

The Goldfinch



INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF DONNA TARTT

Born and raised in Mississippi, Donna Tartt began her undergraduate studies at the University of Mississippi. She then transferred to Bennington College, an alternative liberal arts school in Vermont. At Bennington, she was part of a friendship group with intense literary and artistic aspirations, which included Bret Easton Ellis and Jonathan Lethem. There, Tartt began working on her first novel, *The Secret History*, which is set at a fictionalized version of Bennington. *The Secret History* was published to enormous acclaim, and Tartt instantly became a literary superstar. However, she remained reclusive, rarely giving interviews and revealing little about her life. She is also famous for writing slowly; her second novel, *The Little Friend*, was published ten years after her first, and her third novel, *The Goldfinch*, 12 years after that. In 2014, *The Goldfinch* won the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction. It was adapted into a movie, which was released in 2019.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

For a novel that is largely realistic, *The Goldfinch* does not feel very rooted in history. Almost no historical or political events are mentioned in the novel, and although the characters use technology such as texting and internet searching, in some ways these do not seem to fit the timeless period in which the story is set. Indeed, the only important historical event in the novel is a fictional one—the terrorist attack on the Met—which nonetheless demands comparison with the attack on the World Trade Center on September 11th, 2001. There are many differences between this real event and the one depicted in the novel, yet both feature iconic New York City institutions as targets, and are described as changing the city forever.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

It has become commonplace to compare *The Goldfinch* to the works of Charles Dickens, due to its epic length and scope, the prevalence of orphans, the oscillation between high society and the criminal underworld, and even the fact that it has a character called Pippa (similar to Pip, the main character in Dickens' *Great Expectations*). Another literary allusion contained within *The Goldfinch* is to J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* books—Boris nicknames Theo “Potter” due to his glasses, and like Harry Potter, Theo is an orphan. Other novels whose narratives revolve around art include Tracy Chevalier's *The Girl with the Pearl Earring*, A.S. Byatt's *Possession*, and B.A. Shapiro's *The Art Forger*, which, like *The Goldfinch*, has elements of a

thriller and features issues of art theft and forgery. Meanwhile, Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* is a novel about a boy who, like Theo, lives in New York City and loses a parent in a terrorist attack. Like *The Goldfinch*, *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* has elements of a mystery or thriller, while also exploring the impact of death and trauma on a young person's psychology.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** The Goldfinch
- **When Written:** 2002-2013
- **Where Written:** New York, NY
- **When Published:** 2013
- **Literary Period:** 21st century American Fiction
- **Genre:** Popular Literary Fiction
- **Setting:** New York, NY; Las Vegas, NV; Amsterdam, Netherlands
- **Climax:** Larry's death, and the shootout in the parking garage in Amsterdam
- **Antagonist:** Lucius Reeve
- **Point of View:** First person retrospective

EXTRA CREDIT

A painstaking task. While *The Goldfinch* is almost 800 pages long, Donna Tartt is known to do all her writing by hand, in pencil.

The real thing. The real *Goldfinch* painting hangs in the Mauritshuis, a museum specializing in the Dutch Golden Age in the Hague, the Netherlands.



PLOT SUMMARY

Theo Decker is a 13-year-old boy, living with his mother Audrey in New York. After getting into trouble with his reckless friend Tom Cable, Theo has been suspended from school. Before he and Audrey go in for a meeting about his suspension, they briefly duck into **the Met**, where there is an exhibition about the Dutch Golden Age. Here, Theo is captivated by a young red-haired girl. Audrey points out a painting called **The Goldfinch** by Carel Fabritius, which she says is “the first painting I ever really loved.” They separate briefly, agreeing to meet up again in the museum giftshop.

Suddenly there is a huge explosion, which knocks Theo out. When he wakes up, he finds an old man (Welty) who gestures

to Theo to take *The Goldfinch*, and also gives him his ring. Welty tells Theo to “ring the green bell” at a place called “Hobart and Blackwell.” Carrying the painting and ring, Theo manages to get out of the museum and onto the street, which is crowded with people and first responders.

Theo goes back to his and Audrey’s apartment, hoping to find her there. He waits there for her, but eventually two social workers come to inform him that she is dead. Since Theo’s father Larry is an alcoholic who recently abandoned Theo and Audrey, disappearing to start a “new life,” the social workers bring Theo to the apartment of his friend Andy Barbour, whose wealthy family will look after him while permanent custody is arranged. While Theo struggles to resume his normal life at school, the social workers contact his paternal grandparents in Maryland; however, it becomes clear that they do not want to take Theo in.

Theo looks up Hobart and Blackwell and discovers it is an antiques shop in the West Village. After going there and ringing the green bell, he is greeted by a man who introduces himself as Hobie. Theo tells Hobie about meeting Welty, who died in the attack. The red-haired girl Theo saw was Welty’s niece Pippa. She survived but is badly injured; Theo goes into a bedroom to see her, and briefly holds her hand. He is disappointed to learn that she will soon be moving to Texas to live with her aunt Margaret.

Soon, Theo starts visiting Hobie regularly and helping out in his antiques workshop. He considers telling Hobie about *The Goldfinch* but is too worried about getting in trouble.

Unexpectedly, Theo’s father Larry and his girlfriend Xandra arrive in New York and announce that they are taking Theo to live with them in [Las Vegas](#). They take Theo back to his and Audrey’s apartment to pack a suitcase, and Theo secretly retrieves *The Goldfinch* and leaves it downstairs with the doormen. Days later, he goes back and retrieves the bag containing the painting to bring with him to Vegas.

In Vegas, the house where Larry and Xandra live is barely furnished, and is surrounded by empty houses at the edge of a new development. At his new school, Theo meets a boy called Boris who is Ukrainian and Polish but has lived all over the world. Boris’ father, Mr. Pavlikovsky, is also an alcoholic, and his mother is also dead. The two boys soon become inseparable. Neither Boris nor Theo gets much money from their fathers, so they resort to shoplifting food and leaving restaurants without paying. They spend their afternoons drinking, often to the point of vomiting or passing out. On Christmas Eve, Larry takes Xandra, Theo, and Boris out to a fancy dinner on the Strip, and gives the boys \$500 each as a gift.

A year passes, and Theo turns 15. Shortly after, Boris starts dating an older girl he nicknames Kotku, whom Theo doesn’t like. Increasingly absorbed by this relationship, Boris starts hanging out with Theo less. Larry, meanwhile, keeps being

uncharacteristically kind and generous with Theo, and tells Theo that he is opening a savings account for him. He asks for Theo’s social security number in order to open the account. Soon after, a man named Mr. Silver comes to Theo’s house, claiming that Larry owes him money and sending a message of warning. Concerned that Mr. Silver’s presence might mean *The Goldfinch* is no longer safe at his home, Theo takes it to school and leaves it in his locker for a few weeks, before bringing it back home.

Larry tells Theo that he is opening a restaurant and that he needs to borrow some of the money Audrey put aside for Theo in order to pay the startup costs. He asks Theo to call Audrey’s lawyer, Bracegirdle, and tell him he needs \$65,000 for private school fees. However, Bracegirdle says that Theo can’t withdraw money from the account, and that the money will need to be paid directly to the school. When Theo tells him this, Larry lets out a horrifying scream.

Boris and Theo take acid together, and Theo feels an immense sense of peace, love, and happiness. Mr. Silver comes back to Theo’s house, this time accompanied by several men, one of whom is carrying a baseball bat. He says that Larry owes him \$50,000 and needs to pay. A few hours after Mr. Silver leaves, Xandra comes home and tells Theo that Larry is dead. He was blind drunk and driving on the highway, heading away from Las Vegas, when he hit a trailer-tractor and was killed instantly. Xandra’s friends come over to take care of her; she drinks and takes prescription medication until she passes out. While Xandra is unconscious, Boris and Theo go through her things and discover a stash of prescription pills along with a large amount of cocaine. They take these for themselves, along with cash from her wallet.

Theo says he needs to go to New York immediately, before Child Protection Services find him, and asks Boris to come with him. Boris is reluctant to leave, saying he needs more time. Eventually Theo goes, taking Xandra’s dog Popper with him. After finding out that dogs aren’t allowed on the Amtrak, Theo gets on the first of several buses that will take him to New York, hiding Popper when he finds out animals aren’t permitted on the bus either. Once he gets to New York, Theo runs into Mr. Barbour, who pushes him away and shouts, “No more handouts!”

Theo goes to Hobie’s house and finds both Hobie and Pippa there. Hobie says Theo can stay, although he forces Theo to call Xandra, who scolds him for stealing from her and warns him that he has become a delinquent. Pippa is on vacation from her boarding school in Switzerland, and she soon leaves New York. Theo applies to an early-college program, hoping this will allow him to stay living in New York with Hobie. Bracegirdle sets up a living stipend, and after Theo gains admission to the early-college program, it is agreed that he will stay with Hobie. Concerned that Hobie will find *The Goldfinch*, Theo rents a small storage unit and keeps the painting there, hidden inside a

camping tent bag so no one would know what it is.

Eight years pass. Now an adult, Theo is walking along Madison Avenue when he runs into Platt Barbour, his old friend Andy's older brother. Looking disheveled, Platt tells Theo that Andy and Mr. Barbour recently died in a sailing accident. Mr. Barbour had been suffering from bipolar disorder for years and was experiencing a manic episode on the day they died. Platt takes Theo to see Mrs. Barbour, who seems weak and very sad, but is delighted to see him. As Theo leaves, Platt laments that his little sister, Kitsey, has been dating Theo's old delinquent friend Tom Cable.

Meanwhile, Theo has become Hobie's new business partner, and has been running a scheme wherein he sells bad or fake antiques as authentic. If the client realizes that the antique is not real, Theo offers to buy it back, and if the client accepts then Theo is able to sell it for an even higher price as authentic based on the fact that it has now officially been part of an important person's collection. Thanks to the scheme, the shop has been turning a huge profit, but now one of the clients, Lucius Reeve, has refused Theo's offer to buy back the bad antique and won't leave the matter alone.

Theo has also developed an addiction to prescription opiates. He is obsessively in love with Pippa, who is living in London and dating an English man named Everett. Theo has dinner at the Barbour's, and notices that Kitsey watches him throughout the meal. Theo meets Reeve again, and Reeve tells him that he knows Theo stole *The Goldfinch*. Theo is terrified, but Reeve then shows him an article indicating that the painting is being used as collateral by criminals in Miami, and that a botched raid means it's gone back underground. Stunned, Theo (truthfully) tells Reeve he has nothing to do with this and doesn't know what it's all about. Theo confesses his scheme of selling bad antiques to Hobie, but downplays its scale. Hobie is horrified, and Theo feels wracked with guilt and regret.

More time passes. It is almost Christmas. Theo and Kitsey, who are now engaged, are eating lunch and discussing the (elaborate) plans for their wedding. Theo feels happy about the stability and joy his relationship with Kitsey brings, but overwhelmed by the size and expense of the wedding. On the street in the East Village, Theo runs into Boris, accompanied by a woman named Myriam. Boris and Theo go to a Polish bar and spend hours catching up on the years in which they haven't seen each other. After getting very drunk, Theo takes Boris to Hobie's house so Boris can see Popper again.

Boris' driver Gyuri takes Boris and Theo to a club in Queens, where they keep drinking and doing cocaine. At the end of the night, when they are sitting in a 24-hour bar, Boris mentions that he stole *The Goldfinch* from Theo while they were still in high school in Las Vegas. Theo is stunned and horrified, and Boris is apologetic, though surprised that Theo didn't already know this. Boris says that although the painting has fallen out of his possession, he will get it back for Theo.

Theo goes to Kitsey's apartment and sees her kissing Tom on the street. Later, when Theo confronts Kitsey, she characterizes her engagement to Theo as an arrangement that will benefit them and everyone around them. Surprised at his lack of anger, Theo stays overnight at her apartment. Pippa arrives at Hobie's after her plane is unexpectedly diverted, and Theo takes her out to dinner and movie. They have an intense conversation, and Theo feels overwhelmed with happiness.

At Theo's engagement party, a sinister man named Havistock Irving indicates that he knows about the scheme Theo has been running and is prepared to expose him. Later, Hobie tells Theo that Irving and Reeve are associates who steal from rich elderly people, and they previously went by different names. At the end of the party, Boris tells Theo that they are going away for a few days. In the car, he tells Theo bring his passport and however much cash he can gather, explaining that they are going to Amsterdam to get *The Goldfish*. Theo takes \$16,000 from the shop register.

In Amsterdam, Boris explains that they are going to pretend that Theo is buying the painting, but only give the sellers some of the money. When they arrive at the empty cafe where the transaction is supposed to take place, the sellers act shifty, as one of their men hasn't shown up. The deal goes ahead anyway, but Boris and his crew take advantage of their greater numbers to take the painting without paying at all. Although Boris and his men are victorious, Theo is worried about a young boy he saw in the café's kitchen.

In a parking garage the men split up, leaving Boris and Theo to take one car while everyone else takes another. Just as Boris and Theo are about to get into the car, they are confronted by two men, Martin and Frits, who demand that Boris hand over the painting. Although Boris does so, a shootout ensues, and Martin and Frits both end up dead. Boris takes Theo back to his hotel and instructs him to wait there for him. He tells Theo not to call him, but just to wait, and gives him a small bag of pure heroin to take if he wants.

