of achievement as he has conceived of it, since the dead can only be as significant as living people make them, and the dead can't control such things. Further, in Hollis's efforts Colin comes to understand that while the town of Gutshot has not achieved any kind of historical importance by being the burial site of the real Archduke, Hollis herself has achieved a short-term solution to the town's impending bankruptcy. Her achievement is not public, and it is not the stuff of epics, and it is even a little underhanded, but Colin realizes that it is nonetheless significant.

By the end of the novel, Colin has realized that achievement can be more loosely defined than his parents have led him to believe. What's more, he comes to accept that rather than viewing his achievements as something to be looked back on from beyond the grave, he has a life to live now, a life in which he can enjoy the pursuit of whatever it is that he likes or loves. This revelation leads him to start dating Lindsey (Hollis's daughter), breaking his Katherine streak, even though he knows that he might wind up with yet another heartbreak and will never be able to "perfect" his past. He ends the novel feeling more comfortable enjoying his present and celebrating his daily successes without worrying about the legacy he will one day leave.



### SELF-ACTUALIZATION

Colin is preoccupied throughout the novel with who he is if he is too old to be a child prodigy. He becomes invested in coming up with an original

**Theorem** to predict the course of any given romantic relationship; he believes that doing so will make him a genius, which is a title similar to "prodigy" but available to adults. While Colin must work to redefine how he thinks of his intelligence, this process has less to do than Colin thinks with the difference between a prodigy and a genius. Rather, his struggle over how to identify across the course of the novel is about learning who he wants to be instead of who others want him to be, especially his parents. Growing up, it turns out, might involve some parental disappointment. In the novel, Colin and others must cut or loosen bonds with some of the people they love in order to learn who they are as individuals.

Colin and Hassan's road trip puts both physical and emotional distance between Colin and his parents. Colin's anxious decision to embark on it anyway demonstrates that he feels compelled to take care of himself and his feelings in the wake of his latest romantic relationship with Katherine XIX, and that this self-care requires some troubling separation from his family. The road trip is in direct conflict with how Colin's father

wants him to spend his summer, taking summer classes at Northwestern. His father tells him that the road trip seems like quitting – in fact, Colin reflects that the road trip is the first time in his life that he has disappointed his parents. Colin's rebellion is a significant disruption to his relationship with his parents because everything Colin does seems to be motivated by a desire to live up to the arbitrary "markers" of success his father gives him. Reaching these impossible markers, Colin believes, is how he can prove that he is as "special" as his mother always tells him he is. Disappointment, however, is a two-way road. Colin realizes throughout the road trip that his mother has disappointed him by making false promises about how he will distinguish himself as "special" by having a "Eureka moment" indicative of his genius. His father, too, has disappointed him by compelling him to work hard: for all the hours Colin has put into learning, it has yet to pay off in genius-status, the way his father has led him to believe it will. Because Colin is always trying to please his parents, he needs distance from them in order to see that the pressures they place on him have caused him to treat his relationship with Katherine as a core defining aspect of his identity at the expense of defining himself outside the relationship. When Hassan asks if Colin's problem is the genius thing or the Katherine thing, the narrator says that for Colin, the two are related. Colin has a pathological need, instilled by his parents, to define himself as a genius. He is unable to separate this need from his relationship with Katherine, which means that he is unable to separate his relationship with Katherine from his sense of self until he finds reprieve from parental pressure to be a genius.

Lindsey and Hassan, too, struggle with defining themselves. Both of them eventually come to accept versions of the lives their parents want for them, but they first must rebel in order to be sure that they are choosing their own paths instead of going along with paths laid out before them. After Colin asks Lindsey about a picture in which she looked very different from how she looks now, she tells Colin about her process a few years back of trying to remake her image. She says that she is "full of shit," always "chameleoning" her way through life and losing all sense of who she actually is as a person. She is distressed that if her boyfriend, TOC, or anyone else really sees her, they will find her out. Even though she knows she does not really want it, Lindsey clings to her relationship with TOC because she is worried that her mother, Hollis, is going to make her leave Gutshot for college. Because she defines herself in relation to other people instead of in relation to herself, the idea of being uprooted is even more disturbing than the idea that she simply blends into her surroundings. Once Lindsey realizes that Hollis is trying to push her out of town because the town is in economic trouble and might not be around much longer, Lindsey realizes that she has been imagining a static future that might not come to fruition. In the final scene, she is driving out of Gutshot with Colin and Hassan. Although she has not necessarily decided to leave for college, her willingness to

impulsively drive away suggests that she is opening herself up to the idea that she can define herself by her decisions rather than by a script that tradition has given her. Complying with Hollis's plan and opening herself up to new experiences might, in fact, give her more agency than defiantly marrying TOC and staying in Gutshot forever.

Hassan, who has been out of high school for a year, has been getting a lot of pressure from his parents to find a job or go to college. However, his parents have been allowing him to live in their house. Hassan has little motivation to find a job of his own because his father's paycheck provides for him and allows him to watch *Judge Judy* all day. Hassan's parents allow him to go on a road trip with Colin because they think Colin, who is ambitious in school and bound for college, will be a good influence on their son. Colin does nag Hassan about his plans for college, often a little past the point when Hassan asks him to stop. While Colin may make Hassan feel he should go to college, his needling remarks also make Hassan dig in further to his determination not to go. After all, college is Colin's future, and Hassan (while smart) has never lived up to Colin's ambition. Tired of being Colin's less-impressive sidekick, and tired of living under the rules of his parents' house, Hassan uses the road trip to rebel, trying to fit in with the "normal" Gutshot kids. He drinks a little and kisses Katrina, both of which stretch the rules of Islam by which his parents expect him to abide. Hassan's foray into romance and social drinking does not turn out in his favor. He keeps a good sense of humor when he sees Katrina cheating on him with one of his drinking buddies, TOC. Hassan's "failed" attempt at rebellion, rather than send him spiraling à la Colin's failed relationship with Katherine, allows him to step outside the script imposed on him by his parents and by Colin: by the end of the novel, Hassan is able to recommit to the tenets of Islam and even decide to go to college with the understanding that these are his decisions. Rather than allowing others to control him, he is taking control of his life for himself.

It is not only separation from his parents that allows Colin to explore what it means to decide the course of his own life. It is his breakup with Katherine XIX that sets off the entire novel of self-discovery. Hassan, likewise, must rebel against his parents a little before coming to the conclusion that he does want to go to college, and Lindsey must rebel against Hollis and against the standards of the popular kids at school to come to a sense of who she wants to be. Many of the strained relationships are eventually reinstated, but the relationships of the novel can only be as strong as the individual selves their members bring to the table. It is Colin's final realization that he has the power to reinvent himself that leads him to welcome the possibilities of the future, including not only a relationship with Lindsey instead of another Katherine, but also intellectual fulfillment instead of genius-status.



## STORYTELLING

Throughout the novel, Colin and Lindsey are both preoccupied with storytelling. Colin, however, doesn't initially realize it. Colin conceives of the

**Theorem** — the mathematical algorithm he is attempting to create — as being a kind of precision oracle that can predict the future of any future romance. When he first tells Lindsey about the Theorem, however, she responds that math is an interesting way to tell a story. Further, Lindsey often chides Colin for not being much of a storyteller. His problem, according to Lindsey, is that he strings together events without transitions and without forming them into a plot with a beginning, middle, and end. By the end of the novel, Lindsey helps Colin to realize that storytelling is not a predictive act, which can say with mathematical clarity what will happen. Rather, it is an interpretive act, and one over which the teller has influence.

Colin thinks of himself as being both the victim of his own romances with all the Katherines he has dated and as an objective narrator of those romances. It is only when Lindsey points out that he might not be taking all the variables of romance into account that Colin realizes he might be wrong on both counts: in seeing himself as a victim, and in believing himself to be a reliable narrator. When Colin shows Lindsey the Theorem, he has been struggling to write a version of the Theorem that accounts for Katherine III as well as all the other Katherines. Lindsey responds by insinuating that Colin is actually using the Theorem to tell a story, and that the simple math as he has written it cannot possibly accommodate all the intricacies of a true relationship. Lindsey's comments lead Colin to realize that he might need to reassess what actually happened before he can attempt to write it down in math. Colin thus calls Katherine III, and discovers that he has in fact been an unreliable narrator of his own life. As it turns out, he has convinced himself that Katherine III dumped him when, in reality, he was the one who broke up with her. Colin has become so fixated on his role as the victim of dumpings by Katherines (and on dating Katherine after Katherine in an attempt to get it "right") that he has reinterpreted true events to make himself the "Dumpee" in his relationship with Katherine III as well as all the others. With Lindsey's help, then, Colin to see that he, and all people, are always telling themselves stories. "[Y]ou don't remember what happened. What you remember becomes what happened." Colin realizes that even his brain, which is very good at memorizing things, has the power to alter reality by retelling it according to the script to which it usually conforms. Put another way, Colin discovers that he has been living inside a story that he has been telling himself. In this story, he is the victim who always gets dumped. With this realization comes another, different realization: that the same events could also produce a different story.

While Lindsey insists that a story needs a beginning, a middle, and an end, the section headings of the novel cause the three phases of a story gradually to collapse into one another across the arc of the novel. The novel is told through interspersed scenes in the present and flashbacks to Colin's relationships with the various Katherines. Each flashback is preceded by a subtitle such as, "The beginning of the beginning" or "the beginning of the middle." These subheadings all build to one culminating flashback, called "The Beginning, and the Middle, and the End," in which Colin tells Lindsey how he met, dated, and was dumped by each of the Katherines. While Colin is technically telling a linear story from beginning to end, this section falls at the end of the novel and serves as a moment of honesty from which Colin is to begin his relationship with Lindsey. In this way, the novel suggests that while any particular story needs a beginning, middle, and end, what is the end of one story can always serve as the beginning of another. Colin uses his Theorem to predict how long his relationship with Lindsey will last, and he gets the result of four days. And on that fourth day, the Theorem is proved right: Lindsey writes a note telling Colin that she has left him for Hassan. However, she then immediately reveals that she was just joking, and has no plans to break up with him. Although Lindsey frames the note as a joke, her joke makes the point that there is no such thing as an unwavering script for life, that the past can never predict the future, and that nothing so simple as a Theorem can predict what his story will be.

At the end of the novel, Colin, Hassan, and Lindsey get into the car and drive off. He sees the road stretching out before them and can't see its end. The endless road ahead is a metaphor for life, for a path Colin will learn only as he experiences it, even as he can choose where to go, when to turn. And it is a path with an ending he can't yet know, just as Colin cannot yet know the full plot of his life from beginning to end. Any story he tells about his life will, by necessity, be subsumed into a greater unfolding story, the end of which is not yet in sight. Further, Colin realizes that the end of each smaller story is only a beginning or middle to this greater narrative, and that he has greater agency in telling his story than he previously thought.



### PLANS, CHANGE, AND GROWTH

The main characters of the novel all have their lives well-planned by their parents. Colin's parents plan for him to get through school quickly and then achieve great and "special" things. Hassan's parents plan for him to go to college. Hollis plans for Lindsey to get out of Gutshot, leaving her boyfriend, TOC, behind. As each of these characters grow up over the course of the novel, they are forced to grapple with their parents' hopes and plans for them and how those plans conflict with their own hopes and dreams for themselves. Initially it seems as if this negotiation around which plans to follow in the novel is about resistance and

acquiescence — about how much to resist, and how much to give in. But as the novel works to its conclusion, it becomes clear that, in fact, the characters' growth depends instead on recognizing the deeper motivations behind their own impulses and their parents' hopes for them, and then choosing for themselves.

When the novel begins, Colin has never disappointed his parents in his life. But in the aftermath of getting dumped by Katherine XIX, he decides to go on a road trip with Hassan that his parents don't think fits in with the path needed for him to fulfill his "greatness." In other words, the novel starts with an act of rebellion. It is a mild rebellion, perhaps, but Colin still perceives the road trip as being full of spontaneity that goes against the carefully planned path to distinction Colin's father has laid out for him over the course of his childhood. Yet it is evident that Colin himself has also confined himself to a particular, rigid path. In some ways, that rigid path is tied into his desire to please his parents. For instance, Colin has only ever dated girls named "Katherine" ever since his first two-minute relationship with Katherine at the age of eight. That first Katherine was the daughter of his tutor, who his parents hired to help Colin in his "child prodigy" studies. In this way, Colin's fixation with Katherines is thus connected to his fixation with pleasing his parents through high-achievement in school. And yet, at the same time, it is something Colin has chosen for himself, as well. More broadly, Colin seeks to deal with the pressure of his "child prodigy" past by controlling the world around him. At one point during the road trip, as Colin stares past his headlights while driving, he thinks to himself that his problem is his inability to see the future. And his effort to create the **Theorem**, which he hopes will predict the outcomes of relationships, is another attempt to control the future. Colin's growth in the novel, then, occurs not when he chooses his own future versus the future his parents want for him. Rather, it occurs when he ceases to try to control the future. The unexpected turns he takes over the course of the novel lead literally to an exciting and identity-affirming adventure in Gutshot, Tennessee. It is this adventure that leads him to break his Katherine streak by dating Lindsey, even though he does not know what their relationship will become or where it will lead. Colin thus needs the instability of unexpected change in order to make sense of himself as separate from his parents. But just as importantly, in order to be happy, he must learn to accept that parts of his life will reside out of his control.

Lindsey is similarly resistant to her mother's plan for her because she believes it will involve too much change. While Hollis wants her daughter to leave Gutshot, go to college, and have a life away from the tampon factory, Lindsey feels that to do so would be to disrespect the tradition that lies at the core of her identity. Lindsey tells Colin that in elementary school, when all the Gutshot kids went to school in a larger neighboring town, the Gutshot kids stuck together because the

other kids perceived them as dirty and poor. Lindsey is not eager to go to college with the rich kids who think so little of her hometown, which has made her who she is. Lindsey's status as the daughter of Hollis, the textile factory owner, gives Lindsey a particularly strong connection to the town and its traditions. Lindsey and Hollis's family has owned and operated the factory for generations. Lindsey has thus been raised right alongside the town. Because her mother cares for the town the way she cares for Lindsey, Lindsey feels a deep familial attachment to Gutshot. She feels that Hollis is being hypocritical and betraying their family by pushing Lindsey out of the town. Lindsey gets very emotional and nostalgic when she listens to the Gutshot factory workers tell stories of their pasts. She is also distressed at the idea that Hollis might be selling land to a developer because a new subdivision would transform her world into unfamiliar territory. By the end of the novel, she realizes that Hollis is doing everything she can to take care of the factory workers, but that the factory is inevitably going to close. In other words, Lindsey finally accepts her mother's plan for her when she realizes that the plan is not motivated by a desire to uproot her from everything she knows, but rather by a desire to help her stay afloat in a changing world.

Living up to others' expectations is important to Hassan, but he knows he will always be unable to exceed them in the way Colin can with his incredible smarts. While Colin and Hassan's parents insist that going to college will allow Hassan to distinguish himself, Hassan chooses instead to assert his uniqueness by resisting what everyone wants him to do. Like Lindsey, Hassan eventually exchanges his own plan for the plan his parents and friend have always advocated. However, even as he does so he makes it clear that it is his plan now, not anyone else's. Hassan's parents have raised him as a Muslim, and his faith dictates that he behave in certain ways. Hassan *kind of* follows these dictates. For instance, at one point he drinks a beer (Islam forbids the drinking of alcohol) and tells Colin that it is really *getting drunk* that is forbidden. Hassan clearly does not want to entirely reject the life his parents and faith have set out for him, but he wants to conform to that life on his own terms. Hassan tries on "hats" of various identities to imagine what his life would be like were he to choose another path. For example, he decides to go hunting with TOC, and he dates Katrina to prove that he can date a college girl without going to college. The fact that Hassan is not upset when he later catches TOC and Katrina having sex suggests that, for him, these relationships are less about his bond with TOC or Katrina and more about visualizing an alternative life to the one his parents and Colin think he ought to have. At the end of the novel, Hassan finally registers for college, even though he admits it will mean less time to watch Judge Judy. He is very careful to tell Colin not to get too excited. He wants his friend to be proud of him, but he also wants to be clear that he is defaulting to the original plan of his own accord, not caving to

pressure from Colin or his parents. Hassan thus conforms to the plan but leaves himself a window of opportunity to change it at any time he chooses.

Colin, Lindsey, and Hassan all confront change in their lives. While all of them seem to a degree afraid that they will forget who they are as a result, change actually allows them to grow into more mature versions of themselves. Lindsey, for example, breaks up with TOC because she realizes that she does not actually want to be dating him. By the end of the novel it is clear that all three will benefit from having goals and plans, but the plans are their own, not anybody else's, and they are equipped to deal with the fallout should their plans fall through.



## ROMANTIC LOVE

Colin Singleton, who has dated nineteen girls named Katherine, appears to be highly experienced at romance. However, even he cannot deny that he must have some sort of complex if every one of his girlfriends has had the same name. Although the novel is called *An Abundance of Katherines*, it is really about one of the first times in Colin's life since the age of eight that he has not had any Katherines in his life. This time to be a "Singleton" allows him to work through the reasons why he has dated such a long string of Katherines. Colin recalls the story of each Katherine and comes to the realization that he has much more to learn about dating. However, it is not necessarily by dating an endless string of women that he will learn these lessons, and a continuation of his past dating patterns will certainly not help him live up to the moniker of "special" that his mother has given him. He needs to learn how to pursue projects and relationships that are important to him. A romantic relationship will only help him be a happy, well-rounded person if that individual relationship truly matters to him. Then, however the relationship ends, it will exist as a significant event in Colin's life.

Hassan often contrasts his lack of romantic experience with Colin's surplus of experience. However, as Colin reveals more and more about his various relationships, it becomes apparent that many of his relationships have been extremely short-lived and juvenile. It seems almost ridiculous that he has blown them so out of proportion as to call each girl his girlfriend, much less lament that their rejections constitute a deep undesirability on his part. Hassan, whose first kiss, relationship, and breakup happen during his three-week stay in Gutshot, demonstrates much more clear-headedness when it comes to romance. When Lindsey takes her shirt off to bandage Colin's head after he hits it on a rock on his first day in Gutshot, he thinks back to all the Katherines whose bras he has seen. He recalls four, or seven if the count includes straps. The fact that Colin has dated nineteen girls but only seen four of their bras (and even feels compelled to count bra straps in an effort to up his tally) suggests that he has not been a great deal more sexually active than any 17-year-old. He also reveals that he counts as a

relationship an interaction in which a Katherine held his hand and called him a genius. He thinks of himself as special at least insofar as he has had an active dating life, but he seems to have an extremely loose definition of “dating” that allows him to count nearly any interaction with a girl named Katherine as one of his relationships. In fact, Colin does not seem all that much more experienced than Hassan. Unlike Hassan, who has no problem admitting publicly that his first kiss happens in Gutshot during a game of spin-the-bottle, Colin thinks of Katherine I as the first girl he kissed but later reveals that he did not kiss anyone until Katherine V. Colin thus revises history to give himself his first kiss at a younger age than it actually occurred. He appears preoccupied with not only making Katherine I (who also happens to be Katherine XIX) a central figure in his life, but also with making himself seem uniquely experienced with romance and sex. Although Hassan has his first kiss at a later age than Colin and ultimately decides that he is not ready to date, he is more in touch with reality and his emotions surrounding romance and sex than Colin is.

Colin is obsessed with the idea of having a girlfriend but is not especially invested in any of his girlfriends themselves. He realizes across the course of the novel that he has been thinking of having a girlfriend as one of the arbitrary “markers” of success that he feels he has to achieve to be special. By the end of the novel, he comes to the conclusion that simply having a girlfriend will not make him happy. Happiness, rather, is to be achieved by working on things that truly matter to him – intellectual and romantic projects alike. Katherine XIX breaks up with Colin just before the novel starts. In the flashback to their breakup scene, she tells Colin that he needs a robot that says “I love you” instead of an actual girlfriend. It seems that Colin has been trying all his life to find a stand-in for Katherine I by dating random girls named Katherine, but now that he has the real thing again (because Katherine XIX is Katherine I, many years older), it seems that he from her perspective, he still treats her as a stand-in for something he does not have. Katherine is not the “missing piece” that will make Colin a complete person, but Colin must travel to Gutshot and fall out of infatuation with her before he can realize that he wants something else out of life. Colin frequently cites “mattering” as his ultimate goal in life. He wants to be important, and he laments the fact that he does not matter enough to any of the Katherines for them to date him. As Colin grows closer with Lindsey during his stay in Gutshot, he recognizes that she, like him, is dating someone for the sake of making a point rather than because she actually loves him. TOC, Lindsey’s boyfriend, cheats on her. Both newly dumped, Colin and Lindsey begin dating because they share a connection and are truly interested in each other for who they are. Nonetheless, Colin and Lindsey discuss how no one person can make either of them important or special. Lindsey intends to reconnect with the elderly people in Gutshot because she realizes that her relationships with them mean more to her than maintaining her

popularity. Colin, meanwhile, is not sure what he intends to do next, but he does resolve to stop trying to determine his future romantic actions by predicting how relationships will turn out based on his past relationship experience.

Colin and Lindsey end the novel driving off into the sunset together, Hassan in the back seat. There is no sense that they will necessarily remain together permanently. In fact, as Colin often insists, relationships always end in breakup, divorce, or death. Still, they have both matured enough to realize that they should date who they sincerely want to date, no matter how it will turn out. Hassan’s presence in the backseat signifies that Colin is not losing himself entirely to this new romance, as he has done previously. He is carrying his life with him so that, should he break up with Lindsey eventually, the relationship will be a piece of his life story that he can fit into the remaining aspects of who he is as a complete person.



## SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.



### SATAN’S HEARSE

Colin uses the name “Satan’s Hearse” to refer to his Oldsmobile, in which he and Hassan take their road trip. The car itself is not especially remarkable, except that it carries Colin and Hassan to rural Tennessee on their soul-searching road trip. There is a sense in which Colin and Hassan might simply think the name sounds cool and over-the-top, but there is no doubt that some of their deeper anxieties are also wrapped up in the name of the car. The name suggests that Colin feels he is always driving toward his own funeral. His main motivation for going on the road trip is the feeling that he is aging and has yet to make anything of himself, either through his genius or through his love life, and even though he is young, death threatens to cut off his chance to prove himself.

The idea that the hearse belongs to Satan also suggests that Colin feels like Satan, a fallen angel and the lord of hell, when he is driving the car out of town. The notion of Colin as a fallen angel is in line with the fact that he feels he is disappointing his parents for the first time by taking the road trip. It also demonstrates his overblown sense of the catastrophe his failures stand to wreak upon the world. As for Hassan, his perpetual desire to drive the Hearse shows that he *wants* to occupy Colin’s position as a fallen angel bound for hell. Hassan feels that he lives a comparatively unremarkable life, never having done anything to create a pedestal from which to fall.

Having driven the Hearse to what turns out to be the false grave of the **Archduke Franz Ferdinand**, Colin realizes that death might not be the simple looming ending he thought it was. The Archduke might not truly be buried in Gutshot,

Tennessee, but enough people think he is that the story of his grave there becomes a kind of truth that supersedes the actual circumstances of his death and burial. Death might happen at any point, but stories are always being created along the way, and have the potential to long outlast death. When Colin realizes that stories are the real way to the “mattering” he has been after his whole life, he also realizes that he must live life in order to make memories that can turn into stories. In the final scene of the novel, Colin has put down his notebook, in which he does math to try to predict his future, choosing instead to go out to lunch with his friends. The novel closes with Colin and Hassan, joined by Lindsey, using the Hearse to drive willingly into the unknown to find an unexplored lunch destination. Colin understands that eventually he will die, but he now feels that if he is to fulfill his potential before that time comes, he should make the most of the time he has. This new endeavor starts with the simple act of experiencing whatever the afternoon has in store.