Theo does some of the heroin and feels wonderful, but when he comes down he feels terrified and extremely ill. Days pass; Theo will not let himself leave the room, and only orders room service in the early hours of the morning. He tries to make plans to leave Amsterdam but realizes that his passport is in the glovebox of Gyuri's car. On Christmas Day, just as Theo is preparing to turn himself into the police, Boris comes back, and orders a festive breakfast. Theo is in an abject, furious state, but Boris explains that everything has worked out. He managed to trace *The Goldfinch* to an apartment in Frankfurt, where it turns out many other priceless stolen masterworks were also being stored. Boris arranged an anonymous tip off to the police, and is now splitting the huge sum of reward money between himself, his crew, and Theo. It is clear that this is one of the most significant recoveries of stolen art in history.

Theo flies back to New York and finds Hobie furious. He tells

Hobie the truth about the bad antiques scheme, *The Goldfinch*, and his time in Amsterdam. He then spends a year travelling, buying back all the bad antiques using the reward money. He reflects that it is noble to devote one's life to beautiful objects, which gives a person a taste of immortality and connects them to a community of people across history who love art and beauty.



CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Theo Decker – Theo, whose full first name is Theodore, is the main character in the novel. At the start of the novel, Theo is 13 and his father, Larry, has recently abandoned him and his mother Audrey. Theo is not too unhappy about it because he and Audrey are so close. Theo idolizes his mother, who is also his best friend (possibly to the detriment of his ability to have other close friends). Audrey and Theo go to **the Met** on the day a terrorist attack happens there, and although Theo survives physically unharmed, Audrey dies. In the bewildering aftermath of the attack, Theo meets Welty, who is dying, and—following Welty's instructions—steals the painting **The Goldfinch**, an act that has a transformative impact on his life. Theo is a smart, sensitive, and well-meaning person, yet one with a proclivity for secrecy and self-hatred. As his life unravels after Audrey's death, Theo becomes more and more convinced that he is a bad person. This becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy, as he makes increasingly unwise and unethical decisions on the basis of believing that he is already bad. When Theo briefly moves to **Las Vegas** with his father Larry, he meets the greatest friend of his life, Boris Pavlikovsky. Theo and Boris are an explosive pair, constantly committing rebellious acts such as drinking excessively, experimenting with drugs, and shoplifting. Yet through it all they develop a deep and unconditional bond. When Theo moves back to New York Hobie becomes his legal guardian. Theo adores Hobie, who is between a best friend and father figure to him, but he also constantly worries about letting him down. Like Hobie, Theo loves beautiful objects, and becomes a partner in the antiques business Hobie formally ran with Welty. Theo is non-reciprocally in love with Pippa and later gets engaged to Kitsey Barbour, although they do not go through with their marriage after Kitsey and Theo are forced to admit that they are not truly in love with each other. Although Theo comments some seriously immoral acts over the course of the novel, by its end he has developed a strong moral compass and commitment to taking responsibility for his actions.

Boris Pavlikovsky – Boris is the second most important character in the novel after Theo. He is a vivacious, unique, and in many ways comic character, though his friendship with Theo is one of the most important parts of the novel. Born to Polish and Ukrainian parents who were both alcoholics, Boris lost his

mother as a child but does not claim to feel sadness about it. He also doesn't seem to mind that his father, Mr. Pavlikovsky, is neglectful and beats him. Indeed, Boris has a remarkably tough, resilient attitude. He embraces life in a bold, reckless, full-throttle manner, encouraging Theo to drink, experiment with drugs, and shoplift. However, he is also a very kind, caring force in Theo's life. He comforts Theo when he is having nightmares about the terrorist attack and stops him when he tries to put his suicidal thoughts into action. After Theo confesses to stealing **The Goldfinch** when he is blackout drunk, Boris steals it from him, replacing the painting with his own Civics Workbook (which means that Theo doesn't find out about the theft until almost ten years later). After having early success as a teenage drug dealer, Boris starts a "business" in the criminal underworld, getting his start through using *The Goldfinch* as collateral. Despite Boris' seemingly loose morals, he is actually a deeply ethical person who remains loyal to Theo even after they lose touch for near to a decade. When Boris finds Theo again, he insists on getting the painting back. In doing so, he inadvertently triggers one of the biggest recoveries of stolen art in history. This is comic because, despite being an intelligent person with expensive tastes, Boris has very little interest in art and other aspects of "high" culture.

Audrey Decker – Audrey is Theo's mother. She dies very early in the novel, so most of what the reader learns about her comes in the form of Theo's memories. As a beautiful young woman, she moved to New York City from Kansas and began working as a model, which allowed her to save up enough money to put herself through a BA and Master's in Art History. However, Audrey then met and married Larry, and this put a stop to her burgeoning academic career. Audrey loved art, and she was always taking Theo to cultural institutions and events. Because Theo idolized her so much (and because the novel is narrated from his point of view), the reader gets the impression that Audrey is essentially a perfect person, and never learns if she has any flaws.

James "Hobie" Hobart – Hobie is an antiques restorer who ran a business with Welty before Welty's death. After Welty dies, Hobie takes care of both Pippa and Theo, though at different times both are removed from his custody due to the fact that they have no official familial connection to him. Hobie is an extremely kind, principled, and sensitive man. When Theo is with him, he feels like Hobie always knows the right thing to say and can almost read his thoughts. A highly skilled antiques restorer, Hobie's one flaw is that he is overly trusting. This allows customers of the antiques business to take advantage of him by paying criminally low prices, and it allows Theo to deceive him by running a fraudulent scheme. Although Hobie is of course crushed when he learns about Theo's deception, his fundamental kindness and moral purity encourages him to forgive Theo.

Larry Decker – Larry is Theo's father. A failed actor and

alcoholic, Larry never treats either Audrey or Theo particularly well, and he abandons them months before Audrey dies. Theo later realizes that, during this time, Larry moved to **Las Vegas** with his girlfriend, Xandra, and began professionally gambling. Shortly after Audrey's death, Larry reappears to collect Theo and bring him to live in Vegas. While at first Theo is optimistic that Larry might be trying to reconnect with him, it ultimately turns out that Larry believed Theo was left a "fortune" in Audrey's will, money which he tries to steal in order to pay his gambling debts. Although Larry can be charming, he is overall a fairly morally corrupt character. He is selfish, cruel, and avoids responsibility for his actions. These traits are exacerbated by his alcohol, gambling, and opiate addictions. He ends up dying in a drunk-driving accident while trying to escape his debts (and once again abandoning his family).

Pippa – Pippa is Welty's niece and a kind of goddaughter of Hobie's. Her mother, Juliet, died of cancer when Pippa was a fairly young child. A talented flautist, her future career as a musician ends abruptly due to the injuries she sustains from the terrorist attack at **the Met**. Pippa is a highly intelligent, talented, and sophisticated girl, but remains somewhat sheltered in comparison to Theo. Theo is deeply in love with her, but though she clearly feels very fondly toward him, his feelings are not reciprocated. After living in Texas with her aunt Margaret and then attending boarding school in Switzerland, Pippa moves to London, where she lives with her boyfriend, Everett. A kind but tragic figure, her life, like Theo's, is irrevocably ruined by what happened at the Met.

Welty Blackwell – Welty is Hobie's business partner and Pippa's uncle (and guardian, following Juliet's death). He dies in the terrorist attack at **the Met**. While he is dying, Theo finds him, and Welty gives Theo his ring and tells him to take **The Goldfinch**. Although Theo never really got a chance to know Welty, after his death he learned that Welty was extremely caring, kind, and charismatic, and that he was a highly skilled antiques salesman. Theo comes to believe that Welty's "energy" remains with him ever since his death, and that this is why Theo himself develops a love of—and skill at—selling antiques.

Andy Barbour – Andy Barbour became friends with Theo in elementary school, when they were both moved up a grade and mercilessly bullied for it. Andy is incredibly smart and nerdy, with an off-putting, "robotic" manner. He struggles with feeling as if he doesn't fit in with his preppy, elegant, outdoorsy family. Andy's brother Platt bullies him and his parents are trying to turn him into a different kind of person. Although Theo sees Andy for the last time in childhood, he later hears that Andy had a successful career, gaining a prestigious fellowship at M.I.T. and getting engaged to a Japanese woman. However, tragically Andy is killed in a sailing accident along with his father, Mr. Barbour, when he is still only in his 20s.

Mr. Barbour – Mr. Barbour is an eccentric but kind man from a wealthy, esteemed family. He is obsessed with water and

sailing, despite the fact that his sister drowned in a sailing accident. Mr. Barbour has bipolar disorder, a condition that first began seriously interfering with his life while he was at Harvard Law School. Although there are periods of his life when his condition is stable, Mr. Barbour's manic episodes become increasingly intense while his youngest children, Kitsey and Toddy, are in college. He ends up taking his sons Andy and Platt out on an ill-advised sailing trip while in the grip of mania; the boat capsizes, and he and Andy die by drowning.

Mrs. Barbour – Mrs. Barbour is the mother of Andy, Platt, Kitsey, and Toddy, and she takes Theo in after Audrey is killed in the terrorist attack at **the Met**. She is very wealthy and elegant and can seem cold, but she is actually extremely kind. Before Mr. Barbour and Andy die, she tends to be rather formal and hide any difficult realities from the world. However, after their deaths she no longer cares about putting up a good appearance. She becomes extremely weak and weary, all but losing her interest in living. However, after Theo comes back into her life, she is revitalized and experiences joy for the first time since her husband and son's deaths. She eventually tells Theo that she always considered him her son, even when he was a little boy.

Platt Barbour – Platt is the eldest of the Barbour children. When he is a teenager he is a "champion lacrosse player and a bit of a psychopath," who torments Andy mercilessly. Later, Platt explains that he was sent to boarding school at a very young age in order to hide the truth of Mr. Barbour's bipolar condition from him. As an adult, Platt gets a job at an academic publishing house. He is deeply changed by the deaths of his father and brother, and develops a drinking problem. However, despite his troubles, he is deep down a kind person who regrets his cruel treatment of Andy and treasures his friendship with Theo.

Kitsey Barbour – Kitsey is the third-youngest of the Barbour children, and she is very young when Theo comes to stay with her family. Beautiful, bubbly, and charming, she is a college student at Wellesley when Andy and Mr. Barbour die. During the weekend that they die, Kitsey was supposed to be with them, but didn't come because she wanted to spend time with her boyfriend, Tom. Kitsey is a strong sailor, and Platt believes that if she had been there, Andy and Mr. Barbour might not have died. Following their deaths, she goes on a leave of absence from school and moves back to New York City, where she lives with a couple of roommates and works at a nonprofit arts organization. She and Theo start dating and quickly get engaged, although she keeps seeing Tom in secret. When Theo discovers this, Kitsey argues that their relationship is a way of putting on a good front and providing happiness and security to themselves and everyone around them, even if they're not head over heels in love. However, at the end of the novel, it is implied that Kitsey and Theo never get married.

Xandra – Xandra is Larry's girlfriend. Originally from Florida,

she works as a waitress in Las Vegas. She is a cocaine addict who deals on the side, although Theo does not realize this immediately. Xandra initially resents having to live with Theo (and, even more so, with Boris), but she can sometimes show kindness to the boys. When Larry dies, Boris and Theo steal money and drugs from her, although it later emerges that Boris ends up living with her for a while after Theo escapes to New York.

Mr. Pavlikovsky – Mr. Pavlikovsky is Boris’s father. He works in mining, a job that takes him all over the world. An alcoholic, he drinks so much that he has lost the nerve endings in his feet and has to walk with a cane. Although Mr. Pavlikovsky beats Boris, Boris is surprisingly nonchalant and forgiving about this, claiming it is not a big deal.

Kotku – Kotku is Boris’s girlfriend while they attend high school in Las Vegas. Kotku is not her real name, but a Slavic nickname Boris gives her that means “kitty cat.” She is three years older than Boris and has been held back in school. There are rumors that her mother is a sex worker. Theo disapproves of Kotku because he thinks she is unintelligent and a delinquent. However, Theo comes to feel more sympathy for Kotku after he hears about how she was abused by her mother’s boyfriend and ended up becoming homeless.

Tom Cable – Tom attends Theo’s school in New York. When the novel opens, the two are friends, and Tom has been leading Theo astray; the two of them have been walking into people’s houses into the Hamptons and committing minor theft. Thanks to Tom, Theo gets suspended from school. After Audrey dies, Tom is cold and distant with Theo. Later, when they are adults, Tom keeps dating Kitsey even after she gets engaged to Theo.

Naaman Silver – Naaman Silver, who is known as Mr. Silver in the novel, is some kind of gangster from whom Larry borrows money to fund his gambling habit. When Larry is unable to pay back the \$50,000 he owes, Silver vaguely threatens Larry and Theo in order to force Larry to pay (which leads him to flee Vegas while drunk, accidentally killing himself). After this, Boris starts working for Silver, who eventually becomes a “father” figure to him.

Lucius Reeve (Lucius Race) – Lucius Reeve is a sinister man to whom Theo sells a fraudulent antique. This bad sale becomes an excuse for Reeve to intimidate Theo. It emerges that Reeve knows that Theo took **The Goldfinch** and wants to blackmail him into selling it to him. Ultimately, Hobie reveals that Reeve is a crook who, along with Havistock Irving, used to steal art, antiques, and other valuable objects from elderly people. Hobie turned the men into the police, causing Reeve to be sent to prison.

Sacha – Sacha is a criminal working in the art underworld who never appears in the novel directly; only those working for him actually feature. He steals **The Goldfinch** from Theo and hides it in his girlfriend’s apartment in Frankfurt along with countless

other works of stolen art, which are eventually found when Boris calls in a tip.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Toddy Barbour – Toddy is the youngest of the Barbour children. As a young adult, he attends Georgetown and comically informs Theo that living with him as a child inspired him to devote his life to helping “disadvantaged” children.

Margaret Blackwell Pierce – Margaret is Welty’s half-sister and Pippa’s aunt. Even though Margaret was not on speaking terms with either Welty or Pippa’s mother Juliet before they died, she nonetheless assumes guardianship of Pippa. A wealthy woman who lives in Texas, Margaret takes Pippa to live with her there.

Mr. Blackwell – Mr. Blackwell was Welty, Margaret, and Juliet’s father.

Juliet Blackwell – Juliet was Pippa’s mother. She died of cancer when Pippa was a child.

José – José is another of the doormen in Theo’s old building, who is very kind to Theo.

Goldie – Goldie is one of the doormen in the building where Theo lives with Audrey. He loves Theo, and is very kind to him.

Hadley – Hadley is a girl in Theo and Boris’ school in Las Vegas. She is a good student who is on the honor roll.

Bracegirdle – Bracegirdle is Audrey’s lawyer, who manages the money she leaves behind for Theo in her will. He is kind to Theo and protects him from Larry’s financial predation.

Mrs. DeFrees – Mrs. DeFrees is an elderly woman who is one of Hobie’s closest friends. Theo wonders if there’s a romantic element to their relationship, but he never finds out for sure.

Grisha – Grisha is a Russian Jewish man who does moving and storage work for Hobie.

Jerome – Jerome is Theo’s drug dealer who sells him prescription opiates.

Carol Lombard – Carol Lombard is a woman Theo has an affair with. She is engaged to another man.

Everett – Everett is Pippa’s English boyfriend. They live together in London, where Everett works as a music librarian. Theo finds him unbearable, although it is not clear whether this has any basis or whether it is just because Theo is in love with Pippa.

Myriam – Myriam is Boris’s “right hand man” in the shady business he runs.

Gyuri – Gyuri is Boris’s driver and friend.

Horst – Horst is a wealthy German heroin addict who works in the art underworld. He is friends with Boris and also with Sacha, who stole **The Goldfinch** from Boris. Because Sacha is the brother of Horst’s girlfriend Ulrika, Boris never discovers

where his loyalties actually lie.

Ulrika – Ulrika is Horst’s girlfriend and Sacha’s sister. Boris doesn’t like her.

Emily – Emily is Kitsey’s roommate.

Anne de Larmessin – Anne is Kitsey’s godmother. She arranges Kitsey and Theo’s engagement party even though she is so disapproving of Theo she cannot stand to look at him.

Havistock Irving – Havistock Irving is a busybody, gossip, and associate of Lucius Reeve, who was also involved in Reeve’s scheme of stealing from the elderly.

Victor/Cherry – Victor is a friend and criminal associate of Boris’s. Victor is his real name; Cherry is his nickname.

Shirley Temple – Shirley Temple is another associate of Boris’s. He gets his nickname from his angelic face and curly hair.

Martin – Martin is an American who works for Horst. Theo kills him during the shootout in the Amsterdam parking garage.

Frits – Frits also works for Horst. Boris kills him during the shootout in the Amsterdam car park.

Dorothy Decker – Dorothy is Theo’s step-grandmother on Larry’s side. She lives in Maryland, and is not close with either Larry or Theo.

Bob Decker – Bob is Theo’s paternal grandfather. He is not close with either Theo or Larry.

Dave – Dave is the psychiatrist Theo sees following Audrey’s death.

Enrique – Enrique is one of the social workers Theo is assigned following Audrey’s death.

only if it is valued for itself, rather than for the wealth or status it confers.

In *The Goldfinch*, art is not just an ornament or addition to life; it is the single most important part of existence. This is primarily demonstrated by the fact that the whole plot is driven by an artwork: the titular painting **The Goldfinch**. After Theo is caught up in a terrorist attack at **the Met**, he steals this painting, following the instructions of a dying man (Welty). Theo secretly keeps the painting, feeling both wracked with guilt and fear that his crime will be found out and comforted by its existence, both as a remarkable work in itself and as something that keeps him connected to his mother. The painting (and Theo’s secretive concealment of it) drives the plot forward. It adds purpose and meaning to Theo’s life, as he observes when he states: “The painting was the secret that raised me above the surface of life and enabled me to know who I am.”

The Goldfinch is one of few surviving works by the Dutch master Carel Fabritius, who was himself killed in an explosion that destroyed most of his artworks. The parallel between this explosion and the explosion that takes place at the Met highlights how works of art are in constant danger. (Indeed, the fact that the Met was the target of a terrorist attack serves as a further reminder that art is not neutral, apolitical, or insignificant.) Theo and other characters position themselves as people dedicating themselves to saving and preserving art from the threats posed by the world. Theo argues that in doing so, they make their own lives meaningful. Dedicating oneself to art is portrayed as a morally pure and noble pursuit, and a way of forming a connection to the community of art lovers who have existed across human history. For Theo in particular, it is also a way to feel close to Audrey after her death.

At the end of the book Theo says (of the painting), “Insofar as it is immortal (and it is) I have a small, bright, immutable part in that immortality.” Theo’s belief that art and beauty are immortal where humans aren’t originates with Audrey. Before she dies, she observes to Theo, “People die, sure [...] But it’s so heartbreaking and unnecessary how we lose things” (she is specifically referring to “things” like artworks). Later, this sentiment is repeated by Hobie, Theo’s guardian, who is a highly-skilled restorer of antiques. Writing a letter to Theo, he notes, “When we are sad—at least I am like this—it can be comforting to cling to familiar objects, to the things that don’t change.” Both Audrey and Hobie make explicitly clear that the value of art lies in the way its meaning transcends time.

Of course, the idea that art is a way to access immortality is especially appealing for Theo, because his whole life is colored by losing his mother when he is a young child. Many other characters in the novel also experience the death of a loved one, and for this reason immortality is appealing to them, too. In this sense, the novel reverses the commonly-expressed view that material objects are frivolous, whereas other aspects of



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.



THE VALUE OF ART AND BEAUTY

The Goldfinch is a monument to art and beauty. It portrays art as what gives life meaning, particularly for people in the depths of despair. The novel’s protagonist, Theo Decker, comes to hold this view from his art-loving mother, Audrey. Whereas life is short, tragic, and cruel, art is a powerful (and in some ways eternal) source of meaning. Indeed, the novel shows that through being connected to art, humans can achieve a taste of immortality. At the same time, the novel also shows that not everyone is willing or able to appreciate art, and some people appreciate it for the wrong reasons. Art can provide a transcendent sense of meaning, but

life (love, truth, faith) are more important because they are eternal. The novel suggests that it is in fact art and other beautiful objects that are eternal, whereas something like love is always going to be tainted by loss. This is not to say that artworks themselves cannot be lost or destroyed—indeed, this almost happens to *The Goldfinch*—but that the meaning that art represents transcends time and does not rely on the survival of any single work.

Yet while emphasizing the importance of art, Tarrt also shows that not everyone values art for the right reasons. For example, the novel is attentive to the many ways in which art and beauty can be cordoned off as the reserve of wealthy people. One way in which this is shown is through the astronomical prices of many of the artworks that feature in the narrative, such as a Rembrandt rescued by art police that is valued at \$40 million. Meanwhile, through his work at Hobie’s antique shop, Theo witnesses different kinds of extremely wealthy people who buy antiques. Some of these people (usually those who come from multiple generations of wealth) have extensive knowledge about art, antiques, and other aspects of elite culture, while others don’t seem to know or care much about beautiful things themselves, but only want to possess them as status symbols. Perhaps the most extreme example of people who value art for the wrong reasons are the gangsters who use art as collateral. Like the wealthy people who collect antiques without really caring about them, these gangsters only care about art’s monetary value, rather than being able to see the transcendent meaning that makes works such as *The Goldfinch* “priceless.”

Having demonstrated the ways in which art makes life meaningful, the novel concludes by heroizing those who dedicate themselves to preserving and appreciating art. It frames this as an almost sacred, morally purifying pursuit, and suggests it is a good antidote to the cruelty and suffering that define mortal life. Ultimately, the fact that there are people who value art for the wrong reasons cannot counter the positive power of art to transform people’s lives.



FABRICATION VS. AUTHENTICITY

Through its examination of highly-valued artworks (such as *The Goldfinch*) and depiction of Hobie’s antique restoration business, the novel explores the question of why and how authenticity is valued over fabrication. Of all the characters, Hobie is the most dedicated to the importance of authenticity. Theo at first has a more relaxed attitude toward the issue of fabrication; yet after this gets him into deep trouble, he comes to realize the important of authenticity. Indeed, it takes Theo being tricked himself over the thing that matters the most to him—the painting *The Goldfinch*—to realize that authenticity provides the meaning, logic, and assurance that are vitally needed in a cruel and chaotic world.

The novel conveys the importance of authenticity through the

character of Hobie, who shows how devotion to authenticity can provide calm and meaning in a confusing world. Hobie finds everything about antiques inherently fascinating, including all the factors that make a piece authentic. Hobie’s pure love for his work as an antiques restorer, dedication to his craft, and skill as a restorer earn him a reputation as a particularly upstanding, trustworthy dealer. When Theo comes to stay with him as a 13-year-old, Hobie teaches him about his trade. Theo explains, “I learned about veneers and gilding, what a mortise and tenon was, the difference between ebonized wood and true ebony.” Throwing himself into this trade soothes Theo in the wake of his mother’s death. Indeed, the ability to tell when an antique is authentic gives him a purpose and sense of meaning when the rest of the world seems totally chaotic and cruel. At one point Theo links Hobie’s skill as a restorer to his ability to perceive Theo’s true feelings. Hobie is a deeply attentive person, both in his restoration business and in his relationship with Theo, and the novel indicates that prioritizing authenticity is equally important in both cases.

However, Theo eventually discovers that fabrication seems to offer many benefits of its own. When Theo is 26 and has joined Hobie’s business as a partner, he begins selling fabricated antiques as real. At first Theo does this to save the shop from financial ruin. However, after he realizes how easy it is to dupe customers into buying the fakes, he can’t stop and ends up making a fortune. Theo even comes to enjoy selling the fakes to gullible customers and inventing elaborate ways to make it seem as if the fakes are real. Indeed, Theo develops a level of skill in selling fabricated antiques comparable to Hobie’s skill in restoring them. He comes to know the different kinds of customers and applies different methods to each of them. Theo gets a thrill out of developing this skill, as when he observes: “With this species of cheat—whom I took great pleasure in rooking—the trick was to play dumb, look bored, stay engrossed in my book, act as if I didn’t know what I had, and let them think they were rooking *me*.”

Theo’s skill as a fabricator highlights how falsehood has its own appeal that can seem like it outweighs the value of authenticity. Theo also comes to learn about the common qualities that make people vulnerable to being tricked. Not only do people feel like they want a deal, but they tend to ignore signs pointing to the truth: “Four times out of five they would look right past what they didn’t want to see.”

What’s more, Theo discovers that in many ways, fake antiques really *are* as valuable as real ones—particularly when they are valued not as works of art, but rather as status symbols. Theo takes advantage of the fact that objects gain real value when people simply *think* they are valuable. For example, he uses inventive ways to produce “paper trails” that indicate that the fake antiques he is selling were once part of the collections of important people. This convinces customers that the antiques in question are real, and perhaps more importantly, it makes

them want to buy them more because they crave elite status more than they crave genuine beauty or craftsmanship. Based on this experience, Theo concludes, “An object—*any* object—was worth whatever you could get somebody to pay for it.”

Yet while Theo develops great skill in selling fabrications and even comes to act as though that fake antiques are just as valuable as real ones, he is ultimately forced to confront the importance of authenticity. This occurs when he is blackmailed by a customer, Lucius Reeve, who knows he has been sold a fake (and who, as the reader later learns, knows Theo took *The Goldfinch*). Theo is forced to tell Hobie the truth about selling fakes, a devastating moment in which Theo realizes how much he has betrayed Hobie and, in particular, the values Hobie has passed on to him. He realizes that even though many people will accept fabricated antiques as real, he cannot live with himself by participating in this deception. This is because, to Theo himself, authenticity is important, and what makes art meaningful.

Theo also gets an even more forceful reminder of the importance of authenticity when he gets tricked himself. Toward the end of the novel, Boris reveals that he stole *The Goldfinch* while he and Theo were in high school, and that the package Theo has been carrying around ever since does not contain the painting at all. Boris is shocked that Theo never looked inside the package to see, a fact that serves as a further reminder that people “look right past what they don’t want to see.”