### THE HOLE IN COLIN’S GUT

When Colin was young, his father brought home a book about a circle with a missing piece. Colin did not understand the book as a metaphor at the time, but after Katherine XIX breaks up with him, he begins thinking obsessively about the hole in his gut where he is missing a piece Katherine took away with her. Throughout the novel, Colin decides that the hole will not be filled by the return of Katherine—nor by the completion of a project such as his **Theorem** to predict the course of romantic relationships. Rather, Colin realizes, he needs to fill the hole with things that really matter to him.

The hole is a fixation for Colin, but it also allows him to begin crafting stories about his life. The idea that there is a hole in his gut gives him an affinity with the **Archduke Franz Ferdinand**, who was shot in the gut. Colin also finds significance in the name of the town Gutshot, which derives from the days when prizefighting was closely regulated and had to be done only with shots to the gut. Were Colin not to think about the hole in his gut symbolically, he might not have searched for meaning in Gutshot and at the supposed grave of the Archduke. Although there might not have been anything overtly significant to Colin’s life in either of these places, his determination to spend time there causes them to *become* significant to him. The hole in his gut and his search for his missing piece thus leads to his character growth and sense of fulfillment by the end of the novel.



### THE ARCHDUKE FRANZ FERDINAND

The Archduke Franz Ferdinand was a not particularly important or well-liked Austro-Hungarian aristocrat while he was alive, but his assassination in

1914 was used as justification by his relatives to start the conflict that would ultimately become World War I. Colin identifies with the Archduke because he was shot in the gut, and the wound must have felt the physical version of the emotional **hole** Colin locates in his own gut. It seems that Colin also finds significance in the figure of the Archduke because he died young, and was not particularly impressive to anyone while he was alive. Colin worries about the legacy he will leave, and he worries (although not explicitly) that if he is to achieve any kind of legacy, it might only be by dying young like the Archduke.

The town of Gutshot, Tennessee boasts that it holds the grave of the Archduke, and it is this grave that initially inspires Colin to stop in Gutshot while on his road trip with Hassan. The grave has an obelisk, which John Green himself has acknowledged appears to be a phallic symbol, representing that the Archduke’s identity as a man continues in his death. When Colin has been kicked in his own groin near the end of the novel, he anagrams the letters on the obelisk and realizes that it is not the Archduke at all who is buried there, but rather Lindsey’s great grandfather, whose name is an **anagram** of Franz Ferdinand. Dr. Dinzfar wanted his grave to be marked as that of the Archduke, and Hollis has recently decided to capitalize on tourists who want to see the grave. In this way, the story of the Archduke is distorted even further beyond the actual facts of his life. The Archduke thus represents for Colin not only the arbitrariness of death but also, by the end of the novel, the potential power of storytelling over historical events.



### ANAGRAMS

Colin, who is very good with language, is an expert at making anagrams. He can take almost any word or phrase, rearrange the letters, and come up with other words or phrases that use all the same letters. This talent gives him an edge at Scrabble the first time he plays it, with Hollis, Lindsey, and Hassan. It is also a good conversation starter; he even uses his anagramming skills to win over Katherine XIX. However, Colin interprets his skill with anagrams as a sign that he is never going to be a true genius. Making anagrams is a product of his childhood as a prodigy who could learn, memorize, and reproduce information rapidly. He feels that when he makes an anagram, he is just spitting back letters that were already there, in the same way that, in his mind, each Katherine he dates is a kind of copy of the same nine letters. In short, his skill with anagrams is a sign that he never does anything new or original. He can no longer be a child prodigy because his childhood is ending, and in order to become an adult genius, he would have to do or create something new and original. Every time he anagrams, he believes, he fails to create something new.

At the end of the novel, however, it is precisely Colin’s anagramming that allows him to realize that it is really Lindsey’s

great-grandfather, Dr. Fred N. Dinzanfar, who is buried in the **Archduke Franz Ferdinand's** grave in Gutshot. Colin loses his glasses during the climactic scene of the novel, when TOC is beating him up. The letters on the obelisk that marks the Archduke's grave dance before his eyes, and he realizes that they can be mixed up to form the name of Dr. Dinzanfar. This realization, which he brings up with Lindsey later on, leads Colin to several realizations. First, he realizes that historical events can be manipulated by people who want to tell alternative stories. Second, he realizes that Hollis has commercialized the alternative story about the Archduke being buried in Gutshot in order to bring in tourist revenue to avoid firing textile factory workers. By doing so, she is helping her community and keeping Gutshot's economy alive. Finally, Colin realizes that Hollis's anagrammatic storytelling about the Archduke has brought Colin himself to Gutshot, which has led to the new chapter of his life in which he is dating Lindsey and no longer hung up on Katherines. In this way, an anagram has been a creative force. In fact, Colin realizes that he can rearrange the pieces of his life however he wants, to become whoever he wants to be.



### “EUREKA” MOMENTS

As a child, Colin read a story about how Archimedes took a bath one day and discovered that volume could be measured by water displacement. When an object is placed in a body of water, the water displaces, meaning that its level rises in order to make room for the volume of the object that is now immersed in it. The volume of water that is displaced, Archimedes realized, is equal to the volume of the immersed object. According to the story, Archimedes jumped out of his bathtub and ran out naked on the street, crying “Eureka!”, which is ancient Greek for “I’ve got it!” Ever since reading this story, Colin has been determined to have a “Eureka” moment of his own, when he makes a great and enduring discovery. His mother promises that he will have one, but by the time the novel starts, Colin is not so sure.

Colin does have two Eureka moments in the novel. The first is when he first arrives in Gutshot. He trips on the way to the **Archduke Franz Ferdinand's** grave and hits his head on a rock. When he comes to and does not have his glasses, he realizes that his problem in relationships, like his problem with his eyes, is nearsightedness: he is always being dumped because he is bad at looking far ahead of himself not only in space, but also in time. Colin then determines to write a **Theorem** to predict the course of any relationship based on his past relationship experience. This, he feels, is a “Eureka” moment, because he is sure he has discovered a way to avoid future heartbreak.

Over the course of the novel, however, Colin learns that making a discovery takes more hard work than just a sudden stroke of inspiration and that, quite simply, his big discovery might be

wrong. He struggles to make the Theorem work for all the Katherines, but even once he does, it turns out not to work for his relationship with Lindsey. In the epilogue, Colin finally has his second Eureka moment, which is a revision of his first. Now, as he watches Lindsey and Hassan play poker, he realizes that just as in poker, past events can be modeled mathematically, but it is impossible to predict future hands. He realizes that he does not know what will happen in the future with regard to his romantic life, his legacy, or anything else. What he can do is create new narratives and new events that will eventually make the story of his life. In this way, Colin realizes that discovery is a process that usually does not happen instantaneously. Rather, he should think of his life as one long “Eureka” that will eventually, through revision, piece together into any number of discoveries about how the world works.



### THE THEOREM

One of the reasons Katherine XIX dumps Colin the night after their high school graduation is that he is preoccupied with the question of how to turn from a child prodigy into an adult genius. He is convinced that he needs to have a “**Eureka**” moment, making a new discovery to prove that he is as special as he has always been told. He believes that if he does not become a genius, he will not matter to the world. When Katherine breaks up with him, it only reinforces his feeling that he does not matter to anyone. His road trip with Hassan is intended to help Colin get over the depressive state he enters as a result, so Colin is extra hopeful that he will have a “Eureka” moment while on the trip. Indeed, he thinks he has one when he has the idea to create a **Theorem**, based on his past relationships, to predict the course of any relationship based on how likely each party is to be a “Dumper” or “Dumpee.” Colin works tirelessly on the Theorem throughout the novel, but struggles to make it work for every Katherine. Lindsey then helps him see that he needs it to account for a huge variety of variables that factor into any romantic relationship. Still, he cannot get it quite right. In particular, the Theorem seems to indicate that *he* broke up with Katherine III, which he knows to be false. Finally, at Hassan's urging, Colin calls Katherine III and discovers that he has revised his own memory: he did break up with her after all, and the Theorem has been correct the whole time. However, as Colin discovers when his relationship with Lindsey lasts longer than the Theorem predicts, it is not possible to model the course future relationships will take—only past relationships can be accounted for by the Theorem. The Theorem symbolizes Colin's determination to find meaning in his life's events; eventually, what it teaches him is that he has to abandon his obsession with mathematical precision, and instead accept randomness and uncertainty, to allow meaningful events to take place.



## QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Speak edition of *An Abundance of Katherines* published in 2012.

## Chapter 1 Quotes

☹️ Crying *adds* something: crying is you, plus tears. But the feeling Colin had was some horrible opposite of crying. It was you, minus something.

**Related Characters:** Katherine Carter (Katherine I/XIX), Colin Singleton

**Related Themes:**  

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 7

## Explanation and Analysis

Colin, lying on his bedroom floor, is unable to cry about his breakup with Katherine XIX, even though he is very upset about it. He seems to feel that crying would allow him to get in touch with his deepest emotions. Instead of giving rise to this catharsis, however, Colin feels that his breakup has taken something away from him. Although in the most basic sense the breakup has taken Katherine XIX from him, the fact that the narrator describes Colin's feeling as "you, minus something" instead of "you, minus someone" suggests that Colin already suspects he is missing something that cannot be fixed by the presence of a girlfriend in his life. Colin's recognition of this lack gives rise to his obsession with the "hole in his gut," which he tries to fill by going on a road trip.

## Chapter 2 Quotes

☹️ All I ever wanted was for her to love me and to do something meaningful with my life.

**Related Characters:** Colin Singleton (speaker), Katherine Carter (Katherine I/XIX), Hassan Harbish

**Related Themes:**     

**Page Number:** 9

## Explanation and Analysis

When Hassan comes to talk to Colin about the breakup

with Katherine XIX, Colin laments the breakup as a personal failing. He complains that in ten years, he will probably end up working in a cubical and being of no significance to anyone. This quote demonstrates that Colin's circumstances are indeed dire, but only because he misrecognizes the predicament in which he finds himself. He thinks that his life is a mess because he has failed to keep Katherine XIX's love and also to do anything meaningful with his life.

The compression of these two life goals into the same sentence, separated by no punctuation, demonstrates that the goals are of equal importance to Colin. Colin's inability to distinguish between the significance of his high school relationship and the significance of giving his life meaning shows how young and shortsighted he is: he is blind to the fact that should he live a long life, he will have many more opportunities for fulfilling relationships. For that matter, because of his youth, he will also have many more opportunities to do something meaningful with his life. Colin's problem, therefore, is not that he has failed to achieve his life goals, but rather that he fails to understand that he should be looking ahead to his long future instead of back to his short past.

☹️ Prodigies can very quickly learn what other people have already figured out; geniuses discover that which no one has ever previously discovered. Prodigies learn; geniuses do. The vast majority of child prodigies don't become adult geniuses. Colin was almost certain that he was among that unfortunate majority.

**Related Characters:** Mrs. Singleton / Colin's Mother, Mr. Singleton / Colin's Father, Colin Singleton

**Related Themes:**   

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 10

## Explanation and Analysis

Colin's parents and teachers have told him regularly, from a very young age, that he is a child prodigy. Colin has just graduated high school when the novel begins, which to him feels like the line between childhood and early adulthood; consequently, he feels he no longer has claim to the title of "child" prodigy. Colin thinks of "genius" as the natural successor to the child prodigy identifier. However, he has read about child prodigies and is aware that most of them

do not become remarkable adults, let alone geniuses. Colin feels enormous pressure to have a “Eureka” moment, which he thinks he can use to justify calling himself a genius. Although his mother has told him he will have a “Eureka” moment, Colin is impatient to have one and feels that if he has not had one yet, he never will.

Colin’s anxiety over distinguishing himself as a genius demonstrates first that he feels he is running out of time to do so, and second, that he is in the midst of a crisis over how to identify himself at all. Were Colin to have a better sense of who he is independent of a yet-to-come “Eureka” moment, he might not be so desperate to distinguish himself as a genius. However, because he has always gone along with the labels his parents have ascribed to him, he has fixated on the label of “genius” and is more determined to fulfill that title than to simply be himself.

Colin will discover over the course of the novel that he will not be happy as long as he is trying to live out a pre-determined narrative instead of allowing his life to unfold in unpredictable ways. Part of this discovery is the acceptance that Colin might not make an immediate transition from child prodigy to genius. He may eventually distinguish himself as a genius, but more important than this transition is his transition from child prodigy to the person as he actually is.

## Chapter 3 Quotes

“Driving was a kind of thinking, the only kind he could then tolerate. But still the thought lurked out there, just beyond the reach of his headlights: he’d been dumped. By a girl named Katherine. For the nineteenth time.”

**Related Characters:** Katherine Carter (Katherine I/XIX), Hassan Harbish, Colin Singleton

**Related Themes:**   

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 15

### Explanation and Analysis

The first night of Colin and Hassan’s road trip, Hassan sleeps while Colin drives “Satan’s Hearse” (the car). Part of the reason for the road trip is to help Colin stop dwelling on his breakup with Katherine XIX. Driving occupies enough of Colin’s brain space that he gets a brief reprieve from thinking about the breakup; however, as the quote

demonstrates, the distraction is only a kind of procrastination. Once Colin stops driving, he will have to deal with his feelings surrounding the breakup.

The idea that the thought of the breakup lurks beyond the headlights of Satan’s Hearse, however, signifies more than Colin’s deferral of his feelings. First, Colin is driving towards the thought: while driving is a distraction, the thought and everything it means to Colin is the eventual destination of the road trip. What’s more, Colin is traveling towards this destination in a car he calls Satan’s Hearse. While the name of the car is a joke, there is also a way in which Colin seems to think he is driving towards his own funeral, which will end in hell. Dealing with his breakup represents to Colin the unhappy but inevitable resolution of his life’s journey.

On the other hand, Colin is driving in the dark and cannot quite see what lies beyond the headlights: his vision of what is to come is dark, but only because it is obscured to him. Just as the sun will eventually rise to illuminate the road up ahead, Colin may in fact find that the future is brighter than he thought.

“You’re a very special person. Colin would hear this a lot, and yet – somehow – he could never hear it enough.”

**Related Characters:** Mrs. Singleton / Colin’s Mother, Mr. Singleton / Colin’s Father, Colin Singleton

**Related Themes:**   

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 18

### Explanation and Analysis

In the midst of a flashback about how Colin first earned the moniker of child prodigy, he recalls being tested by a psychologist and how she called him special. From then on, Colin’s parents (especially his mother) frequently insisted that Colin was special.

While Colin associates his depression with his romantic life, the narrator represents Colin’s diagnosis as “special” as “The Beginning of the Beginning” of his story. Were Colin never to have been told that he is unique, he would never have felt the enormous pressure he feels to distinguish himself as such. The fact that Colin has frequently heard that he is special but can never hear it enough suggests that the word “special” is not a compliment, but merely a salve on a never-healing wound first inflicted by the psychologist’s

insistence. In this way, the word “special” and the idea that Colin is extraordinary seem to be deeply intertwined with Colin’s notion that he has an unhealable hole in his gut.

☞ His single consolation was that one day, he would matter. He’d be famous. And none of them ever would. That’s why, his mom said, they made fun of him in the first place. “They’re just jealous,” she said. But Colin knew better. They weren’t jealous. He just wasn’t likable. Sometimes it’s that simple.

**Related Characters:** Mrs. Singleton / Colin’s Mother, Colin Singleton

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 20

### Explanation and Analysis

During Colin’s flashback to “The Beginning of the Beginning,” he recalls being bullied at school. Colin’s mother, who often calls him “special,” insists that the other kids are taking out their jealousy on Colin by beating him up. Colin thinks he is wiser than his mother in assuming that the other kids are not jealous—they simply don’t want to be his friend.

On the surface, Colin’s assumption seems to downplay the idea that he is more special than his peers. However, he still feels he is destined for greatness and fame that the others will never achieve. In fact, he does not even think any of his classmates will ever “matter” at all. His insistence that he is not likable, then, is not only a manifestation of Colin’s poor self-esteem, but also a manifestation of his determination that he is above friendship and association with ordinary people.

## Chapter 5 Quotes

☞ Shit, Colin made a funny. This place is like magic for you. Shame about how we’re gonna die here, though. I mean, seriously. An Arab and a half-Jew enter a store in Tennessee. It’s the beginning of a joke, and the punchline is “sodomy.”

**Related Characters:** Hassan Harbish (speaker), Colin Singleton

**Related Themes:** 

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 30

### Explanation and Analysis

Colin sees a sign for the grave of the Archduke Franz Ferdinand and insists on pulling off the highway to find it. As a waitress at Hardee’s tells them, the grave is in the extremely rural town of Gutshot, Tennessee. Hassan is on board with stopping until he realizes just how rural Gutshot is. Hassan is still joking in this scene, but he seems half-serious about his concern over his and Colin’s safety in Gutshot. Although Hassan mentions that Colin might be at risk because he is Jewish, the fact that Colin has just made his first joke of the novel demonstrates that he does not feel the same sense of unease that Hassan does.

Hassan’s concern is due to the fact that he is visibly Arab in a part of the country that he assumes is highly sheltered from parts of the world that are not dominantly white and Christian. Hassan’s reference to “sodomy” shows that he thinks the people he is about to meet will have archaic homophobic views rooted in strict conservative readings of the Bible (or an even darker joke about himself getting arrested and assaulted in jail). While Hassan has some reason to be afraid, he is about to find out that his urban, “unsheltered” existence may have imbued him with unfair prejudice against people who live outside the city. In conjunction with the friendships Hassan forms in Gutshot, this scene demonstrates that Hassan no more than Colin realizes the extent to which he has room to grow and change his views of the world.

☞ He thought of Chicago, where you can go days without ever once stepping on a single patch of actual earth. That well-paved world appealed to him, and he missed it as his feet fell on uneven clumps of hardened dirt that threatened to twist his ankles.

**Related Characters:** Lindsey Lee Wells, Hassan Harbish, Colin Singleton

**Related Themes:**   

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 32

### Explanation and Analysis

Soon after arriving in Gutshot, Colin and Hassan follow Lindsey through a field to the Archduke Franz Ferdinand’s

grave. Colin is looking forward to seeing the Archduke's grave, but he does not think very much of Gutshot otherwise. Lindsey, who was reading *Celebrity Living* at the counter of the town convenience store before Colin and Hassan requested a tour, strikes him as uninteresting, uneducated, and unintelligent. His assumptions about her are clearly informed by the fact that she lives in a rural town. This quote, in which the narrator gives the reader a glimpse into Colin's thoughts, demonstrates that the rural environment is physically disconcerting to him.

Although Colin thinks longingly of paved streets, the idea that the ground is upsetting Colin's balance suggests that the road trip is doing exactly what it is supposed to do: shaking up Colin's sense of the way the world works. Further, the fact that Lindsey is the one leading him across this rough ground foreshadows that she will be instrumental to his character development. The tension between Colin's assumptions about Lindsey and the idea that she is leading Colin across new ground suggests that his first impressions of people, including himself, might not be fair or accurate.

☞ What is the point of being alive if you don't at least try to do something important?

**Related Characters:** Hassan Harbish, Colin Singleton

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 33

### Explanation and Analysis

Although the narrator and not Colin asks this question, the narrator is paraphrasing Colin's thought in reaction to Hassan's statement that he does not feel a great need to go to college because he can get by on the housing and food provided by his dad's hard work. Colin cannot wrap his head around Hassan's apathy. Colin's question demonstrates that he overvalues fame and distinction to the point that he does not think life is worth living at all if he is not at least striving for these goals. Hassan's shortsighted lack of ambition is not necessarily to be admired. However, Colin's disparagement of his friend's attitude demonstrates his own shortsightedness, because were Colin to care a little less about long-term achievement, he, like Hassan, might be more content with his life in the present.

☞ He could just never see anything coming, and as he lay on the solid, uneven ground with Hassan pressing too hard on his forehead, Colin Singleton's distance from his glasses made him realize the problem: myopia. He was nearsighted. The future lay before him, inevitable but invisible.

**Related Characters:** Lindsey Lee Wells, Katherine Carter (Katherine I/XIX), Hassan Harbish, Colin Singleton

**Related Themes:**    

**Related Symbols:**  

**Page Number:** 35

### Explanation and Analysis

Colin trips and falls in the field on the way to the Archduke's grave, and as Hassan helps him find his glasses, Colin draws a connection between his nearsightedness and his inability to see breakups coming. This, he thinks, is the reason his breakup with Katherine XIX has been so upsetting: he did not see it coming. This realization leads him to his first "Eureka" moment, which is the notion for the mathematical Theorem to predict the course of any relationship.

Colin defines a "Eureka" moment as the mark of a genius. The fact that Colin thinks of his idea for predicting the future of a relationship as a "Eureka" moment demonstrates that he thinks of this as a watershed moment that will define his future as that of a genius, not just a washed-up child prodigy. It is thus not just Colin's relationships that he wants to predict, but also his own intellectual future. The future he craves, as a genius, is invisible in the sense that Colin cannot see a clear path to attaining it, but he also thinks that he will inevitably become a genius.

Colin's false logic shows that he thinks of himself as a passive agent in his own life, which he believes will unfold in a specific way regardless of his actions in the meantime. Colin also thinks of the Theorem to predict romantic relationships just after meeting Lindsey, who he finds surprisingly attractive. In this way, the narrator begins to hint that Colin might be wrong about the inevitability of his future.

☞ She tried to get out as quickly and painlessly as possible, but after she begged curfew, he began to cry. She held his head against her collarbone. And even though he felt pitiful and ridiculous, he didn't want it to end, because he knew the absence of her would hurt more than any breakup ever could.

**Related Characters:** Katherine Carter (Katherine I/XIX),

Colin Singleton

**Related Themes:**   

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 40

### Explanation and Analysis

As Colin recalls the night Katherine XIX broke up with him, he thinks about how he refused to let her leave. He lay with her, thinking about how she would leave behind a hole in his gut. Although Katherine XIX had not physically left yet, Colin already thought of her as gone because she had broken up with him. However, he thinks of her absence as something more painful than a breakup: it is not simply Katherine XIX who is leaving Colin but, furthermore, his sense of their relationship.

This quote demonstrates that Colin relies on the idea of Katherine XIX as his girlfriend in order to feel like a complete person without a hole in his gut. His reflectiveness reveals that he is beginning to realize his need to come into his own as an individual, but he is still looking back to the past for answers about how to become self-actualized, rather than taking charge of his present and future.

reflects mathematical principles of prediction; after all, it is entirely possible (and a regular practice of mathematicians who do things like predicting election outcomes) to make predictions about the future based on the past. However, he does not say he wants to “predict” the future, but rather that he wants to “see into the future.” This language sounds more like Colin wants to do magic than math.

The tension between mathematical logic and imaginative illogic shows that Colin, while incredibly intelligent, has a naïve understanding of how systems of logic such as math apply to the world. He might make predictions about the future, but he cannot truly see what is to come. The notion that he can underscores that Colin, who always thinks his time is running out, is very young and has a lot to learn. The fact that Colin is going to try to predict the future also foreshadows a narrative that will prove him right or, more likely to contribute to his character growth, wrong.

☛ [I]t is important to know things because it makes you special and you can read books that normal people cannot read, such as Ovid’s *Metamorphosis*, which is in Latin.

**Related Characters:** Colin Singleton (speaker), Katherine Carter (Katherine I/XIX)

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 46

### Explanation and Analysis

Colin recalls how Katherine I became his first girlfriend in third grade. The daughter of his tutor, she was at his house one night while he was studying Latin. Before asking him to be her boyfriend, she began to ask him a barrage of questions about why he was studying so hard. This quote, which is the response Colin remembers offering, shows the basic logic behind Colin’s perpetual hard work. He does not study because he wants to learn the material, but rather because he wants to distinguish himself as “special” and extraordinary.

Katherine I asked Colin to be her boyfriend following this early articulation of his desire to be special; romance, for him, is thus inextricable from achievement. His ambition seemed to win over his first girlfriend, and having a girlfriend from that point on became one of the accomplishments Colin sought. Colin has cornered himself into loneliness because he determined from a young age that more than being happy or passionate about what he does, he wants to be better than everyone around him.

## Chapter 6 Quotes

☛ [Y]ou can see into the future if you have a basic understanding of how people are likely to act.