The experience of being tricked forces Theo to appreciate the importance of authenticity, and eventually leads him to use the reward money for *The Goldfinch* to buy back all the fakes he sold to Hobie’s customers over the years. Theo’s decision to buy back the fakes mirrors Boris’ promise to return *The Goldfinch*, which he does at great personal risk to himself. Both Theo and Boris learn that it is important not to deceive people through fabrication. In the redemptive act of buying back the bad antiques, Theo is able to undo his descent into dishonesty and greed, and remind himself of the values that give his life meaning. Indeed, it is his year of journeying around the world buying back the antiques that prompts Theo to deliver the long passage at the end of the novel in which he reflects on the way in which caring for art brings meaning to life. Through Theo’s experience, the novel demonstrates that there’s truly no substitute for authenticity, no matter how tempting falsehoods might seem in the moment.



FRIENDSHIP AND FAMILY

Many of the main characters in *The Goldfinch*, including Theo, Boris, Pippa, and the Barbour children, have at least one deceased parent.

Meanwhile, the parents and other family members who *are*

alive tend to be neglectful at best and toxic at worst. Yet at the same time that the novel starkly highlights the failures of family, it also celebrates the vital importance of friendship. Rather than simply painting friendship as something that can take the place of family relationships, the novel celebrates friendship on its own terms, as something that connects people across huge differences and brings unexpected joy. Friendships can assume a form similar to familial relationships (there are ways in which Boris and Theo are like brothers, for example, and Hobie is something of a father-figure while Mrs. Barbour is a mother-figure). However, the novel also emphasizes that these friendships are not exact simulations or replacements of familial relationships, but rather valuable in their own right.

Despite its emphasis on friendship, the book does emphasize that familial relationships can be deeply important. Although Theo’s mother, Audrey, dies very early on in the book, the novel still emphasizes how much Theo adored and idolized her through his recollections about their life together. For Theo, Audrey was not just a loving mother but a person he sought to emulate. His whole life revolved around her, and when she dies, he feels totally lost. Although he is rarely actually alone, he feels very isolated from the people around him.

Yet while the novel shows that family is important, it also presents family as something that is more often a failed ideal than actually successful. Neither Theo’s father, Larry, nor his paternal grandparents seem to care about him and do not want to take care of him after Audrey dies. When Larry takes Theo to live with him in [Las Vegas](#) it seems possible that he is trying to actually be a good parent, but once they are there Larry neglects him, and in the end it turns out Larry only took him in because he thought that Theo had a “fortune” that Larry would be able to take for himself.

Before moving to Vegas with Larry, Theo is temporarily taken in by another family, the Barbours, but—while they care for Theo—the Barbours become another way in which the novel demonstrates how families fail. Theo is connected to the Barbours via his schoolfriend Andy, who receives rather brutal treatment from both his parents and siblings. While Andy’s siblings mercilessly bully him (Theo compares the way his older brother Platt treats him to a form of torture), Andy’s parents, Mr. and Mrs. Barbour, are constantly trying to turn him into something he isn’t. Whereas Andy is a highly intelligent, bookish child, his parents try to force him to be athletic and outdoorsy. After Andy and Mr. Barbour die in a sailing accident, Mrs. Barbour finally realizes that she did not make Andy feel loved for who he was. Instead, she was trying to mold him into someone he was not.

Yet while the Barbours demonstrate the failures of family, they come to show the value of friendship. The Barbours are arguably not exactly a surrogate family to Theo, but people whose friendship he comes to treasure. This is best shown when he reconnects with them after Andy and Mr. Barbour’s

deaths. Theo becomes especially close to Mrs. Barbour, but even though she tells him that she has always seen him as a son, the relationship he has to her is almost the reverse, with Theo as the parent and Mrs. Barbour as the child. Because she is so traumatized by the loss of her husband and son, Mrs. Barbour is extremely vulnerable. Theo takes care of her, repaying the care she showed him when he was a boy. Indeed, it is arguably the fact that Theo is *not* her son that allows him to care for her in a way that her actual children cannot.

Theo's early experience bonding with people outside his family sets the stage for the novel's deepest, most complex celebration of the friendship: his relationship with Boris. To some extent, the whole novel could be read as an unconventional love story with Theo and Boris as its central couple. Theo notes: "Before Boris, I had borne my solitude stoically enough, without realizing quite how alone I was."

In many ways, Boris and Theo could not be more different. Yet this difference actually brings them together. Theo is fascinated by Boris—by his stories of living all over the world, by his reckless approach to life, and by all the activities that Boris introduces Theo to (most of all drinking and taking drugs). While Boris seems like exactly the kind of figure that a concerned parent would label a "bad influence," this would be a misinterpretation, or at least an oversimplification, of the impact Boris actually has on Theo. In reality, Boris enables Theo to be free, have fun, and take control over his life after having been surrounded by adults making decisions on his behalf.

Boris and Theo's friendship is celebrated because the boys truly love and care for each other (even if they sometimes express this in strange and indirect ways). Although due to their shared parental neglect they have little (to the point that they even have to resort to shoplifting food), they always share everything they have with each other. When Theo has nightmares, Boris soothes him, and later in the novel it is revealed that Boris would clean up Theo's vomit when he would drink to the point of passing out, as well as intervene when Theo's suicidal tendencies drove him to reckless behavior. It seems very possible that without Boris' intervention, Theo may well have not survived his teenage years.

It's also notable that Theo and Boris connect over having parents who are alcoholics and/or dead, the primary thing they have in common. Their friendship makes the pain of losing family members more bearable, but it's important to note that they do not *replace* each other's missing parents—in particular, Boris is certainly the furthest thing from a father figure imaginable. Instead, their friendship gives them a new model of connection, one that proves to be just as meaningful as family bonds are supposed to be.

Perhaps the most important aspect of Boris and Theo's friendship, however, is the fact that Boris majorly betrays Theo and ultimately manages to redeem himself. Conventional wisdom states that while familial connections are forever,

friendship is conditional, and can dissolve if one friend lets the other down. Yet *The Goldfinch* suggests that friendships can also involve a form of unconditional love. Although Boris betrays Theo by stealing **The Goldfinch**, he still loves him, doing everything in his power to right this wrong. Meanwhile, although Theo is shocked and hurt by Boris's theft (and the fact that he kept it secret for so long), he forgives Boris because Boris fulfils his promise of getting the painting back. This restores the bond of unconditional love that exists between them.

Overall, the novel shows that friendship can provide a lifesaving balm when family fails—not as an exact replacement of family, but as a mode of connection that shares many of the same qualities as the ideal familial relationship. These qualities include care, generosity, loyalty, and unconditional love. Theo may have a particularly troubled family situation, but he is able to flourish anyway through friendship.



IMMORALITY VS. CRIME

The Goldfinch is filled with different forms of illegal activity. Yet part of Theo's coming-of-age experience involves learning to differentiate

between illegal and immoral acts. This process starts at the very beginning of the novel when Theo commits an act (stealing **The Goldfinch**) that is illegal but arguably not immoral. Haunted by guilt and terror over this act, he rebels more and more against both moral and legal norms. Yet as the novel overall makes clear, not every illegal act is immoral, and it is far more important to focus on ethics than it is to focus on the law. Indeed, the novel suggests that learning to distinguish between morality and legality is an important part of growing up.

Even at the very beginning of the novel, Theo is both inclined to break rules and afraid to do so; he senses that rules and morality might not be exactly the same thing, but he's not sure how to tell the difference. After his friendship with the wayward Tom Cable leads Theo to commit various misdeeds—such as smoking a cigarette and breaking into someone's house in the Hamptons—Theo and Audrey are called into a meeting at Theo's school. It is on the day of the meeting that they go to the Met to kill some time before they have to be at school—a trip that results in Audrey's death. As a result, Theo blames himself for his mother's death, reasoning that if he hadn't rebelled, he and his mother wouldn't have gone to **the Met** and she wouldn't have died. Irrationally—but understandably—Theo feels that he's being cosmically punished for rebelling, as if breaking rules and behaving immorally always go hand-in-hand.

The first serious crime Theo does commit is a perfect example of an illegal act that is not necessarily immoral. In the aftermath of the terrorist attack at the Met, Theo meets a dying man, Welty, who tells him to take *The Goldfinch*. The fact that Theo

is young and was instructed to do so by an older, dying man arguably means he has diminished responsibility for the theft of the painting. Having stolen *The Goldfinch*, Theo knows that the legally and morally correct thing to do would be to tell an adult that he took the painting and then give it back. Yet as Theo himself points out, the vulnerable position in which he is left following the bombing makes him feel unable to admit the truth: “In my homeless limbo, it seemed insane to step up and admit to what I knew a lot of people were going to view as very serious wrongdoing.” Because Theo is only 13, it is unlikely that he would be in serious trouble for stealing the painting, yet understandable that he feels afraid that admitting the truth would make his already precarious circumstances worse. This further emphasizes how people can commit illegal acts due to being in a vulnerable position.

The illegal activity that Theo goes onto commit with his best friend, Boris, further explores the idea that even frequently committing crimes does not necessarily make one a bad person. At only 14, Theo and Boris drink, take drugs, and shoplift. In many ways, they resemble typical teenage delinquents. Yet at the same time as the two boys engage in a range of illegal activity, they also develop a close, loving friendship, filled with loyalty, care, and generosity. Depicting Boris and Theo’s illegal activity side-by-side with the evolution of their friendship is another way to show that committing crimes is not necessarily evidence of moral bankruptcy.

At the same time, the book does show that illegal activity, even when it is not in itself particularly immoral, can lead to immoral behavior down the road. This is something Theo learns the hard way as a teenager and young adult. When Theo leaves **Las Vegas**, Larry’s girlfriend Xandra comments, “You’re headed down a bad road... [Boris is] going to end up in a jail by the time he’s eighteen, that one, and dollars to doughnuts you’ll be right there with him.” Although Theo never ends up in prison, Xandra’s prediction is not totally inaccurate. Later in life Theo develops an opioid addiction. The novel does not portray his drinking and drug use as necessarily immoral; at the same time, it does suggest that there is a link between Theo’s carelessness about the law and his carelessness about morality. In the midst of his addiction, Theo begins selling the fake antiques without telling Hobie. This is one of the most immoral acts in the book, as it betrays the trust and damages the reputation of someone who loves Theo so innocently. Although it is illegal, this doesn’t really matter as much as the fact that it is a devastating betrayal.

Finally, the novel also shows that although illegal acts are not necessarily immoral, there are many cases in which illegality and immorality go together. This is true of Theo selling the bad antiques and Boris stealing *The Goldfinch* from Theo—two illegal acts that involve betraying a friend. The character who combines illegality and immorality to the highest degree, meanwhile, is Theo’s father Larry. Larry uses illegal drugs,

steals, and evades debt, and the book shows that these illegal acts are immoral because of how they intersect with Larry’s selfishness and greed. Whereas Theo starts stealing because he doesn’t have enough money for food and uses drugs to deal with the pain of losing Audrey, Larry’s criminal activity is produced by his lack of empathy for others. Crucially, whereas Theo tries to right his wrongs after seeing how they hurt people, Larry continues to avoid responsibility, to the point that he kills himself drunk-driving while trying to abandon his family for a second time.

Ultimately, the fact that Larry is an alcoholic and a gambler matters far less than the fact that he is a selfish and uncaring father who abandons Theo (although of course the two issues are not totally unrelated). For all his faults and all the mistakes he makes, Theo never wants to hurt other people. When he does—such as by selling the fake antiques—he makes it right again. Indeed, when Theo uses the reward money from the return of *The Goldfinch* at the end of the novel to buy back the fake antiques he sold, it is obvious that Theo has gained a strong sense of ethical duty—and one that encompasses an understanding of the distinction between immoral and illegal acts.



HOPE, DESPAIR, AND ADDICTION

Over the course of the novel, Theo’s trajectory is defined by swings between extremes of hope and despair. While everything that happens to Theo might seem remarkably dramatic, the novel emphasizes that the oscillation between hope and despair fundamentally defines the human condition. Theo’s story indicates that hope and despair feed off each other, with each one making the other inevitable. Furthermore, Theo—like many other characters in the novel—experiences addiction, and this escalates the existing back-and-forth between hope and despair that defines his life. The novel suggests that addiction creates an oscillation between hope and despair that is connected to the everyday experience of these emotions, yet becomes so dramatic and extreme that it stops a person from being able to process everyday life in a healthy, normal way. While swinging between hope and despair is an inevitable part of human existence, making these emotions even more extreme through substance use, gambling, or other addictive behaviors can destroy a person’s life.

The novel opens with two separate moments of despair separated by a moment of hope in the middle, thereby establishing the rhythm that will dominate the rest of the narrative. At the very beginning of the book, Theo is an adult in Amsterdam—drunk, high, paranoid, suicidal, and unable to leave his hotel room. At this point, the reader does not know the circumstances leading up to this state; the only thing that is clear is that Theo is in a state of utter despair. When the narrative jumps back to Theo’s life as a 13-year-old going to **the**

Met with Audrey, it comes as a relief; yet the reader is also inescapably aware of the horror that lies in Theo's future, making this moment of hope tainted by unease. Even in this opening contrast, the novel suggests that hope and despair are essentially inseparable.