**Related Characters:** Colin Singleton (speaker), Lindsey Lee Wells, Hassan Harbish

**Related Themes:**    

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 43

### Explanation and Analysis

Colin explains to Hassan and Lindsey his idea for a mathematical Theorem to predict the course of any romantic relationship. Hassan and Lindsey are skeptical, but Colin insists that people are predictable enough that it is possible to see into the future with only a limited understanding of the way involved parties have acted in the past.

Colin’s phrasing in this quote, “You can see into the future,”

Colin must realize that until he can love someone for who that person is rather than for who that person makes *him*, he will not be able to have a successful relationship.

## Chapter 7 Quotes

☛ Like it or not, Colin thought, *road trips have destinations*.

**Related Characters:** Hollis Wells, Hassan Harbish, Colin Singleton

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 64

### Explanation and Analysis

Over dinner at Hollis's house, Hollis tells Colin and Hassan that they would be perfect for a project she wants to work on over the summer. She asks them if they will stay at her house for the summer and work for her. Colin is not sure at first, because he has never had a real job before, but Hassan convinces him that it would be nice to make some money, and Colin cannot think of a good reason not to stay.

Colin's justification to himself for staying with Hollis demonstrates that while he is still thinking about where he will end up instead of how he will get there, he is beginning to think of the road trip as a metaphor for his life as a journey. He does not know what exactly to expect from a summer in Gutshot, working for Hollis, but he is starting to think of the unknown as part of the point of life.

☛ No longer a prodigy, not yet a genius – but still a smartypants.

**Related Characters:** Hassan Harbish, Hollis Wells, Lindsey Lee Wells, Colin Singleton

**Related Themes:**    

**Page Number:** 65

### Explanation and Analysis

After dinner the first night at Hollis's house, Hollis suggests that she, Colin, Hassan, and Lindsey should play Scrabble. Lindsey is surprised to hear that Colin, a genius, has never played Scrabble. Colin insists that he is not a genius, so Lindsey concedes to call him a "smartypants." Colin likes the word, and feels that it accurately describes his position between "prodigy" and "genius."

In this moment, Colin first manages to define himself positively as a "smartypants" instead of negatively as *not* a "prodigy," *not* a "genius," and *not* someone's boyfriend. The fact that Lindsey introduces him to the word demonstrates that already, she is playing an instrumental role in his growth as an individual. However, he does not rely on her in the way he relied on Katherine XIX as a marker of his romantic achievement. Rather, she helps him see something about himself that feels true regardless of his stage in life or his relationship to others.

## Chapter 8 Quotes

☛ Authors never included the whole story; they just got to the point. Colin thought the truth should matter as much as the point, and he figured that was why he couldn't tell good stories.

**Related Characters:** Colin Singleton

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 70

### Explanation and Analysis

Colin wakes up the first morning in Gutshot to the sound of a rooster crowing. He is surprised to find that the rooster actually crows at dawn (or, to be accurate, before dawn) because he always assumed authors and filmmakers simply used the rooster as a plot device. It bothers him that authors pay less attention to the truth than to the point of any given stories, because he thinks it is important to recall events accurately.

Colin's surprise that the rooster actually crows demonstrates that he might not have as clear a picture of the truth as he has always assumed. He thinks that his difficulty with telling stories is because he places greater value on the truth than good storytellers do, but evidently the truth might be vaster than Colin realizes. This realization is the beginning of Colin's acceptance that a story has multiple perspectives, and that other people might see aspects of the truth that he has missed.

## Chapter 10 Quotes

☛ The missing piece in his stomach hurt so much – and eventually he stopped thinking about the Theorem and wondered only how something that isn't there can hurt you.

**Related Characters:** Hassan Harbish, Colin Singleton

**Related Themes:**    

**Related Symbols:**  

**Page Number:** 101

### Explanation and Analysis

As Colin and Hassan interview employees at the Gutshot textile factory, Hassan asks most of the questions and leaves Colin's mind free to wander. He dwells on the Theorem and worries that he does not have the requisite genius to make it work to describe his relationships with all the Katherines. He misses Katherine XIX even more than he has since Hassan found him lying face down in his bedroom.

Colin's thoughts of the Theorem give way to thoughts of Katherine XIX, but eventually even those thoughts give way to his dwelling on the hole in his gut. Colin thinks of the missing piece as "something" rather than "someone," demonstrating that he thinks of the missing piece as something in excess of Katherine XIX herself. While listening to all the factory employees narrate their life stories, Colin realizes that he needs to find a part of himself that is missing before he can contentedly tell the story of his own life.

## Chapter 13 Quotes

☞☞ You're not boring. You've got to stop saying that, or people will start believing you.

**Related Characters:** Lindsey Lee Wells (speaker), Colin Singleton

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 139

### Explanation and Analysis

When Colin promises to go on a wild hog hunt with some of the local Gutshot teenagers, Lindsey tells him she is taking him out to dinner. They get food from a drive-thru window, but Lindsey then takes Colin out to a field. She eventually reveals that she is going to teach him how to shoot a gun so that he will not make a fool of himself in front of everyone. However, first they discuss their families. Colin tells Lindsey that his family is boring, and this quote is her response.

Colin is obsessed with demonstrating that he is special, but as Lindsey points out, his obsession has led him to think of himself and describe himself as a failure in this endeavor. Consequently, he seems like a boring person. Lindsey knows

that Colin is in fact an interesting person. Her warning that people will start believing Colin if he keeps saying that he is boring serves doubly as a revelation to Colin: by describing himself in a certain way, he might take control over the stories people tell about him. It is thus partly because of Lindsey's advice that Colin discovers his ability to change his future by changing the way he talks about and thinks about himself.

## Chapter 19 Quotes

☞☞ "It's funny, what people will do to be remembered."

"Well, or to be forgotten, because someday no one will know who's really buried there. Already a lot of kids at school and stuff think the Archduke is really buried here, and I like that. I like knowing one story and having everyone else know another. That's why those tapes we made are going to be so great one day, because they'll tell stories that time has swallowed up or distorted or whatever."

**Related Characters:** Lindsey Lee Wells, Colin Singleton (speaker), Hollis Wells

**Related Themes:**    

**Page Number:** 201-2

### Explanation and Analysis

After the fight at the cemetery and after Hollis has revealed that the textile factory is doing poorly, Colin follows Lindsey to the secret hideout where they almost kissed once before. There, Colin tells Lindsey that he thinks he has realized that it is not the Archduke Franz Ferdinand at all in the grave marked with his name—instead Lindsey's great grandfather, whose name is an anagram of Franz Ferdinand, is the actual occupant of the grave. Lindsey explains that her great grandfather's last wish was for his grave to be incorrectly marked. In this exchange, Colin and Lindsey speculate as to the motivations of Lindsey's grandfather in having his grave mismarked.

The exchange shows first that Colin is coming around to seeing how absurd it can be to go to great lengths simply to leave a legacy. Lindsey's response further complicates the idea of a legacy. Colin, who has always been more invested in recounting facts than in telling well-crafted stories, has always wanted to do something objectively remarkable so as to leave behind an undisputed legacy. However, as Lindsey's comment suggests, that undisputed legacy would only tell one story about Colin, and would leave out all the

small details that truly make up who he is. The tapes they have been collecting, full of autobiographical stories from Gutshot factory workers, might tell partial stories or even contain factual errors, but they are in some ways more accurate and complete than a broader, more objective narrative could be.

John Green's interest in the power of collective, private biography to tell broader, public stories connects this novel to the work of the first major literary critic in English, Samuel Johnson. In the early 1750s, Johnson produced essays about fiction in a periodical called *The Rambler*. One essay, *Rambler* No. 60, treats the genre of biography as a kind of fiction that has the power to teach readers virtuous behavior by providing them with examples of people, with whom they might identify, who behave honorably or dishonorably. For Johnson, it is of the utmost importance that the biographer pay attention to the private details of the subject's life rather than simply cataloging publicly known events. In this way, the reader can develop a rapport with the character of the biographical subject.

Green does not directly invoke Johnson, but by framing biography and autobiography as a kind of semi-fiction, he makes Colin's struggle to tell good stories about himself part of a larger literary debate. By disengaging from his obsession with being a striking public figure, and by starting to think about the greater implications of stringing together events into stories, Colin achieves his lifelong desire to be part of something greater than himself.

☝ And the moral of the story is that you don't remember what happened. What you remember becomes what happened. And the second moral of the story, if a story can have multiple morals, is that Dumpers are not inherently worse than Dumpees—breaking up isn't something that gets done to you; it's something that happens with you.

**Related Characters:** Colin Singleton (speaker), Katherine Mutsenberger (Katherine III), Katherine Carter (Katherine I/XIX), Lindsey Lee Wells

**Related Themes:**   

**Related Symbols:**  

**Page Number:** 207-8

### Explanation and Analysis

Colin has just told Lindsey the story of all his relationships with the nineteen Katherines. He realized some time ago

that he has misremembered some of the facts. For instance, Katherine III did not break up with him, as he always thought. Rather, he broke up with her. There are also several revisions in Colin's story to things he has previously stated. For example, he now says that his first kiss was with Katherine V, when in the past he has remembered Katherine I as the first girl he kissed.

Colin's revisions, combined with his willingness to concede there have been revisions in his memory, show a shift in how he thinks about stories in relation to facts. Whereas in the past he has thought representing facts was the most important part of storytelling, he now recognizes that stories have the power to essentially alter reality by altering perceptions of reality. By telling himself that he was a Dumpee, he became one. Likewise, he has the power to tell himself that he is someone else entirely—and to be convincing enough that he actually becomes that other self.

Additionally, Colin's realization that breakups happen *with* you and not *to* you demonstrates that he feels greater agency in his life than he did at the beginning of the novel. He has altered his perception of relationships in such a way that allows him to be a complete person with agency both in and out of a romantic relationship. While Colin has been attempting through most of the novel to control his romantic destiny with the Theorem, it is surrendering to the idea that romance is unpredictable that seems to be Colin's true "Eureka" moment.

## Epilogue Quotes

☝ As the staggered lines rushed past him, he thought about the space between what we remember and what happened, the space between what we predict and what will happen. And in that space, Colin thought, there was room enough to reinvent himself – room enough to make himself into something other than a prodigy, to remake his story better and different – room enough to be reborn again and again....There was room enough to be anyone – anyone except whom he'd already been, for if Colin had learned one thing from Gutshot, it's that you can't stop the future from coming. And for the first time in his life, he smiled thinking about the always-coming infinite future stretching out before him.

**Related Characters:** Hassan Harbish, Lindsey Lee Wells, Colin Singleton

**Related Themes:**     

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 214-15

### Explanation and Analysis

Colin, Lindsey, and Hassan are driving to lunch at Hardee's when Hassan and Lindsey suggest driving onwards out of town to a different restaurant for a change of menu and scenery. Colin, who has just accepted that he can't predict his future with Lindsey, drives Satan's Hearse onto the interstate. Whereas in the past he has thought obsessively about what is just beyond his headlights while he drives, Colin now thinks about the road as it passes beneath his tires. This shift signals a shift in Colin's attitude about his life and the future. Instead of worrying constantly about the future and what he will have accomplished, Colin now feels more connected to his life as it is happening in the present.

This is not to say that Colin does not look forward to the future. However, instead of thinking about his life as a battle against time, he now accepts that the future will come and that it is what he does in the meantime that will define his life then. He still has a sense that he is aging, and still drives Satan's Hearse as if toward his own eventual funeral. Now, though, he uses the sense of his mortality to motivate himself to seize the day. Rather than do everything because it will help him achieve a rigid version of his future self, he looks forward to crafting his future self by making some choices based on what he wants in the present.

●● Colin's skin was alive with the feeling of connection to everyone in that car and everyone not in it. And he was feeling not-unique in the very best possible way.

**Related Characters:** Katherine Carter (Katherine I/XIX),

Hassan Harbish, Lindsey Lee Wells, Colin Singleton

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 215

### Explanation and Analysis

Colin's devastation in the wake of his breakup with Katherine XIX was in large part due to his anxiety about being "special." His childhood has been dedicated to learning vast quantities of information so that he might distinguish himself from his peers. His need to feel unique runs deep, because he used to comfort himself when he was bullied by reassuring himself that one day, he would be famous and "matter" when none of his bullies ever would.

Colin's need to feel special, however, has led to turmoil in many of his relationships. For example, Katherine XIX broke up with him because she felt more like a prop for his image of excellence than his actual girlfriend. Hassan, too, has confronted Colin about the feeling that he is never quite as good or quite as important as Colin. The fact that Colin now feels connected to Hassan, Lindsey, and everyone outside the car signals a huge change in his attitude toward his position in the world. He no longer wants to be special, but rather wants to be a part of a community.

Additionally, the word "connection" is significant because Colin has reflected, in the past, that he thinks his brain is special because it rapidly forms connections among seemingly unrelated things. Community thus begins to give him the same sense of fulfillment as his intelligence, the very thing that he has always thought of as his marker of distinction. Colin ends the novel feeling assured enough in his sense of self that his confidence is bolstered rather than threatened by community.



## SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

## CHAPTER 1

The novel begins the morning after “noted child prodigy Colin Singleton” has graduated high school and been dumped for the nineteenth time by a girl named Katherine. Colin takes a bath and notices that he is too big for the bathtub. He feels like an adult pretending to be a kid. Colin reflects on a book he read when he was four about Archimedes, who shouted “Eureka” and ran through the streets when he discovered the phenomenon of water displacement. At the time, Colin asked his mother if he would ever have a **“Eureka” moment**. She assured him he would. The narrator notes, “But mothers lie. It’s in the job description.”

Back in the present, Colin is too depressed to cry. He gets out of the bath and finds his parents sitting on his bed. Colin hopes that they are there to tell him Katherine XIX has called to ask for him to come back to her. He is a pessimistic person but optimistic when it comes to Katherines. “He always felt they would come back to him,” the narrator states.

Colin finds out that Katherine XIX has called, but only to report that she is worried about him. Colin’s parents hug him and ask him what happened. He tells them Katherine got tired of him. He feels that he will blow up, literally, if his parents don’t leave him alone. Colin’s father immediately follows up by saying that they need to assess Colin’s options for how to most productively spend his summer now that his time is freed up. His first suggestion is a summer class at Northwestern.

Colin asks for a day before discussing plans. His mother tells him that of course he can have a day and reassures him that he is “so so special.” Colin promptly goes to the bathroom and pukes. Thereafter, his parents finally leave him alone, and he spends the next fourteen hours going through his yearbook and thinking about how none of the people who signed it truly know or care about him.

*Colin’s graduation from high school marks a shift from childhood and the life he has always known to adulthood, where, sinking into the bathtub at his parents’ house, he feels out of place. Even Colin’s high school relationship has ended. Colin takes solace in the bathtub, which reminds him of childhood memories, and in his mother’s reassurance that he is a child prodigy destined for greatness. However, as the narrator notes, his mother’s words might have more to do with her love for her child than with any real greatness on Colin’s part.*



*Although Colin feels like he should be an adult because he has graduated high school, his relationship with his parents remains one in which they confront him in his bedroom and in which he hopes for their comfort. The way Colin talks about “Katherines” and the fact that Katherine XIX has a number after her name suggests that he has dated many women named Katherine.*



*Colin’s parents want to be supportive, but his father in particular struggles to be supportive in the way Colin requests. Even though Colin explicitly states that he needs to be alone, his father begins encouraging his son to take summer classes. Colin’s father apparently has a vision of what his son can and should do with his life—a vision that Colin must contend with.*



*That Colin vomits immediately after his mother tells him he is “special” shows that he is anxious about the moniker to the point of physical illness. There is a contrast between his mother, who sees him as special, and Colin’s yearbook signers, who represent, for Colin, the rest of the world, and who barely even register his existence.*



The signature Colin pays greatest attention to over the course of the fourteen hours is the one from Katherine XIX. She signed the note, “yrs forever, K-a-t-h-e-r-i-n-e.” After staring at it a while, Colin decides the bed is “too comfortable for his state of mind” and moves to the floor. There, he makes **anagrams** of “yrs forever,” coming up with “sorry fever.” He dwells on this phrase and how it describes his current state. He feels an aching behind his solar plexus and is unable to cry because, “Crying *adds* something: crying is you, plus tears.” Colin feels instead that he is lacking something. This lack hurts more than any of the many times he has been beaten up.

*Katherine XIX is one in a series of nineteen Katherines Colin has dated, but she occupies a huge amount of emotional space in his brain. Colin’s desire to make his body as uncomfortable as his mind shows that he wants his sorrow to be more real and tangible. Although Colin feels that Katherine XIX has taken a piece away from him, Colin’s feeling that he is lacking “something” suggests that he already thinks he might be missing something more complicated and intangible than Katherine XIX herself.*



## CHAPTER 2

A little after 10:00 p.m., Colin’s brooding is interrupted when his friend Hassan Harbish enters Colin’s room without knocking. Hassan calls Colin a “sitzpinkler,” which the narrator explains in a footnote is a German word for “a man who sits when he pees” and also German slang for “wimp.” Hassan insists on peeing before comforting Colin and yells about the terrible smell in the bathroom. Colin realizes that he never flushed after vomiting.

*Hassan refuses to indulge Colin’s desire to be alone. From his first appearance, Hassan serves to interrupt Colin’s melancholy and self-aggrandizing moods by reminding him that he is just a human—and a teenager, no less—who pees, vomits, and laughs at low-brow jokes.*



Hassan returns and kicks Colin, who is still lying on the floor. Hassan says he had to hold his nose with both hands in the bathroom, so “Thunderstick” (Hassan’s name throughout the novel for his penis) was “swinging freely” and may have missed the toilet. He is concerned about the fact that Colin doesn’t laugh at his Thunderstick joke, and that Colin somehow forgot to flush his own vomit.

*Hassan continues to make crude jokes that rely on the body and its functions. His concern over Colin’s lack of reaction to his joke demonstrates that Hassan habitually serves as the comic relief in his friend’s life. It also confirms that Colin, whom Hassan knows better than the reader, really is experiencing a moment of unusually great sadness.*



Colin says he wants to die. “All I ever wanted was for her to love me and to do something meaningful with my life. And look. I mean, look,” he says. Hassan says he doesn’t like how Colin looks or smells. Colin goes on a rant about how in ten years, he will probably work in a cubicle and have no Katherine and nothing to show for his life. Hassan tells him that he needs to believe in God because Hassan doesn’t even expect to have a cube, but he’s still happy.

*Colin fails to see that he has his whole life ahead of him to do something meaningful. In fact, he sees the life ahead of him as a kind of hellish trap he has set for himself by not achieving more early on in life. Colin places his high school girlfriend’s love on par with the rest of his life’s ambition, demonstrating that his investment in the relationship might be blown out of proportion.*



Colin sighs. The narrator states that although Hassan is “not that religious,” he often tries to convert Colin as a joke. Colin responds that faith is a good idea, and that he would also like to believe “that I could fly into outer space on the fluffy backs of giant penguins and screw Katherine XIX in zero gravity.” In response to Hassan’s insistence that Colin needs God, Colin mutters that Hassan, who is at the end of a gap-year after high school and has been admitted to Loyola University in Chicago, needs college. Hassan tells Colin to stop deflecting. Colin tells his friend to stop trying to convert him. Hassan turns the tension into laughter by sitting on Colin, facetiously yelling religious proclamations.

After climbing off Colin, Hassan turns serious and asks his friend what the problem is. Colin says the problem is that Katherine XIX dumped him, meaning that he is “alone again,” and a failure. He describes himself as, “Formerly the boyfriend of Katherine XIX. Formerly a prodigy. Formerly full of potential. Currently full of shit.” Colin explains to Hassan that while prodigies learn quickly, geniuses discover and do new things. Colin is certain that he has been one of the many child prodigies who do not become adult geniuses.

Hassan wants to know if the problem is the genius thing or the Katherine XIX thing. Colin answers, “I just love her so much,” but internally, as the narrator reflects, he is unable to completely distinguish between the two problems. He doesn’t feel special the way he has always been told he is. He feels that his not mattering to Katherine is indicative of how he doesn’t matter to the world either.

Hassan tells Colin that the genius thing is “nothing” but a desire to be famous. When Colin protests that he wants to matter, Hassan tells him to stop whining and get up. He tells Colin, “Kafir, you have a very complicated problem with a very simple solution.”

### CHAPTER 3

Colin and Hassan are sitting in the Singletons’ living room, telling Colin’s parents that they are going to take a road trip. Colin is already packed. Colin’s parents protest, and his father tells him that a road trip seems like “quitting” his intellectual journey and abandoning his potential. Colin says he thinks he might have already wasted it.

*Hassan may not be “that religious,” but his religion is important enough to him that he sometimes brings it up with Colin. Colin’s flippant rejection of Hassan’s religion, and his subsequent insistence that Hassan needs to go to college, demonstrate not only Colin’s belief that the individual (not God) is in charge of his or her own future, but also that Colin cannot step outside his own limited worldview to acknowledge that religion may serve an important role in Hassan’s life.*



*Hassan is a jokester and does not always command Colin’s respect, but he is nonetheless a friend with whom Colin feels comfortable speaking. Colin’s insistence that he is alone demonstrates that he emphasizes the importance of romance to the point that he fails to recognize his best friend as a kind of companion. Colin’s insistence that none of his identifiers fit anymore shows that he conflates his identity with the transient things in his life, such as girlfriends who come and go. Colin thinks he is “full of shit” when really, he simply has yet to identify who he is underneath all his temporary identifiers.*



*Again, Colin inflates the importance of his high school relationship to the point that it is inseparable from the rest of his lifelong goals. He feels old but betrays his youth by failing to see that he will have plenty of opportunity for more mature romance in his life.*



*Hassan may not be as accomplished or ambitious as Colin, but he is in many senses wiser and more mature in his ability to see that becoming a “genius” will not make Colin truly happy. By calling Colin Kafir, an Arabic term meaning “unbeliever,” Hassan points to Colin’s failure to believe in himself.*



*Colin’s father again puts pressure on Colin to conform to the life path he has laid out for him. That path culminates in a nebulous realization of Colin’s potential. Colin, who despite his high achievement feels that this realization is always just out of reach, abandons his father’s map for an unmapped road trip with Hassan.*



Colin has never disappointed his parents before by rebelling in any of the other stereotypical teenage ways. The narrator suspects that either this or a desire for a few weeks alone with one another is what leads Colin's parents to cave within five minutes of Colin's request to take a road trip. "Five minutes after acknowledging his wasted potential," the narrator writes, "Colin Singleton was behind the wheel of his lengthy gray Oldsmobile known as **Satan's Hearse**."

Colin and Hassan now have to convince Hassan's parents to let him go on the road trip. Hassan refuses to lie to his own mother but says someone else could lie to her. The duo drives to Hassan's house, where Colin dishonestly tells Mrs. Harbish in Arabic that they are taking a road trip so that Hassan can teach him how to avoid depressing breakups by not dating. Colin then tells Mr. Harbish that he is going to help Hassan get a job. Hassan's parents finally consent, hoping Colin will be a positive influence on their son and get him to stop watching *Judge Judy* as he has been doing all year.

Late at night, Hassan is sleeping in the passenger seat while Colin drives on the highway. Driving is just distracting enough that it helps him ignore the gnawing **hole in his belly**. He also distracts himself by thinking of other holes in stomachs. In particular, he thinks of the **Archduke Franz Ferdinand**, whose assassination led to World War I. Still, Colin keeps coming back to the thought of his recent breakup, lurking "just beyond the reach of his headlights."

The narrator explains that everyone has a romantic type, and Colin's type is girls named Katherine (spelled exactly this way). All nineteen girls he has dated have been named Katherine, and all have dumped him. Colin thinks that at heart, everyone is either a Dumper or Dumpee. The narrator provides a graph of this paradigm in a footnote. Colin considers himself a Dumpee. His pessimistic view is that romance always ends in either breakup, divorce, or death, but he nonetheless felt that Katherine XIX would be different. Colin is frustrated with himself that he can't get over it, but he can't identify what "it" is.