The linked nature of these two opposite emotions sets in further after the terrorist attack at the Met and Theo's realization that Audrey has been killed. Theo's reaction to Audrey's death sets the tone for how he will experience despair over the rest of the novel. Feeling numb and isolated from the world, he keeps secrets and has difficulty expressing his feelings, which of course only further cuts him off from others. When his circumstances seem to be improving (for example, at the prospect that the Barbours will "keep" him), he is hesitant about feeling too hopeful, and yet he can't help but let himself believe that his life might actually get better. Of course, this results in feelings of regret, guilt, and shame when another disaster happens (such as when Larry shows up, taking him away from the Barbours') and Theo lapses back into despair.

As the above examples show, even before Theo starts drinking and using drugs, he experiences extremes of hope and despair that, as the book will come to illustrate, are hallmarks of addiction. As is the case with Theo, addictions often begin in response to despair, and drinking, drug use, and gambling can be ways of dealing with despair—whether destroying it with (false) feelings of hope and elation, or numbing the feeling altogether. When Theo first starts drinking excessively and using drugs, he experiences a kind of wild, hysterical hope and joy. He describes these as "Wild nights with Boris, an edge of giddiness and hysteria that I associated (in myself, anyway) with having narrowly missed death." Yet as this sentence shows, this "giddiness and hysteria" come into relief against the death, horror, and despair that Theo has experienced.

Furthermore, Theo's teenage years in **Las Vegas** show how hope and despair, while opposites, can come to resemble one another—particularly when they are muddled by the experience of substance abuse and addiction. During the period of the novel set in Vegas, Theo describes his experimentation with drinking and drugs as fun and exciting (if a little scary). Yet years after the fact, once they are adults, Boris tells Theo that when Theo was drinking to the point of losing his memory, he would often confess that he was suicidal—and even try to act on these suicidal feelings. What Theo describes at the time as exciting (and thus in a sense hopeful) actually involved him sinking into the depths of despair.

The blurred line between hope and despair works in the other direction, too. In his many states of despair, Theo experiences a lot of numbness throughout the novel (both drug-induced and otherwise) and paradoxically, this numbness sometimes takes the form of hope. Part of being numb, after all, is disconnecting from the (painful) reality in which you find yourself living. One

demonstration of how numbness can be paradoxically hopeful comes when Theo learns that Larry has died. He reflects, "I didn't cry. Though cold waves of disbelief and panic kept hitting me, it all seemed highly unreal and I kept glancing around for him, struck again and again by the absence of his voice among the others." Here, Theo explicitly links his inability to cry (numbed emotion) with his "disbelief" and false hope that Larry is somehow still there. This detachment and delusion is exactly the kind of experience that Theo will later seek through numbing himself with opioids.

While Theo and many of the other characters in the novel experience literal addiction, the novel suggests that in a way, addiction simply amplifies the existing pattern of hope and despair experienced by everyone. This is encapsulated when Theo quotes "another paradoxical gem of my dad's: sometimes you have to lose to win." Of course, this "wisdom" is something that Larry has gained from his experience as a professional gambler. The fact that it can be abstracted as a general statement again emphasizes the proximity between the patterns of experience produced by addiction and the hope and despair that characterizes life itself.



SYMBOLS

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



THE MET

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, commonly nicknamed the Met, symbolizes the transcendent value of art and beauty in the novel. A globally famous museum with one of the most important collections of art and artifacts in the world, for Audrey and Theo the Met is almost a sacred place, somewhere they can come to exercise their devotion to art and beauty. At the same time, the Met also symbolizes the pervasive access to culture that Theo took for granted before Audrey's death. Growing up with her in New York, Theo was constantly surrounded by art, classical music, literature, and other forms of culture. It is not until her death that he realizes that such access is not afforded to most people, and is a privilege of living somewhere like New York, which is filled with culturally significant institutions.

The fact that the Met is the target of a terrorist attack further emphasizes the idea that art and beauty carry extremely high significance. Although the novel doesn't explore the motivation behind the attack in depth, it is noted that the perpetrators are far right extremists. This suggests that whoever carried out the attack felt threatened by what the Met stands for, which is exactly what Theo (and Hobie and Audrey) believe in above all else: the preservation and public display of beautiful things. The terrorist attack on the Met shows that art and beauty are not

frivolous, but powerful and politically important.



THE GOLDFINCH

The Goldfinch—a famous Dutch painting—represents the transcendent power of art and beauty, but also its fragility. Both Audrey and—as readers learn toward the end of the novel—Welty have a special attachment to the painting, which is the only surviving work by the Dutch master Carel Fabritius. Fabritius was a famous and important painter in his time, but almost all of his works were destroyed in an explosion that also killed him in 1654. The Goldfinch, which was painted in the same year he died, is one of very few surviving works, which makes it crucially important to art history. The painting represents the miraculous survival (and, to use Theo’s word, “immortality”) of artwork across time. In the novel, the painting survives not just one but two explosions: the gunpowder factory explosion of 1654, and the terrorist attack that occurs at **the Met**. These two explosions show how art is constantly exposed to the risk of being destroyed.

After the terrorist attack, Welty tells Theo to take The Goldfinch, although his reasoning for doing so is never fully explained. When Theo does so, his ownership of the painting is a secret that comes to define his life. Initially, Theo is not particularly blameworthy for taking the painting. While technically a major crime, at only 13—and in the midst of a traumatic event that kills his mother—Theo could hardly be truly held responsible for taking The Goldfinch (particularly because he was following the instructions of a dying man in doing so). Yet rather than admitting to this act, Theo keeps it a secret, and as time passes the crime becomes more and more serious. This reaches an especially dramatic climax when it turns out that Boris stole the painting and used it as collateral within the criminal underworld. At this point, The Goldfinch represents not only secrecy, crime, and immorality, but also the way that art can be valued for all the wrong reasons. While being used as collateral, The Goldfinch is little more than an abstract promise of wealth and security. No one actually cares about it as an artwork.

When The Goldfinch and other artworks are recovered by the art crimes police and restored to public ownership, the painting once again comes to represent the value and importance of beautiful objects. By the end of the book, it certainly seems as if Theo was *meant* to steal The Goldfinch, because this act not only defines who he is, but leads to the redemptive happy ending of the novel, in the form of the discovery of many other stolen works of art.



LAS VEGAS

Las Vegas, the city where Theo moves after his

father Larry assumes custody of him, represents the opposite of everything the novel values. Whereas other important places such as **the Met** or Hobie’s workshop are filled with beautiful, historical, authentic objects, Las Vegas is the epitome of newness and fakeness. It is a city filled with replicas of famous cultural monuments (such as the Eiffel Tower and an Egyptian Sphinx), but not ones that are supposed to look authentic. Rather, Las Vegas is a city that revels in its own fakeness. It is also a place with a reputation for hedonism, being notorious for “vices” such as gambling, sex work, and drug and alcohol use. Of course, this ends up having a serious impact on Theo, whose issues with drug and alcohol dependency begin there. Much goes wrong for Theo in Vegas; he drinks and takes drugs to excess, stops caring about his schoolwork, and starts shoplifting. At the same time, he develops the most important friendship of his life (with Boris) and comes to see that even Vegas, despite its seediness and lack of authenticity, has redeeming elements. Indeed, precisely because Vegas is so unlike the world of his youth, the city helps Theo grow up by challenging him to explore another side of himself.



QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Back Bay edition of *The Goldfinch* published in 2015.

Part 1, Chapter 1 Quotes

“People die, sure,” my mother was saying. “But it’s so heartbreaking and unnecessary how we lose *things*. From pure carelessness. Fires, wars. The Parthenon, used as a munitions storehouse. I guess that anything we manage to save from history is a miracle.”

Related Characters: Theo Decker, Audrey Decker (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 28

Explanation and Analysis

Fleeing a sudden downpour, Theo and his mother, Audrey, have gone into the Met and are walking around an exhibition of Dutch Golden Age Masterworks. Audrey has taken Theo to the first painting she ever loved, Carel Fabritius’ *The Goldfinch*, and has explained that Fabritius was killed in a gunpowder factory explosion that also destroyed almost all his work. Here, Audrey laments that “*things*” are get lost to history, which she seems to see as a greater tragedy than the fact that people die. By “*things*,” she assumedly does not mean just any material object, but

rather artworks and other “things” with cultural and aesthetic value.

The sentiment Audrey expresses here is one of the most important ideas in the novel: that art is one of (if not *the*) most important aspects of life. Indeed, Audrey seems to suggest that art serves a redemptive purpose, making life meaningful even in the face of death. As a result, the most terrible form of loss is not the loss of life—which is inevitable—but of an artwork, which is preventable. Yet despite the bleak aspect of this quotation (particularly in light of Audrey’s own impending death), it ends on a hopeful note. Audrey indicates that because art is so important and in constant danger of being destroyed, whatever any human can do to save artworks from the destructive forces of time is a “miracle.”

Part 1, Chapter 3 Quotes

☞ Its weighty, antiquated quality, its mixture of sobriety and brightness, were strangely comforting; if I fixed my attention on it intensely enough, it had a strange power to anchor me in my drifting state and shut out the world around me, but for all that, I really didn’t want to think about where it had come from.

Related Characters: Theo Decker (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 95

Explanation and Analysis

Following Audrey’s death, Theo has been staying with the family of his friend Andy Barbour on Park Avenue. One day, Mrs. Barbour spots the ring that Theo got from the old man (Welty) who lay dying at the Met. She admires it, and in response to her questions, Theo pretends that it is a family heirloom. Here he explains that the ring gives him comfort during one of the most chaotic and trying periods of his life. This supports the assertion repeated throughout the novel that beautiful objects are reassuring and can bring solace in the mist of the unpredictable horrors of life.

The fact that Theo does not know where the ring came from—or who the old man who gave it to him is—doesn’t matter. In fact, the mysterious history of the ring brings him even greater comfort, to the point that he doesn’t *want* to know its origin. To Theo, the ring becomes a reassuring reminder of consistency and timelessness. Moreover, knowing the ring’s origin would remind him that he is doing a somewhat immoral thing by making no effort to return it to its owner.

Part 1, Chapter 4 Quotes

☞ I learned about veneers and gilding, what a mortise and tenon was, the difference between ebonized wood and true ebony, between Newport and Connecticut and Philadelphia crest rails, how the blocky design and close-cropped top of one Chippendale bureau rendered it inferior to another bracket-foot of the same vintage with its fluted quarter columns and what he liked to call the “exalted” proportions of the drawer ratio.

Related Characters: Theo Decker (speaker), James “Hobie” Hobart

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 170

Explanation and Analysis

Pippa has left to go live with her aunt Margaret in Texas, but Theo keeps going downtown to see Hobie even though Pippa is no longer living with him. All the adults around Theo have been telling him to get a hobby, and although he considers this silly advice, he *does* end up getting one, in the form of assisting Hobie in his antiques workshop. Here Theo describes some of the things he learns while working as Hobie’s apprentice. The rich, vivid language in this passage conveys Hobie’s passion for furniture, a passion that he is now passing onto Theo. Both cope with their traumas (the deaths of Audrey and Welty, and the departure of Pippa) through their love of “old things.”

☞ It would be much easier to explain to Hobie how I had happened to take the painting out of the museum in the first place. That it was a mistake, sort of. That I’d been following Welty’s instructions; that I’d had a concussion. That I hadn’t fully considered what I was doing. That I hadn’t meant to let it sit around so long. Yet in my homeless limbo, it seemed insane to step up and admit to what I knew a lot of people were going to view as very serious wrongdoing.

Related Characters: Theo Decker (speaker), James “Hobie” Hobart

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 177

Explanation and Analysis

Theo has been considering telling Hobie about *The Goldfinch*, which is still sitting in the apartment where he and Audrey used to live. He is worried that so much time has passed since he originally stole the painting that maybe it is now too late. Here he considers the factors he could mention that would diminish his responsibility, yet ultimately he concludes that he is in too vulnerable position to make the admission. This is an important passage because it illustrates Theo's evolving understanding of the distinction between immorality and illegality.

Theo is well aware that stealing the painting was a "very serious" crime. Yet as the first part of the passage shows, he also knows that taking it was not *necessarily* immoral (although his lack of certainty here is conveyed by the statement, "it was a mistake, sort of"). On one hand, Theo seems to realize that as a young teenager who recently lost his mother in a terrorist attack, he would likely receive gentler treatment than an adult who stole the painting on purpose. At the same time, he also acknowledges that his already vulnerable, "homeless" position means that it is possibly not a good idea to put himself at risk by confessing to his crime. Theo has learned the hard way that those who are more vulnerable are punished more harshly for crimes, simply because they have less security and power to begin with.

Part 2, Chapter 5 Quotes

☞ Before Boris, I had borne my solitude stoically enough, without realizing quite how alone I was. And I suppose if either of us had lived in an even halfway normal household, with curfews and chores and adult supervision, we wouldn't have become quite so inseparable, so fast, but almost from that day were together all the time, scrounging our meals and sharing what money we had.

Related Characters: Theo Decker (speaker), Boris Pavlikovsky

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 245

Explanation and Analysis

Theo has started school in Las Vegas, and in Honors English he meets a boy named Boris whose parents are originally Slavic, but who has grown up all around the world. Like Theo, Boris' father is an alcoholic and his mother is dead. The two boys bond quickly, and in this passage Theo reflects on why he and Boris develop such a close friendship in such

a short space of time. He points out that he and Boris are highly isolated, both neglected by their living parent. The boys are still young, but do not have anyone taking care of their basic needs or imposing the discipline that all children need in order to develop in a healthy way.