*Colin's decision to take a road trip with Hassan is significant because it is the first departure he has taken from his father's plans for him. This rebellion creates an opportunity for self-discovery that depends on Colin recognizing that another kind of potential has died.*



*Hassan is willing to help Colin rebel, but he, too, feels certain obligations toward his parents. In this scene, the reader gets a glimpse into the parental pressure Hassan is getting at home. Colin's situation, by comparison, no longer seems so uniquely stifling. Like many teenagers, Colin and Hassan simply need some space for self-discovery.*



*Colin's comparison of the figurative hole in his belly to the literal hole the Archduke Franz Ferdinand received when he was shot demonstrates that Colin is still blowing his own problems out of proportion. There is a sense of misguided longing in the comparison, as if he wants his own misfortunes to be so grand that, like the Archduke, he matters to the world simply for the sake of those misfortunes.*



*The graph of the Dumper-Dumpee paradigm is the first of many graphs in the novel. The idea that relationships can be represented mathematically with a graph shows that Colin is trying to make sense of his circumstances by demonstrating their inevitability. Although Colin could at any point choose to date someone not named Katherine or could become a Dumper if he wanted to, he insists that he has been cornered into his situation because it is his mathematical destiny.*



The narrator provides more of Colin's backstory in a section subtitled, "Katherine I: The Beginning (of the Beginning)." When Colin was about two years old, he read aloud off the back of his father's newspaper. His father's shock is Colin's first memory. Thereafter, his parents began reading to him in both English and French. They took him to a psychologist for IQ testing. The psychologist told him, "You're a very special person," which became a phrase Colin hears often but can never seem to hear enough. In this psychologist's office, Colin made his first **anagram** while he overheard the psychologist telling his mother that his quick information processing should be encouraged, but that it does not make him any more likely to win a Nobel Prize than any other intelligent child.

The evening of his IQ testing, Colin's father brought home a book about a circle that was missing a piece shaped like a pizza slice. Colin remembers his dad's smile fading when Colin failed to interpret the story as a metaphor for himself as a kind of circle with a missing piece. Young Colin thought through information quickly, but he struggled with metaphor and interpretation.

Colin eventually enrolled in first grade at the school where his mother taught. He was only a year younger than the other students in his class. Colin's father pushed him to study hard, but both Colin's parents kept him on a fairly standard educational track for his age group for the sake of his social life. However, Colin was a know-it-all and struggled to make friends. He was bullied and called "Colon Cancer" on a regular basis. Other kids used to tug on his limbs in all directions in a maneuver he dubbed, "the Abdominal Snowman." His mother told him the other kids were jealous, but Colin knew he simply wasn't likeable. All this resulted in his and his parents' delight when he won over the heart of a pretty girl in third grade.

## CHAPTER 4

Colin pulls into a rest stop in Kentucky around 3:00 a.m. to sleep. Hassan wakes him the morning, telling Colin to move the seat he has leaned back so that Hassan has room to get out to pray. While Hassan attends to mundane tasks like looking for toothpaste and scratching out an offensive statement on a picnic table at the rest stop, Colin tries to explain to Hassan the condition that would actually make someone's mouth taste like corpse, as Hassan has hyperbolically described his morning breath. Hassan tells him this is not an interesting fact.

*Colin's conscious memories of his own life begin when his parents were amazed by his intelligence. In order to maintain the relationship with his parents that he thinks of as essential to his identity, he must therefore continue to amaze them at every turn. Colin also associates his skill at making anagrams with the moment he found out that he was "special" but not likely to do anything particularly remarkable. One of Colin's talents, anagramming, thus has a valence of failure about it because he first discovered his skill when he realized that it would be very hard to continually amaze his parents in the way he did when he first read the newspaper.*



*Colin thinks of his failure to understand the metaphor of the missing piece as a sign of how he is constantly disappointing his father and failing to live up to the person his father wants him to be. Colin fails to see that he simply understands things on an intellectual basis more rapidly than he can comprehend their emotional significance.*



*Colin's parents have high expectations of their son academically, but they do not demonstrate great confidence in his ability to socialize. When he struggles to make friends, rather than help him navigate social cues, they tell him he is superior to his peers. All this contributes to Colin's sense that a social life is simply something he cannot excel at. When Colin finally attracts the attention of a girl, he surprises his parents in a way he has not done since he first read off the back of the newspaper.*



*Colin and Hassan are in the middle of nowhere and doubtless uncomfortable given that they have slept without beds and without a private bathroom. Hassan's attention to his surroundings and his physical discomfort, including his morning breath, contrasts with Colin's attention to random facts in the back of his head that bear little importance on the situation at hand. Colin needs Hassan to keep him grounded in reality.*



Colin goes to the bathroom and **anagrams** a phrase he sees scratched into the door. Rather than share with Hassan when he returns to the car, Colin keeps to himself the subsequent series of barely-connected thoughts that occur to him in response to his surroundings. These thoughts include Katherine XIX, ruby mining, Winston Churchill, bald politicians (Churchill and Gandhi) and mustachioed dictators (Hitler, Stalin, and Saddam Hussein).

Colin's thoughts lead him to the term "pupillary sphincter," which reminds him of how he met Hassan. Hassan came to Colin's school in tenth grade, after ten years of home school that allowed him to take some advanced classes. Colin, a ninth grader at the time, was in Hassan's Calculus I class. One day, Colin asked to go to the bathroom to deal with an eyelash in his eye, but he specified that it was in his "pupillary sphincter." He was laughed out of class. Hassan found Colin later and explained that after nine days in a school, he has grasped that the word "sphincter" will never not be funny to class full of high school students. Their friendship was born out of this moment.

Back in the present, Hassan says that he doesn't think much of Kentucky. Forlorn, Colin says it reminds him of Katherine XIX. He talks about how the two of them were going to go to Paris using his *KranialKidz* money, about which the narrator footnotes, "more on this later." Hassan says that if Kentucky is reminding Colin of Paris, "we're in a hell of a pickle." He takes the keys from Colin and gets back in the car.

Further down the road, Hassan wants to exit to see the World's Largest Wooden Crucifix. Colin says they shouldn't because neither of them is Christian and because it will remind him of Katherine XIX. When Hassan protests that Katherine was an atheist, Colin says she used to wear a crucifix long ago, before they dated. Hassan lets Colin know that he is disgusted but drives past the exit anyway.

## CHAPTER 5

Hassan wants to know if Colin already knew the World's Largest Wooden Crucifix was in Kentucky. Colin tries to tell Hassan instead about the world's largest wooden church in Finland, to which Hassan says, "not interesting." The narrator notes that Colin has a list of "not interesting" conversation topics to help him and Hassan hold a "halfway normal conversation." Colin focuses on the material aspects of the road trip, like his desire to find air conditioning, until he sees a sign for the grave of **Archduke Franz Ferdinand** off Exit 212 in Tennessee. Colin points it out to Hassan, who is all too happy to stop somewhere for lunch.

*Colin's thoughts may not be grounded in the actual situation at hand, but his string of seemingly disconnected thoughts demonstrates that his brain truly can make quick connections. By telling Colin periodically that the random facts he recalls are not interesting, Hassan has taught Colin how to assess his social environment for when it is appropriate to share his thoughts.*



*While Colin thinks of Hassan as someone who has taught him when he cannot be himself in public, their friendship has its basis in Colin's social ineptness. Colin was laughed out of class that day, but had he not used a phrase that his classmates found laughable, he and Hassan might not have become best friends. This memory suggests that parts of Colin's identity that he thinks of as lacking, such as social grace, might actually be important components of who he is.*



*Although Colin's absorption in his recently-ended romance is not unusual for a heartbroken teenager, Hassan serves as a reminder that Colin's melancholy is only temporary.*



*Colin's memory of Katherine XIX's crucifix foreshadows the later revelation that Colin knew Katherine XIX long before she was Katherine XIX; in fact, he knew her as Katherine I as well. Because the reader does not yet know the connection between Katherine XIX and Katherine I, the memory gives the sense that Colin is remembering things he could not possibly have experienced.*



*Hassan's interest in the World's Largest Wooden Crucifix is motivated by passing a sign for it on the road trip, whereas Colin's interest in the world's largest wooden church is simply due to the fact that he has information about it in his head. Colin would rather talk about something he knows than about something new, even when it is relevant to the present moment.*



From the Hardee's parking lot at the exit, Colin calls his mother. He asks if "anyone" called, and his mom tells him sorry and that she'll tell "anyone" to call his cell. After he hangs up, he and Hassan eat at Hardees and get directions to the **Archduke's** grave from the woman behind the register. They are looking for a town called Gutshot, she tells him.

Hassan expresses concern about going to Gutshot, which the woman at Hardees described as "the sticks." He is skeptical about whether the people there have ever seen "an actual, living Arab." For that matter, he asks if Colin if he thinks "they've ever seen a Jew-fro." Colin insists, feeling that the **Archduke's** grave will show him something about his missing piece and the **hole in his gut** even though he doesn't believe in fate.

The narrator interjects that it is not fate but rather Colin's "character and passions, his mistakes and weaknesses, that finally brought him to Gutshot, Tennessee – POPULATION 864, as the roadside sign read." Nothing there looks especially remarkable until Colin sees a bright pink two-story building made out of cinder blocks. The building features a sign that says, "THE KINGDOM OF GUTSHOT – ETERNAL RESTING PLACE OF THE **ARCHDUKE FRANZ FERDINAND** / ICE-COLD BEER / SODA / BAIT." Colin jokes about the sign, and Hassan says it's a shame they are going to die here.

Colin and Hassan go into the building and hide behind racks of potato chips, neither of them wanting to approach the girl reading *Celebrity Living* behind the counter. Colin thinks she cannot possibly be interesting if she is reading *Celebrity Living*. Finally, he walks to the desk and asks about the **Archduke**. She surprises Colin by smiling briefly, then tells him that tours are once an hour, cost eleven dollars, "and frankly aren't worth it." Hassan puts twenty-two dollars on the counter because, as he says, Colin needs to see the Archduke to recover from his nervous breakdown. Hassan introduces himself as "Hassan Harbish. Sunni Muslim. Not a terrorist." The girl, who will be their tour guide, introduces herself as "Lindsey Lee Wells. Methodist. Me neither." Colin keeps noticing her smile even as he thinks about Katherine XIX and his missing piece.

Colin misses the well-paved landscape of Chicago while he, Lindsey, and Hassan walk across an uneven field. Colin finds reasons to be annoyed with both of them and tries to provoke Hassan by asking about his college plans. Hassan responds that his father, Mr. Harbish, didn't go to college, and while he works much harder than Hassan does, it is this hard work that allows Hassan to sit around doing nothing all day. Colin wonders silently, "What is the point of being alive if you don't at least try to do something remarkable?"

*"Anyone" is clearly Katherine XIX. Colin is embarrassed to talk about his heartbreak with his mother, even as he makes a pilgrimage to the grave of the Archduke, which he wants to see because he is worried about distinguishing himself before he dies.*



*Hassan has surely encountered Islamophobia even in Chicago, where Arab people have a more visible presence than they do in much of rural America. Hassa worries that Gutshot's rural atmosphere means that its people will be prejudiced against him. This moment thus demonstrates that Hassan does not have the same luxury as Colin to ignore his surroundings.*



*Colin's rejection of the idea of destiny is at odds with his insistence that his future is inevitably disappointing. The casual tone of the sign that advertises the Archduke's grave right alongside beer, soda, and bait makes even Colin laugh. In this moment, the seriousness with which he views himself and his connection to the Archduke begins to crack.*



*Lindsey Lee Wells surprises both Colin and Hassan by being more interesting and open-minded than they originally assumed. Their surprise foreshadows the unexpected adventures they are about to have in Gutshot that will change how they each think about the world and their positions in it. Colin's association between Lindsey and Katherine XIX also foreshadows the possibility that Lindsey will become a new love interest, thereby breaking Colin's Katherine streak. Lindsey's frank disinterest in the Archduke underscores the absurdity of Colin's quest to find his life's meaning by visiting a tourist attraction.*



*Colin is so out of place in Gutshot that the very landscape makes him feel physically destabilized. This destabilization represents the changes Colin is beginning to experience in his worldview as he abandons the unattainable goal of becoming a genius and learns to enjoy life in the present moment.*



Colin gets distracted making **anagrams**, which leads him to trip, fall, and hit his head on a rock. Lindsey asks Hassan for his shirt to bandage Colin's head wound. When he refuses, Lindsey uses her own shirt. She surprises Hassan and Colin by revealing that although she is only seventeen, she is a paramedic in training. While she jogs away to get a first aid kit, Colin notices that he likes the smell her perfume leaves behind.

Hassan reveals that he did not want to take off his shirt in front of Lindsey because he did not want to reveal is "man-tits." He helps Colin look for his glasses while describing Lindsey's purple bra to his friend. Colin reflects on the Katherines whose bras he has seen ("four, unless you count straps, in which case seven"). Katherine XIX wore a purple bra when she dumped him. Colin thinks that people misunderstand why he gets dumped so often. He is not a "glutton for punishment," as many people think, but rather struggles to see the future just as he struggles to see what is right in front of him without his glasses. He stops Hassan from trying to put Colin's glasses on for him and pushes them up his nose himself, saying "**Eureka.**"

In a section entitled "Katherine XIX: The End (of the End)," Colin recalls the day Katherine XIX broke up with him. It was the day they graduated and nearly a year into their relationship. He remembers driving to dinner in **Satan's Hearse**. They bickered, and K-19 told Colin it was good he was not a child prodigy anymore because he was not a child. He felt a **twinge in his gut**, which he reflects was the first sign of the piece about to go missing. They resolved the bickering match, but later, after sneaking into Colin's house together, Colin again began telling K-19 he was past his prime. K-19 told Colin that he needed a robot to assure him of its love rather than an actual girlfriend. She held him while he cried. After she left, he **anagrammed** "mymissingpiece" and tried to fall asleep.

## CHAPTER 6

Just as keys and Katherines show up when you reconcile yourself to their absence, Colin reflects, his "**Eureka**" moment happens as soon as he accepts it never will. It feels to him "like a thousand orgasms all at once, except not as messy." He immediately sketches a graph and captions it, "Where  $x = \text{time}$ , and  $y = \text{happiness}$ ,  $y = 0$  beginning of relationship and breakup,  $y$  negative = breakup by  $m$ , and  $y$  positive = breakup by  $f$ : my relationship with K-19."

*Colin's proclivity to disappear into his own head now leads him to physical injury. The injury gives rise to another occasion for Lindsey to surprise Colin and Hassan, and it thus causes Colin to start paying more attention to what his senses tell him about his surroundings.*



*Hassan again brings Colin and the reader's attention to the concept of embodiment. This time, not only does Hassan help to ground Colin in his body, but he also shows some vulnerability by revealing his self-consciousness about his body. This vulnerability illuminates that while Colin thinks he is shortsighted because he cannot see the future, he might in fact be shortsighted because he fails to account for others' perspectives.*



*The fact that Colin associates his missing piece first with the loss of the "prodigy" title and then with Katherine XIX shows that he revised his understanding of the hole in his gut to blame it on Katherine XIX instead of recognizing his own failure to discover a sense of himself. Colin has relied on other people to give him a sense of who he is, and when these definitions are called into question, it leads him to feel that his identity is in crisis.*



*Colin's association between his romantic life and his intellectual achievement is so strong that he experiences the "Eureka" moment as a kind of sexual pleasure. His immediate desire to capture that pleasure by modeling his relationship mathematically suggests that what Colin most strongly desires is not necessarily Katherine XIX but rather a failsafe way to understand and control the outcome of any relationship so that his plans for the future cannot be derailed again by another person.*



Lindsey returns with a new shirt and a first aid kit while Colin is finishing up the sketch. She tries to test him for a concussion by asking him simple questions like the day and time. Hassan asks much more difficult questions, such as the name of the junior senator from New Hampshire in 1873, and Lindsey learns that Colin has an impressive repertoire of historical facts. She in turn surprises him by referring to Millard Fillmore. Colin wonders if he was too quick to judge her unintelligent for living in rural Tennessee and reading *Celebrity Living*.

Hassan grabs Colin's notebook, and Colin explains that he is trying to write a **Theorem** to predict relationship outcomes. Hassan says the theorem idea is "interesting" which is the highest compliment he can give Colin. Lindsey looks at the notebook and asks what a K-19 is. Colin briefly describes his relationship history. Lindsey laughs and says she has dated only one boy, and it's funny because his name is Colin (The Other Colin).

In a section called "The Middle (of the Beginning), Colin reflects on how Katherine I became his first girlfriend. He was in third grade when his parents decided that his "sociological well-being" was enough of a lost cause that they would only have him attend school three hours a day. They hired his lifelong tutor, psychology professor Keith Carter, to talk at Colin the rest of the day. Crazy Keith was Colin's father's friend and "the closest thing Colin had to a best friend" because he never gave him an Abdominal Snowman.

Krazy Keith's daughter would sometimes accompany her parents to dinner parties at Colin's house. One night, one of these dinners devolved into Katherine watching Colin study Latin. After a time, Katherine began asking Colin why he learned so many things so quickly. She kept asking him "why," no matter how he responded. Eventually he got tripped up when she asked why Ovid lived in Rome when they spoke and wrote Latin. He told her it was a good question, and she asked him to be her boyfriend. He said yes and had his first kiss, "and it occurred to Colin that the kiss didn't feel nearly as good as the sound of her asking if she could be his girlfriend." This Katherine eventually became to Colin "The Great One," "Katherine I," and "Katherine the Magnificent."

*Lindsey's interruption of Colin's sketch suggests that despite Colin's attempts to preclude interruptions of his plans by future romantic partners, some factors might simply be out of his control or understanding. Lindsey and Colin discover each other in this moment to be more intelligent than first impressions suggested.*



*Hassan's interest in the Theorem seems to be in part because it could be useful in the real world. However, the idea that relationships can be predicted with any precision is immediately undermined by the arbitrary coincidence that Lindsey's boyfriend happens to share a name with Colin.*



*Colin's romantic life began at a very young age, meaning that he has defined himself in relationship to his girlfriends for more than half his life and through all the pivotal stages of self-definition that happen during adolescence. Again, the narrator reminds the reader that Colin has had precious few other relationships with his peers, making him feel lonely around people his age when he is not dating.*



*Colin first begins paying attention to Katherine I when she asks him about his intellectual pursuits. Combined with the fact that Colin is less interested in the kiss than in hearing that Katherine I wants to be his girlfriend suggests that Colin began his romantic career looking for veneration and admiration for his intellectual achievements. The slightly adversarial nature of the conversation suggests that although Colin conflates intellectual and romantic achievement, they have from the beginning been slightly at odds for him.*



## CHAPTER 7

Lindsey, Colin, and Hassan have continued walking through the field, which turns abruptly into a graveyard. A six-foot obelisk marks the grave of the **Archduke Franz Ferdinand**. Lindsey says that Colin probably knows the story already, but she describes the life of Franz Ferdinand anyway. Lindsey says Franz was lonely because he was “a total nerd,” who his family thought was a “liberal wuss.” He married an unsuitable match for love. It was a cute story, Lindsey remarks, until they were both shot dead in Sarajevo in 1914. The emperor, Franz’s uncle, had them buried outside Vienna and didn’t even attend the funeral. He did, however, use the assassination as justification to start World War I.

Colin looks at the obelisk and reflects on what might have been for the **Archduke** if he hadn’t been so much like Colin. “In the end,” Colin reflects, “the Archduke had two problems: no one gave a shit about him (at least not till his corpse started a war), and one day he got a piece taken out of his middle.” Colin determines that he will fill his own **hole** and do something to remain special, making people care about him. He will do so by using his past to inform the future, impress Katherine XIX, and “make the world safer for Dumpees everywhere.”

Hassan asks how this rural town in Tennessee got the **Archduke**. Lindsey says the town bought him around 1921 for thirty-five hundred dollars. Colin mentions that thirty-five hundred dollars in 1921 amounts to far more in modern currency and would require a lot of eleven-dollar tours to turn a profit. Lindsey rolls her eyes and says that the town can figure these things out well enough with calculators, but Colin insists that he was not trying to impress anyone.

Lindsey suddenly notices some of her friends from school trudging over the slope. When the newcomers introduce themselves, Colin speaks bad fake French while Hassan pretends to translate for him. A muscular boy Lindsey stares at turns out to be Colin as well, and Hassan whispers to Colin Singleton that this new Colin’s name is “The Other Colin.” In Hassan’s introductions, Chase becomes “Jeans Are Too Tight,” and Fulton becomes “Short One Chewing Tobacco.” The girl, Katrina, is “incredibly hot—in that popular-girl-with-bleached-teeth-and-anorexia kind of way, which was Colin’s least favorite way of being hot.” Upon learning her name, Colin thinks, “close, but no cigar.”

*Lindsey’s derision and pity for Franz Ferdinand underscores that although the Archduke has left behind a legacy, he is not necessarily to be admired or emulated. Although Colin and Hassan have been intending the whole time to visit the Archduke’s grave, the fact that they walk into the cemetery after driving all this time in **Satan’s Hearse** gives an anticlimactic end to the half-joking funeral procession. Colin’s journey to what he might think of in vague terms as his own funeral has led him to a promising beginning in Gutshot.*



*Colin demonstrates some growth in his determination that he will take control of his future. He seems to understand that unlike the Archduke, the hole in his gut is metaphorical: Colin is still alive and has the opportunity to live out a future of which the Archduke was deprived.*



*Lindsey makes it clear that although Colin’s intelligence is impressive, he will not impress her by acting condescending. She thus encourages him to find ways to relate to people (and especially ways to flirt) that do not involve inflating his importance by showing off his smarts.*



*Colin and Hassan are both excited to pretend to be people they are not in front of the newcomers. While their performance is a joke, it also demonstrates that Colin and Hassan are in a new place where they might reinvent themselves in whatever manner they please. There is tension between their excitement to remake themselves and their insistence upon their own original identities. They are threatened by the idea that The Other Colin could usurp Colin’s right to the name.*



When Colin says the word “hemorrhoid” in French, Hassan cannot resist telling Katrina that he said her face was beautiful like a hemorrhoid. Lindsey bursts out laughing and finally insists that Colin and Hassan drop the act. Everyone laughs. The Other Colin (TOC) tells Lindsey that someone named Hollis would like Colin and Hassan. Colin watches Lindsey fake pout to get TOC to kiss her on the forehead and remembers many times when he has been the fake pouter.

Colin hopes to work on the **Theorem** in the car. Hassan says he needs some Gatorade before he can get back on the road with Colin. Lindsey says they can all go back to the store, and her voice reminds Colin of K-19. TOC kisses Lindsey and says he can't go back to the store because Hollis is there, and he and Chase skipped out on work.

Hollis, who is at the store when they arrive, turns out to be Lindsey's mother. Hollis recognizes Colin as the winner of the game show *KranialKidz*. Colin is shocked that she watched the show because no one watched it. Hollis is star struck and insists on cooking dinner for Colin and Hassan.

On the way back to Hollis and Lindsey's house, Hollis leads the way in a pink pickup truck with Hassan while Colin drives the **Hearse** with Lindsey to give him directions. Lindsey admires Colin's skill with languages. In German, Lindsey says her mother thinks Colin is good for her. Hollis wants Lindsey to become a doctor, but Lindsey says she doesn't need a doctor's money. She needs her life, which she likes as-is in Gutshot. Lindsey points out the textile factory that has been the main source of jobs in Gutshot since her great grandfather started the plant in 1917.

Lindsey makes Colin swear not to laugh when she tells him what the plant makes: mainly tampons. Colin doesn't laugh but rather reflects that tampons are “a little bit like grizzly bears: he was aware of their existence, but he'd never seen one in the wild, and didn't really care to.” Colin follows Hollis's pink truck up a hill to a huge, pink house. Inside, Hollis tells Colin and Hassan to make themselves at home while she and Lindsey fix dinner. Colin notices a photo of Hollis with a girl who looks like Lindsey, except that she looks more goth. When Lindsey comes to ask if he and Hassan like green beans, Colin asks if the photo is of her sister. Lindsey tells him that it's her in eighth grade. Hassan tries to change the subject back to green beans, and Lindsey disappears back into the kitchen.

*The presence of Lindsey, with whom Colin and Hassan have already interacted, destabilizes the notion that Colin and Hassan can entirely remake themselves. Colin seems jealous of TOC because he has both his name and Lindsey's affection. This suggests an interest on Colin's part in change and transformation.*



*Colin's redoubled interest in the Theorem hints at his jealousy in front of Lindsey and TOC and suggests that he wants to get control over his emotions by escaping the situation. The Theorem is only an excuse to do so.*



*Once again, people in Gutshot surprise and impress Colin and Hassan by demonstrating that they are not as cut off from the rest of the world as they might seem. Although this is a minor instance of surprise, it demonstrates to Colin that people don't always behave in ways that can be mathematically accounted for in a theorem.*



*Lindsey again surprises Colin with her smarts by speaking German. The fact that Lindsey is in many ways very similar to Colin makes it striking that she does not have the same ambitions for the future. Similar to the way Colin has insisted on slowing down his academic momentum to take a road trip, Lindsey rebels against her mother by insisting on appreciating what she has.*



*Everything about Hollis and Lindsey, from the pink house to the pink truck to the tampon factory, emblemizes a kind of confident feminine power. Colin, despite ostensibly being very experienced with women, is apparently intimidated by what he considers to be the mysteries surrounding them. It appears that Colin understands them more than he might think because Lindsey, just like him, has struggled to construct an image of her identity that she wishes to project to the rest of the world. Colin is beginning to realize that his struggle to be himself is not unique to him. Even the girls who seem so mysterious and unattainable experience similar struggles.*



Colin wanders around until he finds a room with an imposing desk that looks like “the kind of place where a president might sign a bill into law.” Colin begins writing notes about the **Theorem** and devises a bell curve to represent the distribution of people along the scale from Dumper to Dumpee. He places himself at the left end of the bell curve, as an extreme Dumpee. As he tries to find an equation to represent his simplest romance with the Katherine I, he begins to sweat with exertion but feels even more confident that he can use his extensive dumping experience to come up with the formula he seeks. Once he does, “she” will see him again as a genius.

*Colin specifically seeks out a place to work that will make him feel more important to the fate of the world than he is. By feeling important, he can counteract the feeling that, as a Dumpee, he does not matter to anyone. It is important to note that Colin does not specify that “she” is Katherine XIX. The she could be any of the Katherines, demonstrating once again that Colin is in love with the idea of a girlfriend rather than any specific person. By leaving open the identity of the “she,” the narrator also leaves room for Colin to pursue a romantic partner besides a Katherine.*



After an hour, Colin returns to the dining room, where everyone is seated for dinner. He notices that the Wells family already seems to love Hassan. Hassan, Colin reflects, is amazingly gifted with the ability to make people like him. At Hollis’s invitation, Hassan says grace. All he says is “Bismillah” because, as he says, “We are a terse people. Terse, and also hungry.” Everyone begins eating and is silent for a while. The narrator speculates that the Arabic made everyone uncomfortable. Only Hassan speaks, complimenting the food, until Colin finds something in his food that Lindsey and Hollis tell him is birdshot. Colin decides to mostly eat his green beans and rice.

*Colin’s quest to reunite with his girlfriend by proving his genius has led him to isolate himself from company. His solution to his loneliness has thus backfired. While Hollis and Lindsey have surprised Colin and Hassan by being more interesting and inviting than they would have expected, their discomfort over Hassan’s Arabic and Colin’s discomfort over the food suggest that interacting with the Gutshot locals will still be somewhat of a cross-cultural encounter for Colin and Hassan and the Gutshot locals alike, requiring everyone to shift their perspective to an extent.*



After dinner, Hollis asks Colin how it felt to win *KranialKidz* because she recalls that he did not seem very excited. Colin says he felt bad for the kid who lost. Hassan chimes in that he was excited enough for the both of them. Colin grows quiet because *KranialKidz* reminds him of Katherine XIX. After a silence, Hollis speaks to say Colin and Hassan should work for her this summer in Gutshot on a project she’s starting.

*Despite Colin’s obsession with distinguishing himself academically, he struggles to own his successes and dwells on areas in his life where he believes he has failed—namely, romance. Everyone manages to push through their minor discomfort over differences in language, prayer, and customs, demonstrating that Hollis’s offer to host Colin and Hassan for the summer will provide opportunity for growth on all sides.*



Colin tells Hollis that he’s not qualified to do any work because he always spends his summers at smart-kid camp and has developed no marketable skills. She says he just needs to be reasonably smart and not from Gutshot, and she will pay five hundred dollars a week in addition to providing free room and board. Colin silently consults with Hassan and then answers “okay” for them both. After all, he thinks, road trips have destinations, and Gutshot is as good a one as any. After all, it is the home of his first **“Eureka” moment**, Hollis makes him feel a little famous, Hassan could use the money, and it will be good work experience for them both.

*Colin is realizing that his intense academic schedule has cut him off from many opportunities to learn other skills. His decision to stay in Gutshot is motivated in part by his desire to stay in the place where he feels he took his first step toward genius, but it also marks a small rebellion against his parents’ plans for his future. After all, he is admitting that he might make use of work experience one day.*



Colin consults Hassan in Arabic about his worry that the job will take up his time for working on the **Theorem**. Hassan asks in English if they can make sure Colin has time to doodle. Colin is affronted that Hassan calls his work “doodling,” and Hassan is offended when Lindsey says the Arabic exchange sounded like gibberish. He tells her, “We’re speaking the sacred language of the *Qur’an*, the language of the great *calipha* and Saladin, the most beautiful and intricate of all human tongues.” Lindsey says it sounds like “a raccoon clearing its throat” but also says Colin can have time to do his work as long as neither of them take her room.

A while later, Hollis decides they should all play Scrabble. Lindsey is aghast that Colin is a genius but has never played Scrabble. He insists he is not a genius, so she concedes to call him a “smartypants,” which he likes. They play Scrabble, and Colin beats everyone soundly.

In the evening, Colin calls his parents and tells them he is in Gutshot but does not tell them he is staying with the Wellses. He then stays up late working on the **Theorem** at the empty-drawer desk in the room he has taken as his bedroom. Colin reflects that he has always liked desks with empty drawers.

Just as Colin is wondering whether he lacks the math skills for the **Theorem**, Lindsey comes in wearing pajamas. She bites her thumb nervously, which Colin tells her he does also. Lindsey says she only does it in private. She then tells him she is there to tell him about the photo Colin found earlier “so you don’t think I’m an absolute asshole” because she has been lying awake worrying that he and Hassan think poorly of her for it.

Lindsey tells Colin that she used to be ugly and got picked on a lot. Colin tries to connect what Lindsey is saying to his memories of Katherine I, and she tells him that the first rule of stories is no interrupting. She goes on to tell him that in eighth grade, she had Hollis help her re-make her image to be “all alternative” and “half-emo and half-goth and half-punk and half-nerd chic.” She was different, and she and her peers hated each other for a year. Then, in high school, she decided to embody the image of a cool kid and became one. But, she clarifies, she’s “not an asshole to people,” and didn’t sell her soul to become popular.

*Everyone in this scene demonstrates their limited understanding of each other’s perspective. Colin does not understand why Hassan cannot see the gravity of the work he is doing on the Theorem, and Lindsey does not understand why Hassan and Colin would want to speak in Arabic. The use of multiple languages emphasizes that all three characters need to learn to communicate with one another in order to get along better.*



*In calling Colin a “smartypants,” Lindsey gives Colin a way to identify himself that he has been missing. He still wants to be a genius, but having the label “smartypants” in the meantime decreases the urgency of marking his genius.*



*Colin’s decision not to tell his parents everything about his whereabouts shows that he has taken on a sense of responsibility and ownership over his own life, separate from their approval.*



*Lindsey comes into the room self-consciously just as Colin is doubting his own ability to live up to his plans for himself. Colin and Lindsey share a sense of self-doubt. Lindsey’s decision to come speak to Colin instead of Hassan demonstrates that she feels a sense of connection to him. She also feels comfortable enough around him already that she bites her thumb, which she says she only does in private.*



*Lindsey professes to be able to make anyone think of her what she wants them to think of her, but she nonetheless worries about what Colin will think of her for remaking her image to be more popular. She seems to think simultaneously that Colin will be able to see through her image and that he will not be able to see through it to who she truly is. Despite her professed difficulty with self-expression, Lindsey is entirely confident in her understanding of how to tell a story.*



Colin says he wouldn't judge Lindsey if she had sold her soul because "not having friends sucks." He wonders aloud if his desire to be famous is, as Hassan has insinuated, really a desire to be popular. He begins to tell her about a class trip to the zoo when he had to pee, but he veers off on a tangent about overhydration. Lindsey says it's weird to watch his brain work. Colin reflects inwardly that he is not very good at telling linear stories. He recommences speaking, saying, "I came relatively close to having a lion bite off my penis. And [...] shit like that never happens to popular people." Lindsey says that would be a good story if he knew how to tell it, and that she thinks he's cool and wants him to think she's cool, "and that's all popular is."

In a section subtitled, "The End (of the Beginning)," Colin recalls how after his first kiss with Katherine I, he kept trying to translate Ovid but couldn't focus. After three minutes, Katherine said she was breaking up with him. He went back to Ovid silently until her parents took her home. Their short relationship, Colin thinks, "was the [Katherine Phenomenon] in its most unadulterated form. It was the immutable tango between the Dumper and the Dumpee: the coming and the seeing and the conquering and the returning home."

## CHAPTER 8

In the morning, Colin realizes that his life in Chicago has sheltered him from the understanding that the rooster crowing at dawn is more than a literary and cinematic trope. This morning, a rooster in fact begins crowing well before dawn. Colin feels tired but good until he remembers his breakup and finds that he has no missed calls on his cell phone. Colin spends the next couple hours in bed, listening to the intermingling of the rooster's crows and Hassan's morning prayers, thinking about Katherine XIX, and making **anagrams** of "rooster."

Around 7:00 a.m., Colin goes into the bathroom to brush his teeth. Hassan is there taking a shower, and they discuss how the Wells family is strange. Hassan tells Colin that Hollis has a billion-dollar house but is asleep on the couch watching the Home Shopping Network. He doesn't mind, though, because Hollis is impressed by both him and Colin, and Hassan will be making enough money this summer to survive unemployed for years. Colin makes a comment about Hassan's lack of ambition, and Hassan tells him to lay off him about college. They decide that their code word for when one of them has gone too far teasing the other will be "Dingleberries."

*Colin is beginning to see that his loneliness might not be entirely due to his romantic failure but that his endless quest to distinguish himself from his peers might have resulted in his lack of positive friendships. Nonetheless, he still blames his loneliness for random misfortunes in his life. Lindsey, whom Colin recognizes is a better storyteller than he is, begins to suggest to him that there might be other stories in which his unpopularity is not deterministic and in which he might actually be popular after all.*



*Despite Lindsey's suggestion that Colin might tell alternate stories about himself, Colin remains trapped in a narrative that leaves him forever destined to be dumped by Katherines. Colin remembers reading Ovid during his first relationship and breakup, suggesting that he associates it with great literature. He fails to see that even if the Dumper-Dumpee relationship is a trope, he might, as Lindsey states, tell a fresh story.*



*Following on Colin's recollection of his first relationship as deterministic of his entire future, Colin realizes that he might have simplistic assumptions about tropes in literature. This realization seems to be a comfort to Colin until he falls back into his pattern of dwelling on the unattainable Katherine XIX and feeling powerless to reach out to her.*



*Being in unfamiliar territory gives Colin and Hassan something to bond over. Colin's insistence upon his eternal loneliness is thus set off against his deepening friendship with Hassan, which Colin doesn't yet recognize as fulfilling. Hassan again asserts his ability to be happy with much less than Colin. The fact that college is a sensitive subject suggests that Hassan might in fact want more than he professes to want, but the contrast between his contented attitude and Colin's angst gives rise to the idea that there is a happy medium between Colin's extreme ambition and Hassan's easy contentment.*



Colin begins anagramming “dingleberries,” and Hassan says maybe that’s why Katherine XIX dumped him. Colin responds, “Dingleberries.” Hassan changes the subject to breakfast. On the way down the stairs, Colin wonders why Hollis really wanted to hire them. Hassan jokes that he has a special bond with Hollis because they are both fat. Colin tries to insist that Hassan is simply “pudgy,” and Hassan brings Colin’s attention to his “man-tits.” Colin assents that he is at least an A-cup, and Hassan smiles “with great satisfaction.”

Hassan and Lindsey watch *The Today Show* and Colin reads from a Lord Byron anthology he brought with him while Hollis gets ready. Lindsey asks him what he is reading. He holds it up, and she reads “Don Juan” off the cover. He corrects her pronunciation—it’s pronounced “Don Jew-un” rather than “Don Wan.” Hassan says this is not interesting, but Lindsey is more aggravated that uninterested.

Hollis comes downstairs and explains that the project the two boys will be helping with is an oral history of Gutshot, “for future generations.” There have been issues with gossip about the interviews, so Colin and Hassan, who are outsiders, and Lindsey, who everyone trusts, will be conducting the interviews from now on. Hollis wants six hours of “real history” on tape each day. When she says she is doing this project for her grandkids, not a gossip fest, Lindsey says, “Bullshit.” Hollis tells her to put a quarter in the swear jar. Lindsey swears three more times because she only has a dollar bill. As Hollis sends the three teenagers out the door, she says that she will have The Other Colin, “Lindsey’s [sigh] boyfriend” open the store because he hasn’t been showing up to work half the time lately.

Lindsey, frustrated with Hollis’s tone with regard to her boyfriend, asks Hassan in the **Hearse** to drop her off at the store so she can see TOC. Hassan insists that she is dating TOC because his friend, who can say “unique” in nine languages, is “clearly the Primary Colin.” Colin feels affection toward Hassan and feels like some medicine has momentarily been applied to the **hole in his gut**. Lindsey concedes to being dropped off at the store after they do their work for the day.

Lindsey leads them to the house of a man named Starnes, who greets them at the door and appears to be missing his lower jaw. In response to Colin’s staring, he explains that he lost the jaw to cancer. The smell of the house reminds Colin of Katherine XIX’s basement, and he loses himself in the feeling of his aching gut.

*Whereas Colin remains incredibly sensitive about his sources of self-consciousness, Hassan deals with his body image issues by making jokes. For Hassan, it is easier to accept the truth of his weight and make light of it than try to kid himself into thinking his body is closer to the cultural ideal. Colin is able to laugh with his friend, which helps Hassan find even more humor in his own joke. Colin, however, is not yet ready to joke about his own personal shortcomings.*



*The name Don Juan has become synonymous with womanizing, but Lord Byron’s long poem of that title is also a comedy. In a sense, Colin is reading about himself, but he either fails to recognize himself in the main character, or he fails to understand how he and Don Juan could be portrayed as comical figures.*



*The fact that Hollis wants “real history” begs the question of what real history is, and how it differs from a story that would be spread as gossip. Lindsey is frustrated that Hollis seems to be hinting about the future, when Lindsey might have kids. Lindsey and Hollis, despite their banter, seem to have a loving relationship in which both Lindsey’s youthful focus on the present and Hollis’s mature focus on the future play an important role. Hollis may not be happy that Lindsey is dating TOC, but she nonetheless accepts that this is the case. This parent-child relationship serves as an example of the relationship Colin might have with his parents were he to assert more of his own desires in response to their desires for him.*



*Lindsey’s insistence that she is going to see TOC demonstrates that although Colin feels his decision to take a road trip with Hassan has been a great rebellion, it is really an act that brings him into closer relationship with his peers. Colin also finally begins to recognize that friendship might help him feel fulfilled in lieu of romance.*



*Despite Colin’s newfound realization about friendship, he is nonetheless still sad about his breakup and falls back into his pattern of dwelling on Katherine XIX. This scene, in which Colin also fails to conceal his shock when he sees Starnes’s face, demonstrates that Colin’s youthful and limited outlook on life will take some more sustained work to dismantle.*



In a section subtitled, “The Beginning (of the End),” Colin recalls how Katherine XIX became the XIX. He had been wanting to kiss her for a while but was afraid of rejection, which according to him, boys face at a higher rate than girls. They went to Café Sel Marie for their third date in a row even though Colin only liked the idea of coffee. They went back to Katherine’s basement to watch *The Royal Tenenbaums*, a movie about a family of prodigies. Colin liked the movie but distinguished himself from the characters by emphasizing that he had not been born good at everything but rather had worked hard to be a prodigy. He showed off his **anagramming** skills for Katherine. She wanted to know what else he was good at. He took his opening to show her how good he was at kissing.

*Colin, who does not even like coffee, recreated the same coffee date three times with Katherine XIX in the hope that eventually she would kiss him. This hope demonstrates that Colin’s approach to romance is to play out a specific narrative until it works out in his favor, and also that he feels largely helpless to initiate romance. Colin’s courage to finally kiss Katherine XIX comes only after she listens to him characterize himself as a child prodigy and expresses admiration for his anagramming skills. The feeling of intellectual superiority thus gives him the feeling of romantic courage.*



## CHAPTER 9

Back in Starnes’s un-air-conditioned living room, Colin, Hassan, and Lindsey interview him. He says he was born in “the country” (south-central Tennessee) and has stayed in the area his entire life. Lindsey, who speaks in a thick accent around Starnes, asks him to tell them about the factory. He recalls how he has worked there for sixty years, longer than anyone, and how he has known Lindsey’s family for many generations. He calls Lindsey’s father, Alex, a “sumbitch.”

*Listening to Starnes and Lindsey speak gives Colin and Hassan an idea of how much they do not yet know about Gutshot and about Lindsey. Lindsey’s accent and the little information about her father also demonstrates to Colin yet another aspect of Lindsey’s identity that seems to predate any of the images she has created for herself at school.*



It is now very hot, and Colin reflects that this is a hard way to make a hundred dollars. Starnes offers everyone some sweet tea. Colin thinks that the tea is “everything he’d hoped coffee would be.” He drinks a lot of it as he listens to Starnes talk about how Dr. Dinzandar, Lindsey’s great-grandfather, made sure never to lay off more than one person per family even during the Depression. Starnes also explains that Gutshot got its name because it was a hotbed of boxing back when prizefighting was illegal. To get around the laws, boxers could not hit above or below the belt—hence the name “Gutshot.”

*Colin’s lack of tolerance for sitting in the heat and listening to Starnes demonstrates that he has underestimated what it takes to do a job that is not geared toward grooming himself for a grandiose future. Contrary to deciding that this is a reason to give up, Colin digs into the hard work and begins to listen more intently and enjoy himself. His definition of worthwhile work seems to be expanding as he listens to a working-class man who represents everything Colin has never wanted to become.*



Starnes continues talking about his marriage and about avoiding the draft by shooting off two of his toes. Colin reflects that Starnes never seems to have heard of “transitions.” He knows he is not a good storyteller either, but at least he has heard of transitions, he thinks. Still, Colin begins to enjoy listening to Starnes and looking at his old pictures. He determines that he will also have picture of his fiftieth wedding anniversary with Katherine XIX and that he will also leave behind something more. Colin loses track of them time until Lindsey stands up to leave, asking Starnes if he wants Hollis to get him an air conditioner. He says she has already done well by him. Colin shakes Starnes’s hand on the way out.

*By listening to someone else tell a story, Colin begins to reflect on the work that goes into stringing events together to create stories. In this way, he realizes that he has some power over how he relates the events of his own life. However, he seems to think that this storytelling power will come only near the end of his life and only if he can win Katherine XIX back. Still, Colin is starting to realize that his intellectual and career ambitions might be “something more” in addition to his romantic ambitions.*



In the **Hearse**, Lindsey insists that Hassan and Colin drop her off at the store to see The Other Colin and then make themselves scarce so that she can tell Hollis later that they were driving around all afternoon. She teases Colin that it's because she finds his presence unbearable. He thinks she is kidding but nonetheless fails to conceal that he is hurt. Hassan tells Lindsey that usually when someone calls Colin unbearable, "it's the last words of a Katherine." Colin responds, "Dingleberries."

After dropping off Lindsey, Colin and Hassan spend some time eating unappetizing burgers and fries at Hardee's. Colin reads more Byron until Hassan convinces him that they should stop by the Gutshot General Store, where Lindsey is with TOC. They show up at the store nearly an hour early. They find Lindsey sitting on TOC's lap. They chat for a moment, and the conversation quickly turns to TOC threatening that if either Colin or Hassan touches Lindsey while they are living with her, "I'll kill you."

Lindsey gives Colin and Hassan TOC's keys so that they can wait for her in his air-conditioned truck. On the way out to the truck, Colin and Hassan hear TOC ask if the genius is "the fat one or the skinny one." Hassan comments on TOC's muscular build and tells Colin that "the Fat One's gonna take a piss in the field." Colin responds that "The Skinny One" will be in the truck.

When Hassan returns, he complains about Lindsey's bubbly demeanor around TOC. Colin asks if Hassan has a crush on her, and Hassan says that dating Lindsey would be *haram* (forbidden by Islam). "Also, she's got a big nose," he says. Colin accuses Hassan of moral relativism because he does not seem to have a problem doing some things that are *haram*. Hassan insists that "I don't think God gives a shit if we have a dog or if a woman wears shorts. I think He gives a shit about whether you're a good person." Colin begins thinking about Katherine XIX again, who works every summer at a camp for disabled kids. He wants to call her, but Hassan stops him. Colin says he wants to go home "to Lindsey's." Hassan fakes a "fat kid asthma attack" to interrupt Lindsey's conversation with TOC so they can go back to Hollis's house.

*Colin's concern over what Lindsey thinks of him mirrors Lindsey's earlier concern over what Colin thinks of her. Colin is sensitive about Hassan's assertion that Lindsey's teasing reminds him of the Katherines. This sensitivity suggests that Colin does not want Hassan to draw parallels between Lindsey and the Katherines because to do so would open the possibility of Lindsey as a romantic prospect even as Colin remains committed to the narrative in which he wins Katherine XIX back.*



*Hassan shows greater willingness than Colin to intervene in predetermined plans. TOC is worried that they will intrude on his relationship with Lindsey. The fact that TOC threatens Colin and Hassan rather than having a mature conversation with Lindsey about his feelings suggests that he, like Colin, is less concerned about his girlfriend as a person and more concerned about protecting her as one would protect property.*



*Rather than confront the boys about their disrespectful treatment of her, Lindsey simply breaks up the situation. Hassan again uses humor to deal with his self-consciousness about his body, spinning TOC's insult into a joke.*



*Colin's immediate assumption that Hassan has a crush on Lindsey betrays that he is beginning to think possessively about Lindsey. Hassan cites his religious beliefs as a reason not to date Lindsey, and it is not clear whether his comment about Lindsey's nose is his real reason for not wanting to date her or whether he says it to deflect suspicion. Colin makes light of Hassan's religion, but Colin is less confident than Hassan that he is, in comparison to a do-gooder like Katherine XIX, a generally good person.*



They eat dinner in the backyard, which Colin admires for its size. Gutshot has a wide-open feel that he likes. After dinner, he looks at his phone for any missed calls from Katherine XIX and ends up calling his parents. On the phone, he tells his father the truth about staying with Hollis. His father worries that he is too trusting. Colin protests that he survived seventeen years in Chicago, but his father cuts him off by handing the phone to Colin's mother. At her prompting, Colin tells her he is marginally happier than when he left. She asks to speak to Hollis. After this conversation, Colin's parents decide he can stay. Colin thinks it is because his mother always secretly wanted him to rebel a little like a "normal" kid. His father, he thinks, is probably just beginning to see the unlikelihood that Colin will every transcend normality.

Off the phone, Colin walks past Hassan's room and hears Lindsey and Hassan talking about him. Lindsey wants to know, "How does he do it?" and Hassan says that Colin remembers everything because he finds everything fascinating. Colin is flattered by how Hassan and Lindsey seem to be impressed by his brain, but he also feels the explanation is reductive because for him, his intelligence is more about making connections among seemingly unrelated things. He listens more and hears Hassan explaining that Colin works incredibly hard at any task he begins. The tasks he enumerates make Colin reflect that he has never done anything but rearrange letters, memorize already-known facts, fall in love with "the same nine letters over and over again," and retype all of *The Catcher in the Rye*. He feels more than ever that the **Theorem** is his only hope for originality.