This quotation thus shows that Theo's coming-of-age story is unconventional, because he is essentially having to raise himself. At the same time, it also illuminates the way in which he and Boris' friendship comes to stand in for the familial relationships that they are both lacking. With dead mothers, no siblings, and alcoholic, absent fathers, Boris and Theo turn to each other not only for friendship, but also for the familial care they are not receiving elsewhere.

☞ When we are sad—at least I am like this—it can be comforting to cling to familiar objects, to the things that don't change.

Related Characters: James "Hobie" Hobart (speaker)

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 281

Explanation and Analysis

Theo is growing accustomed to his new life in Las Vegas, largely thanks to his friendship with Boris, but he still suffers horrific nightmares about his mother and the terrorist attack. When he needs comfort, he closes his eyes and pictures Hobie's house or the Barbour's apartment. This quotation is an extract from a letter Hobie sends Theo, in which Hobie says that if he'd known Larry was selling Audrey's belongings, he would have bought some of them to save for Theo. Here, Hobie echoes the line Audrey said earlier in the novel, just hours before her death, about the loss of objects being a greater tragedy than the loss of human life.

Taken together, these two quotations establish one of the most important messages of the novel. Objects—and particularly objects with aesthetic value, like works of art or antique furniture—provide comfort and meaning in the face of the transience and tragedy of human life. This idea runs counter to the commonplace wisdom that material things matter less than people. Here, Hobie suggests that things matter precisely because they "don't change," whereas human life is defined by constant change and loss. This passage establishes Hobie as having an important connection to Audrey (even though they never met), making him a substitute parent figure to Theo.

Part 2, Chapter 6 Quotes

Well, kid, guess what? I've been around the track a few times—I *do* know. He's going to end up in jail by the time he's eighteen, that one, an dollars to doughnuts you'll be right there with him.

Related Characters: Xandra (speaker), Boris Pavlikovsky, Theo Decker

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 368

Explanation and Analysis

After Larry dies in a drunk driving accident, Theo flees Las Vegas, taking Popper with him. Having finally arrived in New York, he goes to Hobie's house, where he tells Pippa and Hobie what happened. Hobie forces him to call Xandra, and in this quotation Xandra warns Theo about the path she believes he and Boris are heading down. She indicates that she is aware of the criminal acts the two of them have been committing, suggesting that it won't be long before this ruins their lives forever.

This quotation is thus an important moment in the novel's exploration of immorality and crime. While not delivered with much sympathy, Xandra's warning is apt: given the way they've been behaving, both Boris and Theo certainly *could* end up in prison soon, and it is in fact somewhat miraculous that they haven't done so already. Of course, the book emphasizes that, despite constantly breaking the law, neither of the boys is immoral. Both have suffered from turbulent life experiences and parental neglect, but they are still good people, largely shown through their love and loyalty to each other.

There is also a level of irony that emerges in Xandra's words of warning, due to the fact that she isn't even aware of the biggest crime Theo has committed. Xandra thinks the boys will land in legal trouble because of shoplifting, underage drinking, or drugs, and she doesn't even realize that Theo has been secretly harboring a stolen painting with priceless value. Of course, this central "crime" of Theo's is also arguably not immoral. However, his whole life is governed by fear that it will be discovered and—as Xandra warns—he will be sent to prison.

That was your father that died. Your own father. And you act like it was, I don't know, I'd say the dog, but not *even* the dog. Because I know you'd care if it was the dog got hit by a car, at least I think you would.

Related Characters: Xandra (speaker), Larry Decker, Theo Decker

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 370

Explanation and Analysis

After Theo arrives at Hobie's house, Hobie insists that he call Xandra, which Theo does very reluctantly. Their conversation is tense, with both of them being rude and cruel to one another. Toward the end of it, Xandra urges Theo to take seriously the fact that Larry was his father. This quotation highlights Xandra's belief that Theo should care about Larry even though he wasn't a good father. As a result, it reflects one of the central questions the novel raises: is there any particular value in blood family just for being blood, or does "family" simply describe the people who love and care about a person?

As Xandra points out, Theo has formed a closer connection to Popper than he did to Larry. Yet given how Larry behaved toward Theo—neglecting him, hitting him, and hoping to use him in order to take the "fortune" he believed Theo had—perhaps there is little surprise that Theo prefers Popper to Larry. Indeed, the qualities that matter to Theo—love and loyalty—are more present in Popper than they ever were in Larry. From this perspective, Xandra is arguably wrong in believing that Theo should be more devastated by Larry's death simply because he was Theo's father.

Part 3, Chapter 7 Quotes

One commentator, in London, had mentioned my painting in the same breath with the recovered Rembrandt:... *has drawn attention to more valuable works still missing, most particularly Carel Fabritius's Goldfinch of 1654, unique in the annals of art and therefore priceless...*

Related Characters: Theo Decker (speaker)

Related Themes:    

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 405

Explanation and Analysis

While leaving the entrance exam to the early-college program, Theo comes across a newspaper article about the recovery of three stolen paintings that had been taken from

the Met on the day of the attack and hidden in a house in the Bronx. This launches him into a new phase of terror about someone discovering *The Goldfinch*, particularly after Hobie makes a comment about the awfulness of the theft. In this quotation, he recounts the words of a commentator who argues that, unlike the extremely high-valued Rembrandt piece discovered in the house, *The Goldfinch* is “priceless.”

The commentator’s words contain important—and in some ways paradoxical—sentiments about how art is valued. The word “priceless” is often used as a metaphor to describe things that have a very high price. In this case, the word both is and isn’t being used figuratively. On one level, “priceless” indicates that *The Goldfinch* has an extraordinarily high monetary value. However, the commentator is also claiming that the painting’s enormous financial value is beside the point. Because it is the only surviving work by Carel Fabritius, the painting’s non-monetary value is inherently more important than its price. While (depending on one’s perspective) this is arguably true of all artwork, the commentator’s words show how the financial value and the aesthetic/historical value of an artwork do not necessarily correspond and in fact contradict each other in a certain way.

Part 3, Chapter 8 Quotes

☞ Anything too evenly worn was a dead giveaway; real age, as I came to see from the genuine pieces that passed through my hands, was variable, crooked, capricious, singing her and sullen there, warm asymmetrical streaks on a rosewood cabinet from where a slant of sun had struck it while the other side was as dark as the day it was cut.

Related Characters: Theo Decker (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 416

Explanation and Analysis

Theo is only minimally participating in his early-college program, alienated by the other students and convinced that he was only accepted out of pity. He remains in a constant state of anxiety about *The Goldfinch*. The one source of joy and satisfaction in his life is the time he spends in Hobie’s workshop, learning the art of antique restoration. In this passage, Theo describes why it is so important to restore antiques in a way that doesn’t make them look brand-new.

When it comes to furniture, age equates to authenticity. In this sense, age—and the flaws that come with age—are what make a piece beautiful and valuable. In particular, this value emerges via the evidence that a piece has been loved and treasured over a long period of time, by many different people. In this sense, the value of an antique can be thought of as an accumulation of love and appreciation across history.

Part 4, Chapter 9 Quotes

☞ I sold heavily altered or outright reconstructed pieces as original; if—out of the dim light of Hobart and Blackwell—the collector got the piece home and noticed something amiss [...] then I—grieved at the mix-up, while stalwart in my conviction that the piece was genuine—gallantly offered to buy it back at ten per cent more than the collector had paid, under the conditions and terms of ordinary sale. This made me look like a goody guy, confident in the integrity of my product and willing to go to absurd length to ensure my client’s happiness, and more often than not the client was mollified and decided to keep the piece. But on the three or four occasions when distrustful collectors had taken me up on my offer: what the collector didn’t realize was that the fake—passing from his possession to mine, at a price indicative of its apparent worth—had overnight acquired a provenance. Once it was back in my hands, I had a paper trail to show it had once been part of the illustrious So-and-So collection [...] I could then turn around and sell it again for sometimes twice what I’d bought it back for.

Related Characters: Theo Decker (speaker)

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 416

Explanation and Analysis

Now an adult, Theo is helping run the antiques business with Hobie, and has just been at the Barbours’ apartment after running into Platt on the street and learning that Andy and Mr. Barbour are dead. Here, Theo explains how he has managed to transform the antiques business’ previously dismal finances through a cunning, duplicitous scheme. The passage demonstrates Theo’s understanding and mastery of the business side of the antiques trade. He knows how to build people’s trust, and also how to manipulate this trust to his own advantage.

Most importantly, Theo has learned how to manipulate the value of an object. Although the aesthetic aspects of an antique play an important part in the object’s value, other

aspects are equally or even more important, including the age, maker, and owner of the object. Indeed, these three things combined contribute to the object's authenticity, which is the single most important factor determining its value. However, as Theo's scheme reveals, authenticity is not as straightforward as one might assume. On one level, of course, an object is either real or fake—there is no in between. Yet the practice of restoration blurs this binary. An original antique can be restored into a different form and sold as something else, for example.

Crucially, Theo's words show that antiques acquire value through their attachment to important people. The quotation suggests that many antiques customers do not prioritize their own judgments, but instead choose to buy objects based on the social value they accrue through their proximity to esteemed people.

☝ It was the secret no one told you, the thing you had to learn for yourself: viz. that in the antiques trade there was really no such thing as a "correct" price. Objective value—list value—was meaningless. If a customer came in clueless with money in hand (as most of them did) it didn't matter what the books said, what the experts said, what similar items at Christie's had recently gone for. An object—*any* object—was worth whatever you could get somebody to pay for it.

Related Characters: Theo Decker (speaker)

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 457

Explanation and Analysis

Theo has explained the deceptive scheme he has been running in order to sell the "changelings" Hobie makes as authentic pieces. He notes that this has saved the shop from financial ruin, yet it is a risky operation because it puts Hobie's reputation at risk. Here he relays a lesson he learned early on: that there is no such thing as "objective value" when it comes to antiques. This is a crucial passage in the novel, as it contains key ideas about art and value.

Theo's argument that there is no such thing as objective value when it comes to antiques could be interpreted as an assertion of aesthetic relativism—meaning that the beauty (and hence value) of aesthetic objects is subjective. However, this is not actually Theo (or the novel's) position. Indeed, the novel actually tends to take the opposite view, arguing that aesthetic objects do have objective value, and that this value is actually what gives life meaning. Theo's

argument instead relates specifically to the antiques *business*, and to the fact that most people who spend money on antiques don't actually know or care about the aesthetic/objective value of the pieces they are buying. As he has argued before, antiques customers tend to be so rich that they are careless with money, and only want to buy objects because of the elevated social status that these objects will provide.

Part 4, Chapter 10 Quotes

☝ I'm so glad you're going to be an official part of the family, that we're going to make it legal now, because—oh, I suppose I shouldn't say this, I hope you don't mind if I speak from the heart for a moment, but I always did think of you as one of my very own, did you know that? Even when you were a little boy.

Related Characters: Mrs. Barbour (speaker), Theo Decker

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 513

Explanation and Analysis

Theo and Kitsey are engaged to be married, and Theo has reflected on his mixed feelings. On one hand, he has still not entirely let go of his obsession with Pippa, and he is also disturbed by how extravagant and time-consuming the wedding has become. Yet on the other hand, he is thrilled by the stability and joy that his engagement brings—particularly for Mrs. Barbour, who could not be happier about it. In this quotation, Mrs. Barbour admits that she always saw Theo as one of her own children, and that she is delighted that this is now going to be made "official."

These words are significant because, throughout the book, Theo forms familial attachments to people who aren't officially his family—including Andy, Mrs. Barbour, and Kitsey, as well as Hobie, Pippa, and, Boris. Meanwhile, the people who *are* officially his family—including Larry and his Decker grandparents—do not mean much to Theo in comparison. In a sense, the book shows that it does not matter who one's family technically is. Real familial relationships are formed by loved and devotion, not blood or marriage. At the same time, Mrs. Barbour's words indicate that there can be something especially reassuring about making these connections "official."

☝ I *did* know. Because if possible to paint fakes that look like that? Las Vegas would be the most beautiful city in the history of earth! Anyway—so funny! Here I am, so proudly teaching you to steal apples and candy from the magazine, while you have stolen world masterpiece of art.

Related Characters: Boris Pavlikovsky (speaker), Theo Decker

Related Themes:    

Related Symbols:  

Page Number: 556

Explanation and Analysis

Boris and Theo have run into each other on the street in New York after many years of not seeing each other or talking. They go out to a club together, getting drunk and high, then end up talking in a 24-hour bar when they are both too wired to sleep. Here Boris admits that back in Las Vegas, Theo drunkenly told him about *The Goldfinch* and Boris took the painting. Here, he explains that when Theo showed him the painting, he could see immediately that it was authentic. This passage suggests that, even to people who don't have particular knowledge or appreciation of art, authenticity is self-evident.