Colin walks into the room, and Hassan and Lindsey change the subject. Colin works on the **Theorem** while they talk. At midnight, Colin looks up to find that Hassan has left, and Lindsey is looking over his shoulder. She mentions his **anagramming** talent and grabs his arm for a moment. Colin notices her nail polish. She remarks that, "you're a genius at making words out of other words, but you can't make new words out a thin air." Colin realizes that this is "exactly it." He tells Lindsey that he just wants to do or be something that matters. Lindsey lies down next to him and eventually says that they must be opposites because from her perspective, people who "matter," (i.e. celebrities), seem more likely to have their lives shot down. She would prefer to stay in Gutshot, unimportant but happy. Lindsey, Colin reflects, seems like a bit of a wimp.

*The fact that Colin is able to negotiate his summer plans with his parents with a civil conversation demonstrates that, despite Colin's rebellion, his relationship with his parents has by no means been damaged beyond repair. There is thus at least some truth to the idea that Colin has greater control over his future than his parents. However, Colin still struggles to express to his parents what he really wants out of the summer and out of the future, perhaps in part because he does not know for sure what he wants.*



*Even though Hassan and Lindsey are praising Colin, Colin sees the praise as a kind of slight because it both demonstrates that Hassan does not know the way Colin's brain really works and reminds him that he has not yet achieved his goal of becoming a genius. Colin comes to a sense of self in this moment by realizing what it is that his brain does—make connections—but he instead focuses on the identity he wishes he could claim as his own. His failure to see that he has achieved the label of "special" for Hassan and Lindsey shows that Colin is still caught up in ideas about who he might become rather than realizing who he is.*



*Lindsey's interest in the Theorem and in Colin's anagrams parallels Katherine XIX's interest in Colin's anagrams, and Colin begins to take notice of Lindsey like he might take notice of a girl he wanted to date. However, unlike Katherine XIX, Lindsey helps Colin realize something new about himself: he needs to work on how to tell stories and communicate what he is feeling. Colin's realization that this is "exactly it" echoes his "Eureka" moment, when he realized his problem was nearsightedness. Lindsey means to help Colin see that he should not care so much about "mattering," but what he begins to realize is that if he can articulate what he wants, he is more likely to attain it.*



Lindsey interrupts Colin's thoughts by beginning to teach him about storytelling. His stories, she tells him, need plots with beginnings, middles, and ends, and he can't get away with rambling. He also needs a strong moral or theme as well as romance and adventure. She suggests that the story about the lion at the zoo might feature a girl who saves him from the lion when she notices how big his penis is. Colin puts his hand on Lindsey's and notices the spot where she has bitten her thumb. He insists that his **Theorem** will have a beginning, middle, and end. Lindsey says there is no romance in geometry, and Colin tells her, "Just you wait."

In a section called "The Beginning (of the Middle)," Colin recalls how his pattern dating Katherines started. He was not especially hung up on Katherine I, but he saw her periodically because her father was his tutor. At first his dating other Katherines seemed like a coincidence, but then it became a monotonous pattern. They always dumped him because, as he sees it, he didn't matter enough. He thinks about how the Romans punished St. Apollonia by crushing each of her teeth, one by one. He compares his relationship history to this punishment. "After a while," he thinks, "having each tooth individually destroyed probably gets repetitive, even dull. But it never stops hurting."

## CHAPTER 10

In the morning, Colin goes downstairs to find Hollis passed out on the couch and Hassan eating breakfast. Hassan shows Colin a note from Hollis directing them to speed up their interviews by asking only four questions: "Where would you live if you could live anywhere? What would you do for a living if you didn't work for the factory? When did your people come to the country? and What do you think makes Gutshot special?" She asks them not to wake her because she wrote the note at 5:30 a.m.

Hassan teases Colin about his bedhead and Colin's insistence that it makes him look like Nikola Tesla. Nonetheless, Hassan shares the eggs he has made with Colin. Colin says Hassan is a good cook, and Hassan says that's "how Daddy got so fat." He says he is now going to refer to himself exclusively as "Daddy." Lindsey interrupts the conversation by coming down the stairs. Colin thinks she looks extra pretty because she is not wearing makeup. He thinks again of Katherine XIX without makeup and reflects that "She was the nexus of all the connections his brain made."

*Lindsey has a strict prescription for how to tell a story. While Colin realizes that he has the power to arrange his stories such that they contain all these elements, he also insists that he has his own way of telling stories, which is math. Colin has yet to prove that he can tell a story through math, and in many senses the Theorem promises to be as formulaic as the storytelling model Lindsey proposes. However, Colin's determination demonstrates that he feels more empowered than he used to feel to craft narratives surrounding his life.*



*Colin understands that his relationships have not each been an isolated instance of heartbreak but rather that he is stuck in a system of heartbreak that resembles the punishment inflicted on a saint. Colin, wanting to become the subject of stories in the way St. Apollonia is, has gotten himself stuck in a repeating narrative of heartbreak so that if he accomplishes nothing else, he will at least be a figure of great suffering. Now, he begins to realize that he might not want to endure the ongoing pain of this repeating narrative.*



*Hollis's questions demonstrate a way in which narrative evidence might be collected in a way directed toward a specific narrative end. Hollis's expectation that all the interviewees will have ready answers to the broad questions emphasizes that Colin might not have answers to any of them because he has not reflected enough on who he is and what he wants from life.*



*Hassan's joking again snaps Colin out of his over-seriousness. By offering Colin food, Hassan also once again brings Colin back to his bodily senses from his cerebral haze, in which he thinks about historical figures such as Nikola Tesla. The sight of Lindsey sets Colin adrift again, thinking about Katherine XIX. However, instead of his failure, the thought of her now makes him think about the connections his brain makes. These connections are something he likes about himself instead of something he thinks of as a shortcoming.*



Colin, Hassan, and Lindsey get out the door and go to interview a bearded man named Hezekiah Wilson Jones. After the interview, Lindsey says she is going to see TOC at the store and asks the boys to pick her up later. Colin thinks that they must be her friends if she trusts them not to rat her out to Hollis. “Almost by accident,” the narrator states, “and in just two days, Colin had made his second-ever friend.” Colin and Hassan continue the interviews without Lindsey. Colin is interested that most of the interviewees say they would still live in Gutshot if they could live anywhere, but he mostly lets Hassan ask the questions so that he can focus on the **Theorem**. Eventually, he dwells only on the **hole in his gut** and how much it hurts.

Toward the end of the day, a woman walks into the room where Colin and Hassan are conducting the interviews and says she is the last employee who hasn't been interviewed. She has heard that one of them is a genius and wants to know why the shower curtain always blows in instead of out. Colin explains that it is because the running water creates a low-pressure area that pulls the curtain in. Even Hassan admits that this is interesting. The woman turns out to be named Katherine. She is attractive and “sexily older” at twenty-two, but Colin is not interested in her because of Katherine XIX.

After the interviews, Colin and Hassan drive around until Colin decides, against Hassan's protests, to trudge out into a field to call Katherine XIX. He gets her voicemail and leaves a message about how much he loves her. On his way back to the car, she calls back. She has not listened to the message but tells him that she feels their breakup was the right decision. Her mother told her that it always seemed like they were unhealthily attached at the hip. Colin tells her that being attached would be better than this. He claims that “Singleton,” his last name, is the word for someone who is not a conjoined twin. Katherine suggests that they do not talk to each other until the end of summer. After they hang up, Colin lies on the ground and thinks about how much he misses the future he had imagined with Katherine.

Eventually, Hassan, who has left to pick up Lindsey, pulls up with Lindsey in **Satan's Hearse**. Both Hassan and Lindsey try to comfort Colin, Lindsey telling him to let it out when he begins to cry. Colin protests that if he begins sobbing, it will sound like a bullfrog's mating call. All three of them laugh.

*Although Colin is clearly beginning to see Lindsey as a romantic interest, his satisfaction with being able to classify her as a friend demonstrates that Colin has grown to see that friendship is an important part of self-fulfillment. Colin still ends up dwelling on the hole in his gut, but his determination to complete the Theorem has less now to do with Katherine XIX and more to do with showing Lindsey that he can tell a story with math. This shows that he is beginning to develop his own self-understanding.*



*Colin, who has been letting Hassan ask the questions, finally speaks up when he has the opportunity to show off his intelligence. The fact that he does so before finding out that the interviewee is named Katherine demonstrates that Colin is not solely invested in impressing Katherine XIX, but he still insists that Katherine XIX is his sole focus. Colin thus remains blind to what he really wants despite his strides toward articulating goals that are more varied and nuanced than the goal of “being special.”*



*Colin is clearly more heartbroken than Katherine XIX. She cares about him, but the phone call makes it clear to the reader (if not Colin) that the relationship is over. Colin's strange interest in being a conjoined twin demonstrates that he feels as though he is not self-sufficient without his girlfriend. He fails to see that in order to have a healthy relationship, he needs first to be a complete person on his own. The fact that Colin misses a future he never experienced indicates the extent to which the relationship for him was about fulfilling an ideal rather than about experiencing a happy relationship in the present.*



*Colin's feelings of deep loneliness are interrupted by Hassan and Lindsey. While it is reasonable for Colin to be sad, his feeling that he is alone and helpless without Katherine XIX is overly dramatic and simply not true.*



In the evening, Colin works on the **Theorem** but becomes increasingly frustrated as he comes to the conclusion that although he could conceive of the idea, it will take a genius to complete it. Bent on burning his notebook, he goes in search of a match and ends up in Lindsey's room. He notices that all the pictures of her in the room are from the past couple years. Lindsey looks through Colin's notebook and asks Colin to explain it. He tells her about the scale he has created going from -5 for a strong Dumpee to +5 for a strong Dumper. Lindsey tells him that she wants the notebook for a few days before he burns it. She says she hates math, but this is a cool way to tell stories. She agrees that they can burn it soon.

*Colin is interested in Lindsey's room because he is interested in her. This interest in itself demonstrates growth, given that Colin generally struggles to show interest in most people besides himself. Furthermore, Colin seeks Lindsey's help. Although he at first only wants her help to burn the notebook, he allows her to look over his math before destroying it. This demonstrates that Colin trusts Lindsey to see the inner workings of his brain, one of the prize pieces of Colin's identity.*



## CHAPTER 11

The fifth night in Gutshot, Colin refuses Hassan, Lindsey, and even Hollis's attempts to get him to go out driving around with Hassan and Lindsey. Colin is reading about how to cure a racoon hide when Hassan returns from the outing and tells Colin that he drank half a beer. Colin, who knows that drinking is *haram* (forbidden by Islam), teases Hassan about his religious commitment. Hassan tells his friend not to make him feel guilty because he didn't get drunk, and he had fun with Lindsey, TOC, JATT, SOCT, and Katrina. Hassan tries to convince Colin to go out shooting pigs with the group. Colin proposes camping instead, but Hassan insists. Colin feels as though he is being dumped by Hassan. He asks if Hassan wants to kiss Lindsey, and Hassan says he doesn't want to date anyone because he's seen what it has done to Colin.

*Despite Colin's strides toward making friends, he remains uncomfortable in many social activities, and feels left behind when Hassan participates in the social activities anyway. His feeling of abandonment shows that for all Colin's determination that he be "special," he still craves company. In particular, Colin feels that a key part of his friendship with Hassan is that Hassan also does not have a lot of friends. Colin also betrays a hint of jealousy over Lindsey by asking if Hassan wants to kiss her.*



In a section called "The Middle (of the Middle)," the narrator explains that a psychologist named Lewis Terman chose seven thousand gifted children (whose IQs, granted, were all lower than Colin's) and followed them into adulthood. They were largely successful, but "almost none of them turned out to be real geniuses." One, George Hodel, became remarkable not because of any great achievement but because he was likely the serial killer implicated in the infamous "Black Dahlia" case. Colin's father, a sociologist, decided to give Colin an intensive education in the hopes of transforming him from a child prodigy into an adult genius. Colin's lack of friends, his father argued, would not matter once all of his peers envied his great success.

*This section suggests that Colin was aware of the study while growing up because his father was determined to prove Colin an exception to the rule of relatively unremarkable child prodigies. The notion that Colin is up against either mediocrity or the gruesome fate of becoming a serial killer adds outrageous stakes to the matter of Colin's future. In the name of excellence, his father has encouraged the kind of isolation from friends that Colin now feels. By isolating Colin socially, Colin's father has in some sense given Colin common ground with a sociopath. This notion makes Colin's seeming friendlessness feel all the more catastrophic.*



Colin's great success arrived at the end of his junior year, when he won a \$10,000 prize on an obscure television show called *KranialKidz*. Colin allowed the network to give him a makeover. Notably, they had him wear a t-shirt that said "slacker." His new look attracted the attention of Marie Caravolli, the hottest girl in school. He was about to break his Katherine streak by going out with Marie, but he came home from school that day to find Katherine I on his doorstep, asking him for tutoring in French. Colin thought about how even if Marie ended up really liking him, he and Hassan would probably make fools of themselves among the cool kids at their parties. He called Marie and faked a family emergency to cancel their date. He tutored Katherine, and within a month, they were sneaking out of the house for coffee at *Café Sel Marie*.

*The fact that Colin has already attained some level of fame but still does not feel like he matters demonstrates that being famous will not make him feel fulfilled. This passage reveals that Katherine XIX, with whom Colin went to Café Sel Marie for their first three dates, is actually Katherine I many years later. Colin's desertion of Marie in order to spend time with Katherine I shows that his relationship with Katherine XIX was built on a desire to return to some previous version of himself, when he was simply an admirable child prodigy who had never been dumped.*



## CHAPTER 12

In the morning, Colin wakes to the sound of the rooster and Hassan's morning prayers. Colin goes to ask Hassan to be quieter, and Hassan says he is going to call in sick because it has been twelve days since he watched *Judge Judy*, the love of his life. Colin tells him to at least have his mother send in a deposit to Loyola. Hassan pleads "Dingleberries."

*Colin's annoyance with the sound of Hassan's prayers demonstrates that Colin does not appreciate the significance of the things that are important to Hassan. He wants his friend to go to college because college is what he envisions for his own future. However, he does demonstrate interest in Hassan's wellbeing, showing that he values their friendship.*



Downstairs, Hollis is dressed in a pink pantsuit because she is going to the factory to check on things and then to the warehouse in Memphis. She evades Colin's question about why the warehouse is in Memphis. She tells Colin that she is sending him and the others to interview the old factory retirees. They should ask the same four questions but stay a little longer to be polite. Between sighs, Hollis says that Lindsey used to visit these people before she started dating "that boy." She yells up at Lindsey to get out of bed. Lindsey yells back that she is getting in the shower. Hollis tells Colin she will be out late but will have her cell phone.

*Again, Lindsey demonstrates to Colin that it is possible to defy a parent's wishes and still maintain a loving relationship with that parent. Following Colin's assertion to Hassan that college is the only possible path to a future, Lindsey's defiance begs the question of whether Colin has ever considered alternative options or if he simply assumes college is in the future because that is what his parents have always told him.*



When Lindsey comes downstairs, Hassan is watching TV. "Sorry Linds," he says, "I called in sick." Colin notes that he has never called Lindsey "Linds." On the way out to the **Hearse**, Colin vents about how "fugging" frustrated he is that Hassan gets to call in sick when he was also up late. Lindsey asks why he and Hassan say "fug" all the time. Colin tells her that he was reading Norman Mailer's *The Naked and the Dead* when he and Hassan met, and that the book uses "fug" constantly because the publishers in 1948 told Mailer he could not include actual "F-bombs" in his book. Hassan started saying "fug" as an homage to Mailer and as a way to swear in class without getting in trouble. Lindsey remarks that even though there is no moral, romance, or adventure, this is a good story.

*Colin's frustration with Hassan for calling in sick seems in part due to jealousy over Hassan's informality with Lindsey. However, Colin also seems to be jealous that it occurs to Hassan to simply do as he pleases when it only ever occurs to Colin to do as he is told. By asking Colin about an inside joke he shares with Hassan, Lindsey reminds Colin of Hassan's importance to him. She emphasizes that Colin's explanation of the inside joke is a "good story," meaning that Colin has found his way back to appreciation of his friend by telling a story about their friendship.*



They come up on Chase's car. Lindsey has Colin slow down and roll down his window. TOC is driving and calls out, "Hey Lass." Lindsey says, "not funny," while Chase laughs. TOC invites Lindsey to go out that evening, but she declines and tells Colin to go. She says that the exchange was an inside joke. She turns the conversation to his **Theorem** and tells Colin she wants to contribute to it so that she might "matter a little." While she can't fix it, it occurs to her that there are more variables to relationships than Colin has been accounting for, such as age, attractiveness, and fetishes. Colin agrees, proposing that a guy who only likes girls with thirteen toes would dump a pretty girl who only has ten toes and only likes "skinny guys with glasses and Jew-fros." Lindsey adds, "And really green eyes," telling Colin she is complimenting him.

By the time they reach the nursing home where they are to conduct their interviews, Colin and Lindsey have settled on five variables: age, popularity differential, attractiveness differential, Dumper/Dumpee differential, and introvert/extrovert differential. Still, as they sit in the car with the windows down, Colin has trouble getting the graphs of the various Katherines to look right relative to one another. He tries to think of the formula "not as math, which he hated, but as language, which he loved." The formula gets more and more complicated as he thinks of it as an attempt to communicate. Finally, he gets something that he thinks is close. Lindsey says she doesn't understand it at all, so he is probably right. They go inside to talk to the "oldsters."

Colin has only been to a nursing home once, to visit a relative in a coma, so he is pleasantly surprised by how chatty everyone is inside. Lindsey has to correct some of the interviewees who assume he is her boyfriend. The "oldsters" seem to have great affection for Hollis, and Lindsey seems to be "some kind of rock star" among them. He learns from one of the interviewees that Lindsey used to come here at least once a week and used to sneak in a beer for him every Saturday. Colin and this man go over to where Lindsey is interviewing a woman named Jolene. Colin hears Lindsey find out from Jolene that Hollis is selling two hundred acres of land to her son, Marcus. Shortly thereafter, Lindsey grabs Colin and says they should leave.

*Whereas the inside joke Colin has just told helps him remember why he is friends with Hassan, Lindsey's inside joke is upsetting to her and makes her unhappy with TOC. Like Colin, she makes recourse to the **Theorem** to distract from the actual issues she is facing in her romantic relationship. She, too, seems to feel the need to distinguish herself in some way, and her desire to do so is heightened by the interaction with TOC. Lindsey's compliment suggests that although she is in a relationship with TOC, she finds Colin attractive.*



*Colin makes more progress on the formula than he has made in a while when he is working with Lindsey, demonstrating that doing something to distinguish himself might not necessarily mean completing that task without help. Colin's desire to think of the formula as language rather than math demonstrates that he is attempting to communicate through the **Theorem**. This desire demonstrates Colin's newfound understanding of his **Theorem** as a way to tell stories about his romantic past.*



*Speaking to the people in the nursing home allows Colin to change the story he tells himself about nursing homes. Their stories also further flesh out his understanding of Lindsey as a person. Whereas Lindsey has stated that she wants to "matter," it seems that in the nursing home, she already does. In this light, it is even more clear that Hollis's previous comment to Colin, about how Lindsey spends less time at the nursing home than she used to before dating TOC, means that Lindsey has not been acting herself.*



In the **Hearse**, Lindsey is perplexed by why Hollis would sell land. She is sure they are not hurting for money and says her great-grandfather, Dr. Fred N. Dinzanfar, built the factory. She then changes the subject to the “oldsters” and reminisces about going from one of their houses to the next in the “pre-friend days.” She teases Colin about how they kept talking about his good looks and that he could get a whole new demographic of Katherines in the over-eighty market. Colin says it was funny how they thought he and Lindsey were dating. Lindsey asks how that’s funny and gives him a slight smile. All he can say is “um.”

*Ironically, given that Lindsey has refashioned herself so many times, she seems very invested in tradition and the history of Gutshot. Lindsey calls the days when she spent more time with the elderly people the “pre-friend days,” but it seems that her relationships with the elderly people were more satisfying and affirming for Lindsey than her current friendships with her peers. It seems that the story she is telling herself about her life is just as mixed up as some of Colin’s stories.*



## CHAPTER 13

Hassan goes out with Lindsey, Katrina, TOC, JATT, and SOCT on Sunday and Monday while Colin works on the **Theorem**, which he still can’t get right for Katherine III or Katherine XIX. Hassan comes home on Monday night and reports to Colin that he kissed Katrina during a game of spin the beer bottle. Colin gives him a hard time about how if Hassan is being a pious Muslim, he must plan to marry Katrina. Hassan is upset that his friend is not happy for him, and he says “Dingleberries,” but Colin goes on berating him for making out with Katrina of all people. Hassan grabs Colin by the hair, pushes him against the wall, and presses into “the precise location of the **hole in Colin’s gut**.” He says he doesn’t want to fight Colin because Hassan would lose. Colin reflects that Hassan always jokes, even when he’s angry.

*Colin knows he has bothered Hassan by berating him for doing things forbidden by Islam, so he seems to be trying to provoke Hassan in this scene. Although Hassan ends the interaction with a joke, the physical altercation that precedes the joke demonstrates that Hassan has hit a kind of breaking point and wants Colin to leave him to make his own choices. The fact that Colin is upset with Hassan for making these choices, combined with the notion that Hassan hits Colin directly in the hole in his gut, suggests that Colin might be jealous of Hassan for finding himself before Colin manages to do the same.*



Once Hassan goes to bed, Colin continues working on the **Theorem** through his tears. He thinks of a best friend, a Katherine, and a Theorem as the three markers of success he is striving for. He has hated not reaching his markers ever since he was four and only learned twenty-three irregular Latin verb conjugations instead of the twenty-five his dad set for the day. He feels that he is now farther away from his markers than when he arrived in Gutshot three weeks ago.

*Colin’s dwelling on his failure to reach these markers suggests that indeed, the interaction with Hassan has been upsetting to him because it makes him feel even less “special” than he has already been feeling. However, he is also frustrated with himself because he has strained his relationship with Hassan.*



The next morning, Colin and Hassan avoid talking to each other during the interviews. Colin thinks about all the reasons he is frustrated with Hassan. Hassan, he thinks, has become “the kind of guy who cruises, leaving Colin behind.” Walking down the driveway from an interviewee’s house, Colin tells Hassan that he thinks he has changed. Once in the car, Hassan begins yelling at Colin about how he has lived in Colin’s shadow and has been Colin’s support without reciprocation. He just wants his friend to be happy for him for kissing a girl. As he criticizes Colin for his perpetual fear of being left behind, Colin, near tears, tells Hassan that Hassan called TOC “Colin” the previous evening. Hassan apologizes, and Colin admits to being self-centered. He asks how he can stop being afraid of being left behind. Hassan tells him he’s smart enough to figure it out.

*Hassan helps Colin recognize his self-centered nature not out of spite, but so that they might strengthen their friendship, demonstrating that Colin has not, in fact, been left behind. Rather, he has convinced himself again of a story that places him at the mercy of someone else’s actions. Colin finds out in this scene that he is actually in control of many aspects of his friendship with Hassan, despite the stories of helplessness he tells himself. By finding the words to tell Hassan that he feels replaced, Colin begins to realize that he is fifty percent responsible for every relationship, romantic or otherwise.*



Hassan and Colin make up after Colin congratulates Hassan for kissing a girl. They joke that they might be gay if they were both better looking. When Colin tells Hassan that he seems to act as if he hates Colin, Hassan sincerely says he thinks Colin is a genius and can do anything, and Colin accepts the compliment.

When they arrive at the store to pick up Lindsey from another illicit date with TOC, Hassan and TOC joke with each other, and TOC invites Colin to come out shooting with the group. Colin almost accepts but remembers his realization with regard to Marie Caravolli that such an arrangement can only result in humiliation for the outsider. He tries to pass by saying that he doesn't know how to shoot, but when TOC insists, Colin decides he owes it to Hassan to try. Once he accepts, TOC says he's going to take advantage of the others' presence in the store to sneak off for a night out bowling. Lindsey tries to go with him, but he says it's a boys' night out. Lindsey fake pouts and kisses him goodbye.

Colin, Lindsey, and Hassan go back to Hollis's house early. She is on the phone when they arrive and hangs up to tell them to stay out of the house until 5:30 p.m. Lindsey demands to know why Hollis is selling land to Marcus. Hollis says it is none of her business and that she knows Lindsey blew off work that day. Hassan says he has a date and will miss dinner, and Lindsey manages to make Hollis happy by saying that she is taking Colin ("this Colin") out to dinner tonight.

Before dinner, Colin continues working on the **Theorem**. He realizes that his problem with the Katherine XIX graph is that he has been attempting to graph a reunion. It will only work, he realizes, if he only accounts for events so far, meaning the graph must end with a breakup. Still, he can't figure out how to represent Katherine III, whose given name is Katherine Mutsenberger. Currently, the Theorem produces a graph that suggests that Colin dumped her rather than the other way around. This, he thinks, is ludicrous. He cannot figure out what he is missing because he remembers everything about Katherine III just as he remembers everything about all the others.

When Lindsey comes by Colin's room to get him for dinner, he is struck by how pretty she is. On the way outside, they see Katrina picking up Hassan. They kiss, and Colin can't believe he is seeing Hassan kiss a girl "who had to have been Homecoming Queen." Lindsey calls out to Hollis that they might be out late for "Hot sex and all," and Hollis says to have fun and call if they are going to be out past midnight.

*Hassan and Colin demonstrate their immaturity by making a gay joke, demonstrating that Colin and Hassan are navigating their friendship in a world that is anxious about closeness between men.*



*As it turns out, Hassan's newfound friendship with TOC seems to open a new opportunity for friendship for Colin as well. TOC's invitation demonstrates that Colin was quick to assume that Hassan's new friendships amounted to an abandonment of Colin. However, Colin is still so wrapped up in his feelings of social awkwardness that he feels supremely uncomfortable even trying to socialize with the popular kids. Colin's decision to participate in the hunt for Hassan's sake demonstrates growth on Colin's part.*



*Lindsey proves much more confrontational with Hollis than with TOC, further emphasizing her lack of actual investment in her romantic relationship as compared with her relationship with her mother. Lindsey seems all too happy to replace her potential plans with TOC with plans with Colin.*



*Colin's realization regarding Katherine XIX directly contradicts the purpose of the Theorem, which is to predict relationship outcomes. His continued investment in the project despite realizing that he can not account for every event demonstrates a shift in Colin's attitude towards deeper self-reflection. Colin's insistence that he remember everything about Katherine III shows increasing anxiety that he might have mixed up elements of the story he has told himself about her.*



*Colin's cognitive dissonance when he sees Hassan with Katrina demonstrates again that Colin relies on literary and cinematic tropes to understand the world and is taken aback when the world contradicts these tropes. The fact that the world has done something unexpected leaves room for Colin to be optimistic about his feelings for Lindsey.*



In the car, after Colin and Lindsey get food from what Lindsey refers to as the “Taco Hell” drive-thru and stare through the window at Hassan and Katrina, Colin asks why they are going out to dinner. Lindsey first says she wants to know how the **Theorem** works if you’re gay, and Colin insists that it doesn’t matter who the individuals represented by the variables are. Lindsey also says she is trying to get on Hollis’s good side by making better friends with Colin because she needs to find out what is going on with the land Marcus is buying. She is worried that Marcus is going to build a cookie-cutter subdivision, which she knows Hollis would not want. The third reason, she tells Colin, is that she needs to teach him how to shoot a gun so that he won’t embarrass himself.

They go to a field that Lindsey tells Colin will soon be owned by Marcus. They discuss their parents. Colin learns that Lindsey’s parents aren’t technically divorced but that her father left when she was one. Colin tells her that his parents are overprotective but normal. He calls his family boring, and Lindsey says he has to stop calling himself boring “or people will start to believe you.”

Lindsey gets a shotgun out of the trunk, loads it, and tells Colin to shoot straight ahead. The kick knocks him over, and Lindsey laughs, telling him that is why he needs to be prepared before the hunt with the others. After forty shots, his shoulder is numb. He asks Lindsey if she wants to try, and she says she doesn’t shoot guns because she is terrified of them. Lying back in the grass, Colin reflects that although he has gotten a number of physical injuries and a gaping **hole in his gut** while in Gutshot, he likes the place. Lindsey, lying next to him, kicks his shin lightly to get his attention. She tells him that part of the reason she is mad about Hollis selling the land is that her secret hideout is there. She asks if he wants to see it.

In a section subtitled, “The End (of the Middle),” Colin recalls sitting with Katherine I in Café Sel Marie and telling her about his Katherine pattern, all starting with her. They discussed her French tutoring, and she said, coded in numbers corresponding with the letters of the alphabet, “*Je pense que je t’aime.*” Colin noted that this could have meant either “I like you” or “I love you.” The moment was interrupted by a phone call from Colin’s mother, but “by then it was too late. In his mind, Katherine I was already becoming Katherine XIX. She would soon retake the throne that, all along, had rightfully been hers.”

*Lindsey claims to be using Colin’s company to reflect further on the Theorem and to get on Hollis’s good side. When she eventually reveals that she is going to teach him to shoot, it becomes clear that she is invested in his ability to make friends with her friends. Furthermore, she understands that he might be worried about embarrassing himself in front of the cool kids. While Lindsey, who has grown up in Gutshot, surely knows better than Colin the possibilities of embarrassment while shooting a gun, her concern demonstrates an understanding of his concern over his image.*



*Lindsey takes Colin to a place she associates with the past before telling him about her family. The nostalgia is heightened by the fact that Lindsey is afraid this land is soon to be sold. Whereas Colin has always looked forward to the future as far more interesting than his past or present, Lindsey insists on the value of the known.*



*Colin’s willingness to shoot the shotgun far past the point of physical pain shows that he is greatly invested in spending time with Lindsey. He is also willing to embarrass himself in front of her, which suggests that he feels more comfortable around her than he usually does around people he considers cool. Lindsey, likewise, feels comfortable enough around Colin that she invites him to her secret hideout.*



*Colin’s relationship with Katherine XIX began with uncertainty about the difference between “like” and “love,” foreshadowing Colin’s difficulty in sorting out his desire for Katherine XIX herself over his desire to have a girlfriend in general. Colin is so wrapped up in the romantic narrative in his mind that he forgets that he exists outside of it.*



## CHAPTER 14

Back in the present, Lindsey tells Colin that the problem with his stories is that they don't have morals, he can't do a good girl voice, and he focuses too much on himself. Still, she can imagine Katherine XIX, and she thinks Colin likes her because she's a little mean to him. Lindsey won over TOC from Katrina by being mean, she says. She claims that it is easy to get people to like you. Colin says it isn't easy for him, but Lindsey protests that she likes him, and she doesn't like anyone. Lindsey looks at the damage Colin has done shooting trees and says he might be able to kill a pig, but Colin insists that he does not want to do so. He challenges Lindsey on her statement that she doesn't like anyone: she seems to like the "oldsters." She says that is because they never messed with her.

Lindsey leads Colin to a small, dark cave. She says she is bringing him there because he is the only guy skinny enough to fit. By the light of a flashlight, Colin sees that inside the cave are a blanket, sleeping bag, pillows, and a jar of moonshine Lindsey says she got from TOC. She told him she drank it, but she brought it here instead. Lindsey has Colin turn off the light, and it is "the kind of dark your eyes never adjust to."

Lindsey says she found the cave when she was hiking around by herself in eighth grade. She has never been in here with someone else and says it is different being invisible with someone. Colin asks what she does here since it is too dark to read or do anything. Lindsey says she just sits here where no one can find her. The two are quiet for a moment (indicated by ellipses), and Lindsey offers Colin moonshine. Colin has never had alcohol and says moonshine can make you blind. Lindsey is unsurprised. By feel, they find the moonshine and each other, and they both try some moonshine. Colin says it's like French-kissing a dragon, which Lindsey says is the funniest thing he's ever said. Colin says he used to be funnier. The two grow quiet but keep bumping into one another's body parts.

Lindsey decides to tell Colin a story about herself. She says that in elementary school, she was friends with all the Gutshot kids (they went to school in Danville), but in third grade, TOC and his friends started saying she was a dog and calling her Lass, short for Lassie. She goes on to talk about how she gave everyone valentines in fourth grade but got none in return. She returned home feeling horrible and refusing to talk to Hollis about it. Out her bedroom window, she saw TOC run up to the door with a cardboard box covered in hearts and drop it off. She ran down to see what it was and found that it contained a can of Alpo dog food. From then on, it became her life's goal to get him, kiss him, and marry him. She says he's different now and is protective.

*Lindsey's criticism of Colin for being self-centered in his stories gives him a hint at how to stop being so self-centered in his relationships: tell stories that account for other perspectives. The idea that Colin has been manipulated into liking Katherine for her meanness has never occurred to Colin. Once the idea has been planted, it seems all the more significant that Lindsey professes to actually like him and is not mean to him. Notably, neither Lindsey nor Colin includes TOC in the short list of people Lindsey likes.*



*The cave is an intimate space that Lindsey is choosing to share with Colin even though it is her hideout from the rest of the world, including TOC. The intense darkness makes it difficult to focus on image, meaning that the cave might allow Lindsey to be her true self.*



*Lindsey's use of the cave dates from eighth grade, the same time when she first had Hollis help her remake her image. The cave seems to represent for her a space where she does not have to worry about image but can think about the person she wants to be for herself. Being there with Colin is very intimate because not only are they isolated from the rest of the world, but they also do not have to worry about what they look like to each other physically. By offering Colin moonshine, Lindsey encourages him to make a rebellious choice based on what he wants instead of what he has been told to do (or not do).*



*Lindsey's story is an explanation of the "inside joke" Colin witnessed earlier on, when TOC referred to Lindsey as "Lass." The story echoes Colin's explanation of his inside joke with Hassan about the word "fug." Whereas Colin's explanation reminded him of why Hassan is important to him, Lindsey's explanation of this joke requires her qualification as to why she is in a relationship with TOC. Given that he has been incredibly mean to her and continues to refer to her as "Lass," it seems that Lindsey might be tweaking the fact in order to fit the narrative she wants to be true about her future with TOC.*



After another moment of silence, Colin asks if Lindsey thinks people would like her more or less if they could see inside her. He feels like the Katherines always dump him right when they start to see inside him, except Katherine XIX. He doesn't think anyone would love him if they saw him the way he sees himself. Lindsey says that in two years of dating, TOC has never said he loves her. She admires TOC because he doesn't pretend to be anyone other than who he is. She says that by comparison, she is "full of shit." She goes on to remark that "The thing about chameleoning your way through life is that it gets to where nothing is real." She says that for Colin, at least he can get to the part where *he* doesn't matter. She says that the only true sentence she can begin with "I" is "I'm full of shit."

After a longer silence, Colin says that he likes Lindsey, and that she doesn't chameleon in front of him. For example, she bites her thumb in front of him and has brought him to her secret hiding place. Colin is mid-sentence when Lindsey says "hi." Colin says "hi," then Lindsey says, "We shouldn't." Colin says she started it, but Lindsey says that was just because she wanted to say "We shouldn't" dramatically. She says they should leave it at their foreheads and noses touching and Colin's hand on her leg. She bites her thumb again.

Colin and Lindsey return home after dark, talking about how it is just not meant to be. Anyway, Colin thinks, she's a Lindsey. They walk in the house quietly and overhear Hollis on the phone, talking about leaving something out for the garbage men to pick up. Colin and Lindsey sneak back out the window then come back in the front door, loudly this time. Hollis asks if they had fun, and Lindsey, looking at Colin, says she's rarely had so much fun in her life.

On the stairs, Lindsey and Colin conspire about Hollis's phone call. It must have something to do with the warehouse, Colin says, because that's where Hollis was today. Lindsey says they might need to take a road trip out there. Hassan appears and says he and Katrina, who he emphasizes is a college girl (Colin has always said he will need to go to college to date a college girl), are in. The date went well.

Colin sneaks into Hassan's room once Lindsey goes downstairs. They discuss how Hassan got to second base over the shirt, and how Hassan and Lindsey got very close to one another. Hassan wants to know if Colin likes her, and he says in the moment, he kind of did. Hassan encourages him to finish the **Theorem** so he can predict how it would go.

*Lindsey and Colin feel equally adrift in their own lives. Colin feels that his relationship problems are due to over-intimacy. Lindsey contents herself with TOC's indifference because she is sure that there is no real Lindsey beneath all the images she has created for herself. While Colin worries that people will see a version of himself that not even he can see, Lindsey worries that people will see that she has no true self. Despite these worries, Colin and Lindsey are proving that they have inner selves by revealing their deepest, most private feelings to one another.*



*The narrator describes this entire interaction through dialogue and no description. This style of narration emphasizes that Lindsey and Colin are really listening to each other and not paying attention to external factors. The dialogue implies that they come close to kissing, which Lindsey initiates and then stops, perhaps feeling like she is cheating on TOC.*



*Colin and Lindsey decide to maintain their relationship as-is, not necessarily because they do not want to date each other but because to do so would be to upset the narratives they tell about themselves. For all Lindsey's insistence that it is possible to decide one's own fate, she remains attached to her life as-is for familiarity's sake.*



*Lindsey's commitment to finding out what Hollis is up to, with the hope of stopping her from selling the land, further shows that Lindsey is afraid of change. Hassan's reappearance, and the news of his good date with Katrina, provide a contrasting example of how surprising turns of events can be positive.*



*Sharing details about relationships is new to Colin and Hassan. The fact that they can bond over their love interests suggests that even if a romantic relationship turns out poorly, it could have a positive impact for Colin by giving him something to share with his friend.*



## CHAPTER 15

Things are awkward over the next few days because Lindsey and Colin do not talk about anything they mentioned in the cave, but slowly things return to the way they were. Lindsey has a boyfriend, and Colin works on the **Theorem**. To shake things up a little, Hassan has a girlfriend, and everyone is preparing for a pig hunt.

Colin tries to prepare for the pig hunt by reading. The feral pig seems like a fierce enemy. Colin consoles himself by thinking that he is not really going on a hunt—it is more like a walk through the woods with a gun. The morning of the hunt, he is excited to wake up before the rooster for the first time. He runs into Hassan in the bathroom, and Hassan says that he is confident no pigs will die today.

Colin and Hassan drive to the meeting place for the hunt in the **Hearse** with Lindsey. Lindsey directs them to a lodge off a dead-end, where they find TOC, JATT, and a middle-aged man Colin recognizes from one of the interviews as Townsend Lyford. Katrina comes outside and greets Hassan cheerfully. Colin calls Hassan a smooth cat.

Inside the lodge, SOCT hands Colin and Hassan camouflage outfits and bright orange vests. They change in the outhouse. Mr. Lyford then gives a speech before everyone about the dangers of the feral pig, or “the poor man’s grizzly bear.” He puts heavy emphasis on a lot of words. He calls pig hunting a sport and says that the pigs are pests that even the government says should be eradicated. To Colin’s surprise, TOC calls Mr. Lyford “Dad.” Everyone gets their marching orders except Katrina, who refuses to hunt on moral grounds. Hassan tells her he is thinking of going vegetarian. She tells him not to get skinny, they kiss publicly, and Colin is baffled.

On the hunt, Colin and Hassan are to stick with Mr. Lyford while the others go off separately. He tells them to start looking for rootings, or places where the hog has turned up the soil. He talks to them as if they are younger than they are, but he also offers them chewing tobacco, which they decline. Eventually, Hassan finds a rooting, and Mr. Lyford takes off at a brisk pace between a run and a walk. Colin and Hassan ask to slow down, and Mr. Lyford disappointedly decides to leave them behind in search of the pig because “This is no time for lollygaggin’ or dillydallyin’.” He leaves his chewing tobacco with Colin in case the hog smells the wintergreen.

*The fact that Lindsey and Colin fail to continue talking about their feelings once they are back to their normal lives, surrounded by other people, and away from the intimacy of the cave shows that the script people expect them to perform gets in the way of their self-expression and happiness.*



*Colin’s attempt to prepare for the hunt by reading shows that as usual, he is more comfortable getting to know the world through books and theories than by jumping into new experiences.*



*The narrator’s emphasis that Colin and Hassan are driving with Lindsey in the Hearse underscores that for them, the pig hunt feels both silly and like a rite of passage with high stakes.*



*The way Mr. Lyford speaks is very unfamiliar to Colin and Hassan, who have grown up in relatively wealthy families in the city. Nonetheless, SOCT includes them in the group by giving them hunting clothes. Hassan also appears to have found a girlfriend who affirms his attractiveness despite his body image issues. Colin is thus noticing that unexpected and unfamiliar situations can offer opportunities for surprisingly positive relationships.*



*Colin and Hassan are not quite sure what to make of Mr. Lyford, but the fact that Colin is sticking with his friend on this adventure, which is extremely far removed from Colin’s usual summer practice of studying, is a testament to his character growth thus far in the novel. Colin is willing not only to be flexible with his plans for how to spend his time but also endures the condescension of Mr. Lyford when he is used to being recognized as the smartest person in the room.*



Hassan has Colin pull out the mini recorder from the interviews and records a “captain’s log,” in a *Star Trek* voice, about how boring hog hunting is, and how he is going to take a nap while Colin keeps a lookout. While Hassan naps, Colin thinks about Katherine XIX and decides against calling her again. He wants to wait until he completes the Theorem. He begins thinking about Katherine III and why on earth she is posing a problem for the **Theorem**. He only knew her for twelve days. He **anagrams** her name, “Katherine Mutsenberger,” and finds the phrase, “remark eighteen, snub rest.” It does not make sense, he thinks, because he remarked all nineteen.

When Hassan wakes, Colin tells him about Katherine III, and how she dumped him at the end of “smart kid camp.” She was homeschooled, and as it turns out, Hassan knows her from homeschooling events he attended before he started going to Colin’s school. When Colin expresses his perplexity that the formula does not work for Katherine III, Hassan encourages him to call her. Colin has never thought of this before, but he decides to give it a try. When Katherine III picks up, he reminds her who he is and questions her about how cool she was in fourth grade, then hangs up. Hassan tells him she must think he’s “STARK RAVING BONKERS.” Colin ponders for a moment whether the formula could possibly already be right. He calls Katherine back and finds out that indeed, she did not dump him—he dumped her. He apologizes for hurting her feelings, and they get off the phone amicably.

Colin feels betrayed by his memory. He tells Hassan that he has only ever been two things: a child prodigy and dumped by Katherines. Hassan says he should be grateful that now he is neither. Colin is now a Dumper, and Hassan is “making out with a ridiculously hot girl.” He says the world has turned upside down, like a snow globe God is shaking. Colin feels an affinity with Lindsey now in her inability to identify what “I” means. He now has not one **missing piece from his gut** but, rather, thousands. He feels that there is something wrong with him that he needs to fix. He looks up at the branches splitting the sky into pieces and feels like he has vertigo.

*Hassan, as usual, finds a way to make even the disastrous hog hunt amusing. He provides Colin with an example of how to adapt a failure to make the best of it instead of continuing with a sense of unrealistic optimism to strive for the original desired outcome. Colin gets partway there: he decides to use the failed hog hunt as an opportunity to work on the Theorem, but he continues to think in vain of his prospects with Katherine XIX.*



*Through Hassan’s encouragement, Colin realizes that Katherine III is an actual person who might have another piece of the puzzle he is trying to put together. Even Hassan has another piece of the puzzle, and Colin has never noticed because he has never asked his friend about his Katherine III dilemma. When he listens to Hassan and Katherine III, Colin recognizes that the story might have more sides than the one he remembers. This realization is a significant step towards doing as Lindsey has suggested and making his stories less self-centered.*



*Colin must reconcile himself to the fact that not only do others have missing pieces from his stories but also to the fact that this means he might be wrong about things he recalls as facts. Colin, who prides himself as perpetually right, experiences this realization as a threat to one of his core identifiers. Combined with other surprising events of the past weeks, Colin’s shift in perspective feels like an even bigger shift than the one he experienced when first walking across the field in Gutshot. The realization that he has thousands of missing pieces signals some growth: Colin no longer thinks of Katherine XIX as the one piece that will fix everything.*



Just then, Hassan spots a pig, and the pig spots Colin and Hassan. It is huge and terrifying. Colin tries to recall useful information from books he has read, but try as they might to intimidate the pig, it charges at them. All Colin can do is summon the courage to shoot the pig the way Lindsey showed him. He is amazed to see the pig stop dead in its tracks and run away, but then it becomes clear that the pig ran away because Colin accidentally shot a hornets' nest. Colin and Hassan take off running, Colin always remaining behind Hassan so his friend, who is running impressively fast but is still not athletic, will not die alone of hornet stings on a hog hunt in south-central Tennessee.

When the buzzing stops, Hassan collapses. Colin panics at first, thinking his friend is allergic to bees and going into anaphylactic shock. Hassan reassures him after a moment that he is simply out of breath. It then becomes clear that while Hassan only has three stings, Colin has taken the brunt of the damage, with eight stings, because he stayed behind Hassan. The stings are very painful, and Hassan announces that he hates the outdoors. Colin, drawing on information he learned in one of the factory interviews, pulls out Mr. Lyford's chewing tobacco and presses it on his stings to alleviate the pain. He offers some to Hassan. Hassan tells Colin that this is an actual interesting fact, and that he should "focus less on who was prime minister of Canada in 1936 and focus more on shit that makes my life better."

Colin and Hassan begin walking downhill, uncertain of where they are and worried that they might die out in the forest. Finally, they see a house that Colin recognizes as one that can be seen from the **Archduke's** grave. They hurry toward it and see movement in the graveyard. As they draw closer, Hassan confirms with Colin that they are seeing Katrina, naked, straddling "some guy."

## CHAPTER 16

Colin, who has never seen people having sex before, finds the sight of Katrina and the guy in the graveyard ridiculous but intriguing. Hassan begins to laugh and yells, "I AM BREAKING UP WITH YOU!" Colin reflects that Hassan "takes so little seriously." Hassan tells Colin that he has to see the humor in Hassan walking out of the forest in such a sad state to find the first girl he ever kissed having sex with TOC next to the **Archduke's** grave. Colin turns around and sees that Hassan is right—the guy with Katrina is TOC. Colin charges toward TOC but doesn't know what to do once they are face to face. TOC threatens to beat up Colin and Hassan if they tell Lindsey. Katrina admits that this arrangement has been going on for a long time, and Hassan says they can still be friends. TOC swears this was the last time.

*Colin demonstrates great courage to engage with his physical environment in the midst of a crisis. Whereas a few weeks ago he might have thought of the altercation with the pig as an opportunity to become an infamous victim like the **Archduke** or like Saint Apollonia, he now thinks only of his and Hassan's survival. When it really counts, he demonstrates a will to stay alive and unremarkable rather than dead or injured but with a grand legacy.*



*Colin finds his sense of self in the midst of emergency, pulling facts out of the back of his mind. He shows that his misunderstanding of what happened with Katherine III does not indicate that he is not a knower of facts but rather that he simply rearranged the facts in that particular case. Hassan's praise for Colin's memory means a lot because usually he criticizes Colin for bringing up facts at inappropriate times. By making use of his talents in the situation at hand instead of simply showing off, Colin feels that he is making a difference.*



*Colin's use of the Archduke's grave as a physical landmark demonstrates that the grave is more important to Colin and Hassan because of the geographical location to which it has led them (Gutshot) and because of the sight they find there (Katrina cheating on Hassan) rather than because of its original significance to them.*



*Colin's unfamiliarity with sex reinforces that although he has dated a lot, he is still quite young. The fact that he is baffled by Hassan's amusement at the circumstances gives the impression that Colin takes his own romantic relationships more seriously than they might be to others. Colin's urge to beat up TOC shows that Colin's feelings for Lindsey might be more complex than his feelings for the Katherines. He thus shows greater investment in Lindsey's happiness in this scene than he has shown for Katherine XIX's happiness throughout the book.*



When Lindsey, SOCT, and JATT show up, Colin tries to decide whether or not to tell Lindsey—would he want to know if he were her, and what about the fact that he likes her? Lindsey, smiling cheerily, has brought beer for TOC, and Colin feels horrible for her. No one, it turns out, has killed a hog. SOCT and JATT squabble over which one of them shot a squirrel, and Lindsey teases them for being like an old married couple both in love with TOC. They both begin repeatedly trying to assert their heterosexuality.