Significantly, Boris states that his ability to recognize the painting as authentic rests within the fact that he lives in a fake city. In contrast to the “priceless” aesthetic and historical value of *The Goldfinch*, Las Vegas represents a kind of cheap artifice. The city is dominated by unconvincing replicas of beautiful places and monuments from around the world (Venice, the Eiffel Tower, an Ancient Egyptian sphynx). These replicas are obviously fake, and as such do not confer the beauty and meaning of true pieces of art like *The Goldfinch*.

☝ Because this is closed circle, you understand? Horst is right on the money about that. *No one is going to buy this painting*. Impossible to sell. But—black market, barter currency? Can be traded back and forth forever! Valuable, portable. Hotel rooms—going back and forth. Drugs, arms, girls, cash—whatever you like.

Related Characters: Boris Pavlikovsky (speaker), Horst, Theo Decker

Related Themes:    

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 586

Explanation and Analysis

Boris and Theo have gone to the decrepit townhouse belonging to Horst, a rich German drug addict involved in the trade of *The Goldfinch*. Horst maintains that the painting is now in Ireland, but Boris doesn't believe this is true and thinks that Horst is being tricked. After they leave the house, Boris explains to Theo that without intervention, the painting will remain underground forever. In this quotation, he emphasizes that the painting is “impossible to sell.” This is because it is such a high-profile stolen piece of art. No collector would want it, because if anyone found out they owned it, it would be seized by the police.

As a result, the painting has no commercial value. However, it nevertheless does still have (high) monetary value as collateral. This might seem like a contradiction, and in a sense it is. The painting's value as collateral relies on the value it would have if it were to be sold, even though—as Boris emphasizes—this certainly won't actually happen. As a result, the painting demonstrates how financial value can be just as abstract as aesthetic value. Furthermore, it shows how the world of high art is tied to the criminal underground via a shared connection to extreme wealth.

Part 5, Chapter 12 Quotes

☝ Because—they are saying, ‘one of great art recoveries of history.’ And this is the part I hoped would please you—maybe not who knows, but I hoped. Museum masterworks, returned to public ownership! Stewardship of cultural treasure! Great joy! All the angels are singing! But it would never have happened, if not for you.

Related Characters: Boris Pavlikovsky (speaker), Theo Decker

Related Themes:     

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 741

Explanation and Analysis

After Theo spends a tormented period of time in the hotel in Amsterdam, Boris finally shows up on Christmas Day. He shows Theo, who is initially furious, an enormous amount of

cash, which is a “fraction” of the reward money for information that led to the recovery of *The Goldfinch*. Here, Boris explains that when the police raided Sacha’s apartment in Frankfurt, they didn’t just find *The Goldfinch* but a huge number of stolen artworks. The bleak, sordid story of Theo stealing the painting (and Boris stealing it from Theo) thus has a triumphant ending.

This quotation is one of the main messages of the novel, that the “public ownership” of art is an inherently good thing. The high financial value of artworks mean that they are desired by people who don’t care about them for their aesthetic and historical resonance (including criminals like Sacha). However, the point of art—and the reason why art is such an important part of life—is to provide meaning to masses of people who treasure it for the right reasons. The fact that Theo’s original theft of *The Goldfinch* inadvertently leads to “one of great art recoveries of history” redeems Theo’s original crime, which he has felt guilty about throughout the novel. This suggests that some crimes, even if they are wrong in themselves, can indirectly lead to positive outcomes.

☝ Good doesn’t always follow from good deeds, nor bad deeds result from bad, does it? Even the wise and good cannot see the end of all actions. Scary idea!

Related Characters: Boris Pavlikovsky (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 745

Explanation and Analysis

Boris has told Theo how the recovery of *The Goldfinch* led to recovery of many other stolen artworks, meaning that Theo’s original theft ended up having a net positive impact on the world. Boris laments that he stole from Theo, who was always so generous with him, yet also suggests that Theo’s very black-and-white way of thinking about morality perhaps does not accurately reflect the nature of the world. Here, Boris suggests that because “good doesn’t always follow from good deeds” (and vice versa) it can be hard to accurately distinguish good deeds from bad.

Of course, many people would say that the end result of the deed is not what matters, arguing that a person’s original intention or what they reasonably expect to be the outcome of the deed is more important. As we have seen throughout the novel, Boris can have a somewhat loose version of

morality. At the same time, his determination to right his wrongs—including by getting *The Goldfinch* back for Theo, and then turning it into the police—suggests that he is actually a good person. While Boris has certainly committed immoral acts, he is always trying to ultimately have a positive impact on the world. In this sense, his (slightly skewed) version of morality is arguably more advanced than Theo’s.

☝ Where’s the nobility in patching up a bunch of old tables and chairs? Corrosive to the soul, quite possibly. I’ve seen too many estates not to know that. Idolatry! Caring too much for objects can destroy you. Only—if you care for a thing enough, it takes on a life of its own, doesn’t it? And isn’t the whole point of things—beautiful things—that they connect you to some larger beauty? Those first images that crack your heart wide open and you spend the rest of your life chasing, or trying to recapture, in one way or another?

Related Characters: James “Hobie” Hobart (speaker)

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 757

Explanation and Analysis

Theo has returned from Amsterdam to find Hobie very upset with him. Theo then asks him to sit down and tells him the whole story about *The Goldfinch*. Hobie tells Theo that he should have told him he’d stolen the painting when he was a child, as Hobie would have been able to help him deal with hit. Here, Hobie reflects on whether there is moral value in devoting one’s life to objects as he has done. He evidently feels conflicted, on one hand dismissing objects as frivolous or even morally sinister (as shown by his use of the word “idolatry”), while at the same time considering that objects afford people access to beauty, and that this makes them morally valuable.

This uncertainty stands in contrast to the overall position on the value of objects expressed in the novel, which is more definitive. The novel powerfully demonstrates that objects provide meaning, value, and comfort against the randomness, suffering, and transience that defines human life. Yet considering how much trouble objects have caused Hobie and Theo lately, perhaps it is not surprising that in this moment, Hobie doubts whether it is admirable to devote one’s life to them.

●● Insofar as it is immortal (and it is) I have a small, bright, immutable part in the immortality. It exists; and it keeps on existing. And I add my own love to the history of people who have loved beautiful things, and looked out for them, and pulled them from the fire, and sought them when they were lost, and tried to preserve them and save them while passing them along literally from hand to hand, singing out brilliantly from the wreck of time to the next generation of lovers, and the next.

Related Characters: Theo Decker (speaker)

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 771

Explanation and Analysis

After returning from Europe, Theo spends a year using the

reward money for *The Goldfinch* to travel around the world and buy back the bad antiques he sold. In the final pages of the novel, he reflects on what he has learned during this year and during his life, and in particular what *The Goldfinch* has taught him. In this quotation, which is the final passage of the novel, Theo argues that works of art are immortal, and by interacting with them, humans can experience a brush with immortality.

Theo positions himself as part of a tradition of people who love “beautiful things,” imagining them forming a community across time who dedicate themselves to loving and preserving objects. In opposition to Hobie, who dismisses the life of an antiques restorer as not particularly noble, Theo frames caring for beautiful objects as a noble, even sacred task. Indeed, to him, appreciating immortal and beautiful things is what enables people to transcend the transience and tragedy of human life and achieve something truly meaningful.



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.

PART 1, CHAPTER 1: THE BOY WITH A SKULL

Theo Decker has locked himself in his hotel in Amsterdam for a week, too scared to go out or even make a phone call. He left New York in a rush, not thinking to bring any warm clothes even though it is Christmastime. He has been smoking cigarettes and drinking vodka, and he feels that he knows the room as well as a prisoner knows his cell. Early each morning he creeps downstairs to get the newspapers, but he cannot read Dutch, so he doesn't understand them. He has a cold, and his fever produces extremely vivid dreams. He sees his mother (Audrey) or finds himself inside Hobie's shop. Seeing Audrey makes him euphoric, but she always remains out of reach.

Theo thinks his life "would have turned out better if [Audrey] had lived." Yet she died when he was young, and he has never met anyone who loved him like that again. When she died, he lost "the daily commonplace happiness" that existed before. When she first moved to New York from Kansas as a young woman, she worked as a model. She was a beautiful, enchanting woman, who attracted attention wherever she went. Theo states plainly that "Her death was my fault." She died 14 years ago, on April 10th. It was in New York, on what seemed like an ordinary day.

Theo and Audrey stand outside their apartment building on 57th Street while Audrey's favorite doorman, Goldie, hails them a cab. When Goldie comments that they aren't getting the train as usual, Audrey unconvincingly says they have some "errands" to do. Theo is 13 and has been suspended from school. He isn't exactly sure why he's been suspended, but he thinks it's because a teacher saw him standing with his friend, Tom Cable, while Tom smoked a cigarette on school property. Audrey hates smoking because her parents both died of smoking-related causes.

The reader is introduced to Theo in a moment of utter despair. Crucially, it is not yet clear what has caused this despair, which creates a sense of mystery and invites the question of whether Theo is truly as doomed as he seems to think he is. There is a sense in which Theo is suspended in time, hovering between two climactic events—the details of which are totally hidden from the reader at this point.



Audrey's death marks an irrevocable shift in Theo's life, with everything divided into "before" and "after." Before is characterized by innocence and happiness (as shown by a young, beautiful Audrey arriving in New York) and after by misery and regret (shown by Theo feeling like a doomed prisoner in Amsterdam).



This passage suggests that Theo might have an inclination for rule-breaking, which is important in the context of the novel's exploration of immorality vs. crime. Yet standing by someone who is smoking a cigarette is hardly a serious violation. Getting into trouble in this matter is nothing out of the ordinary for a 13-year-old boy.



However, Theo has been having other problems at school, too. Ever since his father (Larry) abandoned him and Audrey, Theo's teachers have been giving him extensions and other special allowances, which has ironically led him to fall behind on work. Now, because Audrey has had to take the morning off work anyway, she's suggested that she and Theo go to breakfast before their meeting with the school. While Audrey and Goldie chat about the weather, Theo worries that he is going to lose his scholarship. He is worried that his teacher has found out that he and Tom have been wandering into people's empty vacation homes in the Hamptons, taking beer, Xbox games, and \$5 and \$10 bills.

In the cab, Theo wonders if he's going to be sent to jail. He notices that Audrey looks pale, and tells the driver they'll get out. Theo suggests they go sit in the park. Suddenly, Audrey stops still, looking intensely in the distance. She tells Theo she just experienced a "time warp," and that every time she finds herself in this spot she remembers the moment she got off the bus from Kansas at 18. She recalls how amazed she was by the city at the time, particularly this part of Central Park, which was so unlike her own neighborhood, the Lower East Side. Suddenly, rain starts to pour, and Theo and Audrey run into **the Metropolitan Museum of Art** for shelter.

After Audrey arrived in New York, she was scouted and began modelling, which allowed her to save up enough money to get a BA in art history at NYU. She was in the middle of her master's degree when she met Larry and dropped out before finishing. Now, she suggests that she and Theo "poke around" **the Met** while waiting for the rain to stop. Theo is reluctant because he is hungry and wants breakfast, but he agrees. He and Audrey discuss whether she should buy an art book as a birthday present for the Art Director of the advertising firm where she works.

Audrey explains that the exhibition on Dutch Golden Age Masters is huge, but that there are a few pieces she especially wants to see. Theo is at first unenthusiastic about the idea of seeing these paintings, but once they are inside the exhibition, he becomes entranced by them. Audrey explains that the Dutch invented the microscope and paid extraordinary attention to detail. She also notes that they included details in paintings that served as reminders of the fleeting, transient nature of life. When they get to Rembrandt's *The Anatomy Lesson*, she gives a long, in-depth analysis.

This passage indicates that Theo's rule-breaking is actually a little more serious than simply standing in the proximity of someone smoking a cigarette. While it seems as if Theo is growing up in a wealthy community (as denoted by the fact that he goes to private school and spends time in the Hamptons), Theo himself is not the picture of privilege. Yet the extra allowances that he has been given because of the difficulties he faces have actually led him to behave worse, not better.



Audrey's pale demeanor and "time warp" adds a spooky, almost supernatural element to this scene. Theo has already stated that this is the day Audrey dies. The way she appears in this passage suggests that, on some level, she is experiencing a premonition about her fate.



As can sometimes happen between single parents and only children, Theo and Audrey's relationship has elements of a best friendship. The fact that meeting Larry ruined Audrey's burgeoning academic career further demonizes him. While Audrey seems to be a picture of kindness, beauty, and intelligence, Larry appears to have been a purely negative force in her life.



Like most 13-year-old boys, Theo is not overly enthusiastic about art history. However, it is clear that Audrey's passion for art is infectious, and being able to see these masterworks in the flesh—while hearing about them from his mother—inspires an appreciation in Theo that he probably would not have experienced otherwise. This is an important demonstration of the value of museums and other public art institutions.



Suddenly, Theo sees a skinny, red-haired girl in the crowd carrying a flute case. The way that the girl looks at Theo entralls him. The girl is with a white-haired man who walks with a limp, and yet is still somehow “elegant.” Audrey is now discussing what she describes as “the first painting I ever really loved.” Its painter, Carel Fabritius, was Rembrandt’s student and Vermeer’s teacher. Fabritius was killed and his studio destroyed in a gunpowder factory explosion. He was very famous, but only a handful of his paintings survived. Now, this painting, **The Goldfinch**, is the only one that still exists.