Everyone drinks except Hassan, who says he is no longer drinking. Lindsey asks if Colin is quiet because of the stings, and he says they burn “like the fire of ten thousand suns.” TOC says “Pussy,” which is the breaking point Colin needs to pull out the mini recorder and play back the conversation, which he recorded, in which Katrina and TOC admitted to hooking up with each other occasionally ever since they dated sophomore year. Suddenly, everyone gets into a fist fight. Colin is impressed to see JATT go after TOC, even though TOC knocks him out. Colin and Hassan try to rush TOC, who is holding onto Lindsey against her will. TOC knocks them to the ground, but Lindsey frees herself by squeezing TOC’s genitals. Colin makes his way to the **Archduke**’s obelisk, “the only geographical location in the world that wasn’t currently spinning.”

Once Colin has recovered a bit, everyone gangs up on TOC. Colin is an inexperienced fighter and accidentally slaps Hassan. TOC kicks Colin in the groin, and Colin vomits on his way to the ground. He feels that the “Franz Ferdinandian **hole in his gut**” has ripped open into a canyon. He reflects that the nauseating pain is all in his brain. He pushes through it, knowing he has to help Hassan, and drags himself up on the **Archduke**’s obelisk to look around. TOC is gone. Lindsey is tending to Hassan with her first-aid kit. Colin turns back to the obelisk. He realizes his glasses are gone again, and the letters on the obelisk appear jumbled. He anagrams and says, “That’s a hell of a coincidence.” Hassan notices that he is awake. Lindsey rushes over, thanks him for defending her honor, and asks where TOC hurt Colin. “In the brain,” he says.

## CHAPTER 17

The next morning is Colin and Hassan’s twenty-second morning in Gutshot, which is “indubitably the worst.” Colin is in pain from walking, running, getting stung, and being beat up. Lindsey has decided she is never speaking to TOC again. Colin sees Hassan, who is also in bad shape, in the bathroom. Hassan jokes that if he could do it again, “I’d just let myself be trampled to death by the Satan Pig.”

*Colin continues to demonstrate that he wants what is best for Lindsey. He could tell her that TOC has been cheating on her in order to get her to break up with TOC. Regardless of whether such a breakup would lead to a relationship between Lindsey and Colin, it would mean that Colin could see less of TOC, whom he does not particularly like.*



*The events in the graveyard seem to have made Hassan decide to go back to his usual habits of not dating and not drinking. He makes these decisions for himself, which shows a strong sense of commitment to his values and the person he wants to be. Colin has more difficulty deciding what his values are in this moment. The fact that TOC’s feminizing insult is what gets Colin to break suggests that Colin’s insecurity has led him to feel he must demonstrate his masculinity in front of Lindsey.*



*Colin’s commitment to helping Hassan further shows that Colin has already become less self-centered than he used to be. The way Colin stares at the obelisk without his glasses and seems to have an idea based on the anagram he creates from his letters is significant. Whereas the last time Colin lost his glasses, it gave him the idea that he was too nearsighted and needed to look ahead to the future, now he seems to discover that if he looks right in front of him, there may be new ideas to discover.*



*Although everyone is unhappy, Colin, Hassan, and Lindsey experience the after effects of the events in the graveyard as a community. They might wish that the events had not transpired as they did, but everyone has learned something from the experience.*



Downstairs, Lindsey says she doesn't want to talk about what happened, but that she hopes Colin's genitals are okay. That day, they are to go interview Mabel Bertrand, who is at the home for when you're "really old." Lindsey doesn't want to go, but Colin convinces her that Mabel could use the company. Lindsey drives the **Hearse**, and no one speaks. Colin wants to think about Katherine III, but his head hurts too much.

At the assisted living facility, Mabel, who seems to have memory problems, recounts memories of Dr. Dinzanfar. He once gave her free candy. She tells Lindsey she missed holding her hand, and Lindsey starts crying. She stops in the bathroom on the way out. While waiting for Lindsey on the curb, Hassan says that the fact that the nursing home isn't funny is getting to him. Colin challenges him as to why everything has to be funny, but Hassan objects to being psychoanalyzed. At this point, Lindsey returns and says she doesn't need to talk about it.

That night, Colin finishes the **Theorem** and gets an accurate graph for his true relationship with Katherine III. He shows the graph to Hassan and Lindsey. Hassan wants to know if it works to predict the future for anyone, and Colin says yes. He asks Hassan who he's looking to date; Hassan says that he is not looking to date anyone, electing to eliminate "breakup" from the list of three romantic possibilities Colin always discusses (breakup, divorce, or death). Lindsey asks if Colin can model her and TOC's relationship. Colin clarifies that getting cheated on counts as getting dumped and plots a graph that shows TOC dumping Lindsey. Lindsey says all she feels about breaking up is relief. That, Colin says, is a Dumper emotion. Lindsey says she has realized two things: "I don't want to date assholes, and I'm not actually turned on by big muscles."

Hassan tells Colin the formula seems to work, but it really only proves what everyone already knew: that football players like TOC play the field, and that Katherines dump Colins. Colin says the real test will be whether the formula can predict how a relationship will go. Lindsey interrupts to tell Colin he should ask Hassan what he was doing in the game room. Hassan lets Colin know that he was registering for two college classes.

*Although Lindsey does not want to talk about her breakup, Colin's encouragement to go see one of the "oldsters" who cares about Lindsey shows that just as Hassan has been trying to help Colin reconnect with himself in the wake of Katherine XIX, Colin is trying to help Lindsey reconnect with her old self.*



*Lindsey is confronted in this scene not only with memories of when she used to visit Mabel and the other "oldsters" often, but also with Mabel's increasing age and with stories of Gutshot's history from before she was even born. Combined with her belief that Hollis is selling land, Lindsey feels an intense sense of nostalgia and seems to worry that she will not be able to retrieve her former, "oldster"-visiting self from the past.*



*Colin's success with the Theorem is a mark of achievement. However, it seems that the Theorem offers Hassan and Lindsey more opportunity for growth than it offers Colin. It prompts Hassan to announce that he is not dating anymore, not because he can't find anyone to date but because he does not want to date. For Lindsey, the Theorem prompts the realization that if she dates anyone, she wants that person to treat her well. Both Hassan and Lindsey seem surer of themselves than before their breakups.*



*The fact that completing the Theorem is not enough for Colin demonstrates again that his markers of success are always moving farther away. Lindsey's interruption just when Colin is talking about whether the formula can predict a relationship foreshadows that Colin and Lindsey will get together by the end of the novel.*



## CHAPTER 18

Lindsey wakes Colin up on Thursday morning, telling him they are going to Memphis to spy on Hollis. Colin pretends to be sleepy, but he is alert as soon as Lindsey jumps on his bed. Downstairs, Colin helps Hassan find the address of the warehouse. Hassan insists on taking credit because he has had a rough week. Colin, he notes, is the least recent Dumpee in the house. Colin realizes that he wants Katherine XIX to call, but he no longer wants her back.

Colin reads J.D. Salinger's *Seymour: An Introduction* in the backseat of the **Hearse** on the way to Memphis. He finds the sight of skyscrapers comforting as they pull into the city.

The address they found leads them to an empty parking lot. There is no receptionist in the small office of the warehouse, so Colin, Lindsey, and Hassan make their way out back to a dirt field, where there are two guys driving a bulldozer and a forklift containing three large cardboard boxes. At Lindsey's urging, Colin walks up to the hole the bulldozer seems to be digging for the boxes and asks the guy operating the forklift if he works for Gutshot Textiles. The forklift operator confirms that he does but declines to tell Colin what he is throwing in the hole. However, the next box to fall in the hole bursts open, and thousands of strings are suddenly flying through the air. He grabs at the air and realizes that the boxes must be full of tampons. The sight of them flying through the air, he thinks, is pretty.

The forklift operator, who introduces himself as the director of operations for Gutshot Textiles, recognizes Lindsey because she looks like Hollis. He says that Hollis will be there soon and walks the three teenagers back to the hot warehouse. Lindsey is aghast and thinks Hollis must have lost her mind if she is having her director of operations bury the factory's product, thereby running Gutshot into the ground. Colin is protesting that he doesn't think Hollis wants to run the company into the ground when Hollis herself appears.

*Colin's final realization that he only wants to work through the past with Katherine XIX, rather than dream about a future with her, suggests that Colin has finally learned to adapt his romantic plans to account for unexpected change. The ease with which Lindsey gets Colin's attention shows that his sights are finally turning toward Lindsey.*



*Colin is reading a story about a literary child prodigy, Seymour Glass. The premise of the story is that Seymour recently died by suicide. The tragic end of Seymour's life contrasts with the way Colin is riding in the Hearse toward new adventures.*



*Whereas earlier in the novel, Colin expressed fear of the mystery surrounding tampons "in the wild," he is now seeing them very much "in the wild," out of their wrappers, and thinks they are pretty. His appreciation of the sight symbolizes his increased appreciation of Gutshot and the people involved in running its textile factory. Because tampons are typically associated with women, Colin's appreciation of their beauty also shows increased maturity in how he thinks of women. However, the fact that the tampons are being disposed of in this manner signals that something is not right in factory operations.*



*Colin tries to help Lindsey see that Hollis likely has an alternative viewpoint from Lindsey, which is prompting her to have the tampons buried. By suggesting that the same event might represent something different when seen from someone else's perspective, Colin fulfills the same role for Lindsey that she has fulfilled for him in the past by suggesting that he account for multiple perspectives in his stories.*



Hollis is surprised to see Lindsey there. Lindsey begins angrily demanding if she is trying to kill the town so that Lindsey will have to leave. Hollis is surprised that Lindsey would think this. She explains that actually, the factory is doing poorly because there is no one to buy the product. Almost all the factory's business has been lost to overseas companies. Not wanting to fire anyone in order to produce less, Hollis has been secretly burying the extra tampons that have been stacking up in the factory.

Lindsey demands why, if the company is so broke, Hollis hired Colin and Hassan to do a made-up job. Hollis explains that the job is not made up. "A generation from now there might not be a factory," she says, "and I want your kids and their kids to know what it was like, what we were like [...] The world ain't gonna stay like you imagine it sweetheart." She swears Lindsey and the others to secrecy. Her plan is to continue like this for five years while she tries to come up with new ways of making money. Colin decides that unlike TOC's cheating, he should keep this secret because "People don't like to know [...] that their paychecks have less to do with their company's profitability than its owner's compassion."

Lindsey rides with Hollis on the way back to Gutshot, leaving Colin and Hassan alone together in the **Hearse**. Hassan takes the opportunity to tell Colin that he has reflected on the question of why he always makes jokes. He says it is a way of "not-doing." If he makes fun of other people for the things they do, he can deflect attention from the fact that he sits around and does nothing. He resolves to start doing things, starting with taking his trash out of the car. He jokes that he deserves a Congressional Medal of Honor for this feat, and Colin reassures him that he is still funny and has been doing things—for example, he registered for college. Hassan concedes to this fact but says, in a "faux morose" tone, that he probably ought to register for three classes, not just two.

## CHAPTER 19

Colin and Hassan arrive home after Hollis and Lindsey. Hollis tells them Lindsey went to stay overnight with her friend Janet. She thinks Lindsey is upset about "the boy." Hassan offers to help Hollis brainstorm ideas for making money, and Colin tells them he is going to go out camping.

*Hollis confirms that indeed, there is an alternate side to the story Lindsey has been telling herself about what Hollis has been up to secretly. While Lindsey has been convinced that Hollis is trying to destroy Gutshot so that she will be forced to leave, Hollis has actually been doing everything she can to make sure that life in Gutshot does not change more than it must.*



*What Hollis reveals forces Lindsey to reckon with the fact that no matter how much she tries to reconnect with the "oldsters" or lay down roots in Gutshot, things are going to change, and Lindsey will have to change with them. Just as Colin cannot rely on others to define him, Lindsey cannot rely on external factors to define herself because those factors will not always be in place.*



*Lindsey's decision to ride back to Gutshot with her mother shows that, to an extent, she has accepted the changes on the horizon. Hassan also accepts and welcomes change. Although he is sarcastic about the effort involved in his resolution to "do things" and go to college, he nevertheless pushes himself to use the potential Colin has always told him he has. Meanwhile, Colin demonstrates that he has changed by congratulating Hassan for what he has already done instead of nagging him to do more.*



*Lindsey has already told Colin that she is glad not to be dating TOC. Although she might still be upset about the breakup, she has shown much more distress over the change Hollis is expecting to come to Gutshot. It seems that Hollis is unaware that the reason Lindsey was dating TOC in the first place was to forge a stronger connection to the Gutshot of the past.*



Colin drives in the **Hearse** to the field where he practiced shooting with Lindsey, hoping that he is correct in understanding “sleeping over at Janet’s” as a hint from Lindsey to him. He hikes up to her secret hideout, **anagramming** along the way. He does indeed find Lindsey in the cave, and she confirms that she was giving him a code through Hollis. Colin sits beside her, and she turns out the light she has briefly illuminated for him to find his way into the cave.

Lindsey tells Colin that she thinks TOC is not real after all, and she is mad that she wasted so much of her life with him. She was crying on the way home in the car with Hollis because she realized she only ever liked the idea of being his girlfriend. She worries that compared to Hollis, who is trying to help all the factory workers, she is the most self-centered person in the world. Colin tells her she can’t be because that is his title. She reminds him that he let the hornets sting him instead of Hassan. He concedes that they are at least nearly tied for most self-centered.

Colin asks Lindsey how to fix the problem of being self-centered. She tells him she has been thinking about his “mattering” business. She says she thinks how you matter is defined by what matters to you. It is easy to get caught in something unimportant, like she did with TOC, but there are more real things and people to care about, like the “oldsters.” Colin says he doesn’t think it is possible to fit missing pieces back inside oneself once they go missing: dating TOC did not fix the Alpo dog food prank, and getting Katherine XIX back would not fill the **hole in Colin’s gut**. Lindsey says that maybe no girl will. Colin agrees and says that neither will the **Theorem**. Life, he has decided, might be about more than achieving arbitrary markers.

After a silence, Colin says he thinks the **Archduke’s** grave contains someone else’s body. Lindsey says it’s her great-grandfather. Colin is surprised that she knows “Fred N. Dinzanfar” is an anagram of “Franz Ferdinand.” She tells him that all the old-timers know. Dinzanfar wanted his grave to be marked as such, and a couple years ago, Hollis put up the sign on the road to bring in revenue with tours. Ironically, what Dinzanfar did to be remembered has led to people forgetting him now that a lot of kids at school think the grave really belongs to the Archduke. Lindsey observes that by contrast, the interview tapes that they have been making will preserve real stories.

*Colin, who has only known Lindsey for a short time, can understand subtle communication from her that her own mother does not. The intimacy between Colin and Lindsey is heightened by his receptivity to her communication.*



*The narrator relates this conversation Colin and Lindsey have in the darkness through dialogue only, no description. The atmosphere of the scene is thus entirely about Lindsey and Colin’s conscious effort to communicate their inner thoughts with one another. By making themselves vulnerable in this way in front of each other, they both realize that they share common ground in their reliance on others to prop up their senses of self.*



*Colin and Lindsey realize together that no one person or thing can make them feel fulfilled. This realization is accompanied by a newfound understanding that achievement for the sake of achievement, or for the sake of impressing someone else, will only result in dissatisfaction because there will always be more to achieve and more people to impress. The fact that they come to this realization simultaneously is important because it means they can be important to each other without being each other’s “missing piece.”*



*This moment reveals Colin’s realization during the fist fight when he lost his glasses and anagrammed the letters on the Archduke’s obelisk. Colin’s anagramming abilities have led, in this instance, not necessarily to originality, but rather to the original roots of a story that has affected both Gutshot and Colin himself by bringing him to Gutshot in the first place. The fact that Hollis has made money for Gutshot off of this jumbled story shows that spitting back facts in a mixed-up order can be just as impactful as coming up with new ideas.*



Colin and Lindsey seem to grab each other's hand. Colin tells her how he dumped Katherine III and changed his memory of the event. Lindsey says that makes sense because she remembers things as stories. Once she spots a constellation of events, she makes other events fit into the shape. Colin's memory must work the same way: he is a natural-born storyteller. She asks him to tell her the story of the Katherines.

In a section subtitled, "The Beginning, and the Middle, and the End," Colin tells Lindsey about each Katherine. Katherine I was his tutor's daughter. Katherine II was an eight-year old whose romance with Colin was orchestrated by her best friend. After Katherine III came Katherine IV, from violin lessons. Katherine V gave Colin his first kiss while he was reading *Huck Finn* in the sandbox in fifth grade. Katherines VI, X, and XV were all girls from smart-kid camp. Katherine VII took pity on him in middle school when he had no friends until she realized he was hurting her social standing. Katherine VIII's full name anagrammed into "Heart Breaker, Ink." Katherine IX was in sixth grade when Colin was in seventh. Katherine XI went to one movie with Colin, held his hand, called him a genius, and never called him back. Katherine XII said Colin reminded her of Holden Caulfield. Katherine XIII was a longtime crush who Hassan helped him woo like *Cyrano de Bergerac*. Katherine XIV liked Camus, Kierkegaard, and metaphors. He had a fourteen-hour relationship with Katherine XVI at an Academic Decathlon tournament. Katherine XVII was an indie girl he met on the internet. He invested greatly in Katherine XVIII until she dumped him over email after two dates and four kisses, and two weeks later, Katherine XIX showed up on his doorstep. They dated for 343 days before she left him with the hole in his gut.

Colin ends his story by saying that the moral is that "What you remember becomes what happened," and that "breaking up isn't something that gets done to you; it's something that happens with you." Lindsey adds that the other moral is that anyone can learn to tell a good story. Colin says that something about telling the story "made my gut grow back together." They mention that they like each other. After a pause indicated by ellipses, Colin says, "Wow. My first Lindsey." Lindsey responds, "My second Colin." Colin says, "That was fun. Let's try it again." There are several more lines of ellipses. They drive home late and in their separate cars. They kiss "once more" in the driveway and then sneak into the house to sleep.

*Whereas Lindsey and Colin have thus far thought of themselves as very different kinds of storytellers, Lindsey now helps Colin understand his way of processing memories as a kind of storytelling. His memory has not failed but rather arranged the facts into a constellation. The idea that he is a natural storyteller is another positive identifier for Colin.*



*By weaving all his Katherine stories into one master-story that has a beginning, middle, and end, Colin finally concedes to leave his Katherine streak in his past as one of the stories that make up his life. His recounting of each of the Katherines shows an increasing interest in Katherines who make him feel smart. Even when girls barely dated him, he still considers them part of his narrative. This tendency shows the extent to which Colin has historically needed a Katherine to define himself. In fact, Katherine XIX is the only girl he dated long term. Because she was also Katherine I, it seems that Colin's great upset has been over not nineteen girls, but really over just one. In a sense, this is his first breakup all over again, and his great achievement in telling this story is accepting that time will move forward without Katherine in his life. Notably, Colin's statement that Katherine V was the first girl who kissed him contradicts his earlier recollection of his first kiss, with Katherine I. This mixed-up detail emphasizes that for Colin, his entire romantic life has been about Katherine I/Katherine XIX.*



*The act of telling his Katherine story constitutes for Colin the mastery of Lindsey's type of storytelling, which requires a moral and an element of romance in addition to a beginning, middle, and end. That mastery also constitutes a new kind of self-awareness: Colin has finally sorted out the pieces of his past into a narrative that helps him understand himself. Once he comes to this sense of self-awareness, he can leave the pieces of the Katherine narrative behind long enough to acknowledge his feelings for Lindsey, kissing her in the cave and again on the driveway.*



## EPILOGUE

Colin wakes up in the morning, exhausted, and descends the stairs to find Hassan going over profit and loss margins. He asks Colin if he hooked up with Lindsey and congratulates him for circling her like a vulture. Having decided to go out to breakfast at Hardee's, they call to Lindsey to wake her up. She says she can't go because she is visiting Mabel that morning. Colin confides in Hassan that according to the **Theorem**, Lindsey is going to dump him in four days.

The day the **Theorem** indicates as the day Lindsey will break up with Colin, he wakes up to a note from Lindsey telling him she is dumping him for Hassan. "P.S.," it says, "Just kidding." He wants to be happy but is still disappointed that the Theorem doesn't work to predict relationships because it means he is not as special as everyone once thought.

The next day, Colin works on the **Theorem** some more while Hassan and Lindsey play poker. Suddenly, he realizes that while it is possible to write equations explaining why a poker hand was won or lost, it is impossible to write an equation to predict future poker hands. The past can be a logical story, but the future is unpredictable by any Theorem. Colin says "**Eureka**" to himself. He shares his realization that the future is unpredictable, and Hassan teases him for stating the obvious.

Colin continues to think about how the future threatens to swallow everyone up eventually. Lindsey's stories, on the other hand, are a big part of why he likes and even loves her already; stories might be "the only way to the infinite mattering he'd been after for so long." Unlike individuals, stories are remembered. Colin decides that having the right graph for Katherine III from the beginning proves that the brain has room for "knowing what cannot be remembered." He realizes that without noticing, the graphs in his notebook have switched over to writing. He looks up and asks if Hassan and Lindsey want to go get a burger.

*Hassan continues to be a jokester despite his newfound productivity, demonstrating that it is possible to grow more mature while maintaining a sense of humor as a core part of one's identity. Colin is still tied up in the idea of the Theorem as a "genius" predictor for his future. The extent to which he cares about the Theorem impedes his ability to surrender himself to the new possibilities of his relationship with Lindsey.*



*Colin's friend and girlfriend conspire to show Colin that his Theorem is nothing but a self-fulfilling prophecy. Colin's disappointment shows that he has not yet fully grasped how to let go of the importance he places on arbitrary markers of success.*



*Colin's second "Eureka" moment is not exactly a rejection of the Theorem that came out of his first "Eureka" moment. Rather, he realizes that the Theorem has helped him make sense of his past but that he can't use it to make sense of his future. He thus realizes that even a "failure" can result in an unexpected achievement—in this case, new perspective on how to live a fulfilling life.*



*Colin's newfound reverence for stories leads him to think about his life less in the relatively rigid terms of math but rather through language, which consists solely of twenty-six rearrangeable letters but nonetheless contains endless possibilities, which Colin himself knows because he is constantly rearranging the letters into anagrams. Colin's abandonment of the notebook in order to ask his friends to go to lunch shows that Colin is surrendering himself to the unpredictable potential of the stories contained in his own life instead of wasting his life trying to plot out what will happen next.*



Walking out to the **Hearse** with Lindsey and Hassan, nothing much happens, but Colin knows he will remember it because it is “thick with mattering.” As Colin drives, they decide to break habit by going to Wendy’s instead of Hardee’s. Colin looks at the road and thinks about “the space between what we remember and what happened, the space between what we predict and what will happen.” He realizes there is room there for him to reinvent himself as anything, even a genius. In any case, he realizes, he can’t stop the future from coming. Lindsey turns to Colin and says they could just keep going instead of stopping at Wendy’s. Colin and Hassan agree. Colin feels connected to everyone in and out of the car and “not-unique in the very best possible way.”

*That Colin is driving in the Hearse with Lindsey and Hassan shows that he has not stopped thinking of his life as a story ending with death, but he has now accepted that all he can do is make the best of the journey along the way. He chooses to share that journey with both Lindsey and Hassan, and has learned to find comfort in being one among a crowd rather than being unique. This shift in attitude shows that instead of feeling like a lonely and incomplete person constantly trying to compete, Colin now feels like one complete and growing person among many.*





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