Audrey observes that while death is inevitable, the loss of “things” is tragic. Theo, meanwhile, can’t take his eyes off the red-haired girl. Audrey interrupts his thoughts by announcing that she’s going to go down to the shop to find a present for her colleague. However, she then says that she’s going to look at Rembrandt’s *The Anatomy Lesson* one last time, and Theo agrees to meet her in the shop. Theo wants to use this opportunity to talk to the girl, although he doesn’t know if he’ll have the courage. Suddenly, a museum guard runs across the room, carrying something. Another guard follows, screaming. There is a gigantic explosion, and Theo loses consciousness.

When Theo wakes up, an alarm is ringing and everything is covered in dust. His body aches, and he struggles to gain a sense of his surroundings. He moves through the debris, encountering objects like a signal-less phone and a bottle of water. He then sees an old man whose body seems mangled. Theo picks up the bottle of water, which is hot, drinks some, and then brings the rest to the old man. The old man (Welty) gently removes some glass from Theo’s forehead and gives him a reassuring pat. Theo helps him drink, and the man feebly mentions the name Pippa, indicating he wants to find her.

Welty speaks nonsensically, implying that he has known Theo for a long time. He mentions composers and auditions and asks if Theo is a student at the Lycée, but Theo explains that his school is on the West Side. Suddenly, Welty becomes distressed, and urges Theo to take something. Picking it up, Theo realizes it is the painting of the bird (**The Goldfinch**). He goes to show it to Audrey, and then realizes she isn’t there, or that only one part of her is there, the “invisible” part. Theo tries to give Welty the painting, but Welty somewhat aggressively insists that Theo take it with him.

The fact that the novel is called “The Goldfinch” immediately alerts the reader that this painting is very significant. The painting evidently has great importance within art history as well, as shown by the fact that Fabritius was connected to two of the most famous painters in history (Rembrandt and Vermeer). The fact that it is shrouded in dramatic tragedy heightens this sense of significance.



The scene escalates from something entirely normal into a terrifying, surreal moment in the blink of an eye. This demonstrates the seeming randomness of the world. At the same time, there are also certain things about the day that seem to have fated Theo and Audrey to be there—Theo’s suspension from school, the rain, and the draw of the first painting Audrey ever loved.



In the aftermath of the explosion, everything takes on a surreal quality. Possibly due to losing consciousness or injuries sustained by the blow, Theo experiences a sense of disconnection from where he was and what he was doing before the explosion happened. This makes the environment he wakes up in seem like a surreal and spooky dreamscape.



Theo saying that only the “invisible” part of Audrey is present suggests that there has been a dislocation between Audrey’s physical and spiritual existence. Her body is no longer present, but her soul is still with Theo—and despite his confusion, he is confident that she is there.



Welty has a coughing fit, and blood bubbles at his nose. Theo assures him that he will take the painting, and Welty tells him to wrap it in newspaper and “pack it at the very bottom of the trunk.” As they talk, Theo himself comes to believe that Welty is an old friend or relative. Welty takes off a ring and tries to give it to Theo, who tries to refuse it. The man says, “Hobart and Blackwell,” and instructs Theo to “ring the green bell” and “tell Hobie to get out of the store.” Then he begins struggling to breathe. Theo gives him a few drops of water, but at this point he collapses and stops breathing.

Theo stands up, covered in Welty’s blood. Walking away, he stumbles past objects and bodies that he can’t properly see. He walks into a gallery room and feels relief, until he realizes that he is the only one standing; everyone else in the room is “lying down.” He looks down at the bodies on the floor, some of which have parts missing. He checks each of them, but none is Audrey. Then without realizing what has happened, Theo finds himself running through the museum. It quickly occurs to him that he is lost. He finds a steel door and, with difficulty, pushes through it. It leads to a long corridor dotted with offices of staff members.

Theo feels increasingly nervous about the fact that he hasn’t seen a living person—not even a police officer or fireman. He runs toward a drinking fountain and rinses some of the blood off his body. Finally, he sees an emergency exit door and stumbles out into Central Park, where he hears the roar of dozens of sirens. Theo ducks under the yellow police tape and into the thick crowd of people standing outside **the Met**. Theo tries to tell some ambulance workers that there are still people inside the museum, but someone mentions that there is another bomb. At that moment, a cop grabs Theo and yells at him, telling him to get away from the building.

Theo darts away, and sees Hazmat officers blasting an undetonated bomb with a water cannon. When they safely dispose of it, a cheer erupts. Police continue pushing the crowd east, away from **the Met**. The scene is chaotic; some people are trying to get cell service, others are trying to get back to the museum, and some are simply standing still in shock. Theo realizes it will be impossible to find Audrey, and decides he will meet her at home. He feels confident that she was not hurt, as she’d been far away from the part of the museum where the explosion happened. Still, he feels shocked that she left the Met without him.

*This passage raises some important, mysterious questions, which are never properly resolved in the novel but invite speculation on the part of the reader. Welty’s dying wishes are for Theo to have *The Goldfinch* and to go to Hobart and Blackwell. Yet does he only want this because he is confused and thinks Theo is someone else? Or does he somehow sense that Theo needs to be set on the journey that these objects will spark?*



Despite the horror that surrounded them, Theo and Welty’s conversation was somehow hopeful. Yet with Welty dead, Theo is left alone, and brought face-to-face with the hellish environment around him. Before the explosion, the Met was a utopian space, filled with art and beauty that could brighten up even the comparatively bad day of having to go to a suspension meeting. Yet it has now been transformed into something broken, haunted, and scary.



This scene shows the kind of confusion and fear that dominates the scene of a terrorist attack immediately after it takes place. While reemerging into Central Park is better than being trapped inside the museum, the person saying that there is another bomb indicates that Theo is not safe yet.



This passage draws attention to the very particular stage of life Theo is in. At 13, he is both old enough to get himself home from the Met, and young enough to still feel surprised that his mother would ever leave him somewhere. Although he has been thrust into a particularly extreme, unusual situation, the mix between maturity and vulnerability he feels here is typical of the experience of being a young teenager.



PART 1, CHAPTER 2: THE ANATOMY LESSON

When Theo was a little kid, his biggest fear was Audrey not coming home to him. He would imagine horrific things he'd heard about on the news happening to her. The fear was compounded by the fact that his father, Larry, was so unstable, with wildly unpredictable mood swings and a drinking problem. He was irritable with Theo and Audrey, which convinced Theo his bad moods were their fault. In the mornings, Larry would shake while drinking his coffee, and he often wouldn't come home for long periods of time, particularly on payday.

Because of these habits, Audrey and Theo were not surprised or concerned when Larry first disappeared. College football season had just begun, and it seemed likely that Larry had gone to Atlantic City to gamble. After three days they began to worry, and soon after they received a strange, brief note from Larry saying that he'd left to "start a new life." Neither Theo nor Audrey were too sad about this, but it put them a tough position financially, with Audrey struggling to afford their rent-stabilized apartment. Now, Theo imagines Larry hearing about the bomb on the news, and thinks he probably won't worry about them.

On the walk home, Theo hears people muttering about North Korea, Iran, Iraq, and Al-Qaeda. He worries that Audrey must be sick with worry, and tries to send her a "psychic message" that he is alright. However, when he gets home he is shocked to find the apartment empty. Everything is just as they'd left it that morning. Audrey took Theo's phone when he was suspended, and he doesn't know where she's hidden it. At some point Theo falls asleep on the sofa and wakes up hours later, feeling disoriented, and still alone in the apartment. He checks the landline, where there is a single voicemail from someone in Audrey's office updating her on a postponed deadline.

Theo calls Audrey's cell and leaves a worried voicemail. Feeling increasingly panicked, he calls downstairs, hoping to reach one of the friendly doormen. However, the phone is answered by the building's new maintenance man instead, who doesn't speak much English and tells Theo to call back later. Theo switches on the news and sees that the bridges to the outer boroughs are all shut down. He sees a helpline for people who are missing someone and plans to ring it in half an hour if Audrey still isn't back. After an hour, Theo calls.

In some ways, Theo had a sheltered childhood. This is mostly due to the fact that Audrey was such a caring mother, and Theo had the advantages of growing up in a wealthy, privileged community. However, having to deal with a parent's alcoholism is difficult for any child, and can force children to grow up very quickly.



The lack of emotional attachment between Larry and Audrey and Theo is one of the first ways in which the novel explores the failures of family. While it might be presumed that Larry would automatically feel attachment and love for his wife and son, this does not seem to be the case. In fact, Theo is so sure that Larry doesn't love them that he implies Larry wouldn't care if they died.



Theo's concern that Audrey will be worried about him and his desperation to send her a "psychic message" that he is alright shows the ways in which the parent-child dynamic is not one directional. Although Audrey is the parent, Theo does not think of her as superhuman. He is more worried about protecting her from worrying about him than he is about looking after himself.



Theo's initial certainty that Audrey is alright gives way to hope that she is. In a sense, it is strange that Theo was ever confident about her wellbeing in the first place. Although she was not in the part of the museum where the bomb went off, it would be normal to fear that something happened to her. Yet perhaps, because they are so close, Theo cannot imagine that she is not alright when he is.



The woman on the other end of the line tells Theo that Audrey isn't listed among the dead or injured and asks him to leave his number. Theo sees on the news that 21 people are dead and many more are injured. Terrified, he calls the helpline again, but is again told they don't have any information. By now it is almost midnight, and Theo realizes his hands are shaking. He eats leftover lo mein from the fridge and then cleans the kitchen, thinking this will please Audrey. On TV, the news declares that the attack was committed by "homegrown" right-wing terrorists, who placed explosives inside the display platforms in the museum shop.

Theo tries to open one of the kitchen drawers, which has been jammed shut for months. He thinks about the fact that Audrey is an only child. His only living grandparents are Larry's dad and stepmother, who live in Maryland. Theo does not have a good relationship with them. He manages to open the drawer, then wraps himself in a blanket and sits on the sofa, facing the front door. On TV, a curator is being interviewed about the incident, noting how important it is that the pieces inside the museum are rescued before they are damaged by water, chemicals, smoke, or heat.

Suddenly the phone rings. A social worker from the Department of Child and Family Services asks to speak to Theo's father. She won't tell Theo if Audrey is alright, and instead insists on speaking to an adult. Theo pleads with her to tell him, but she leaves her contact information and asks that Theo's father call her back. Theo sits very still. It is almost 3am, and the city will soon start waking up again. He almost decides to go out and look for Audrey himself when the doorbell rings. Theo calls out "Mom?" but when he sees two strangers standing on the doorstep, he realizes "that my life, as I knew it, was over."

PART 1, CHAPTER 3: PARK AVENUE

The two social workers take Theo to a diner downtown and order him scrambled eggs. They ask him when he last saw Larry, and he guesses it was sometime the previous fall. They ask about any close friends of Larry's who might have his contact information, and Theo is shocked just by the idea that Larry might have close friends. It is only at the end of the conversation that Theo realizes the social workers are trying to figure out whose care he should be placed under. They tell him that he needs to be placed into "emergency custody" until they can reach his "grandpa and grandma." Theo is stunned to hear Larry's parents referred to in this way.

There are obvious connections between this fictional terrorist attack and the attack on the World Trade Center on September 11th. However, there are also crucial differences: the fictional attack on the Met is much smaller in scale (with a preliminary death toll of 21, compared to the almost 3,000 people who died in the Twin Towers attack). Even more importantly, this is the work of domestic terrorists who seem opposed to or threatened by what the Met represents.



The words of the curator echo Audrey's statement earlier in the novel, that while human mortality is inevitable, losing "things" is a genuine tragedy. Emphasizing the importance of rescuing objects at a time when people have died might seem frivolous or callous, but one of the main messages of the novel is that it actually isn't. Art is so important that it should be prioritized on an equal level to human life.



The woman refusing to tell Theo what has happened is another example of the way that families can fail. Because Theo lives in a nontraditional family, the woman who calls him can't understand that without Audrey, he is at home alone. This is torturous for Theo, and it delays his inevitable confrontation with the unbearable truth of his mother's death.



Again, the social workers are making assumptions about the nature of Theo's family—assumptions that are simply untrue. While Theo was not in a neglectful or insufficient situation thanks to Audrey's love and devotion to him, he does not have other relatives he can depend on. However, it was perhaps dangerous or unsustainable for all the responsibility for Theo's care to be placed in one person—as becomes clear now.



The social workers' calm demeanor makes Theo increasingly agitated. He exclaims that he doesn't want to go into foster care, and they explain that this might be avoidable if Theo finds someone else he can stay with. Without really knowing why, Theo gives the number of his school friend Andy Barbour. Although they were close when they were younger, Andy and Theo have drifted apart in middle school. Andy's family are wealthy and live on Park Avenue, yet as Theo is telling the social workers about them, he remembers that Andy's father, Mr. Barbour, recently spent time in a mental hospital due to "exhaustion."

The social workers tell Theo that they will drop him at the Barbours' house now and then figure out if he can stay there longer term. They take him back to his apartment to pick up his schoolbag and some clothes. Inside Andy's building, the doorman gives Theo a look of pity. Mr. Barbour, who is a bit strange-looking and wearing rumpled clothes, opens the door and welcomes Theo and the social workers. Mrs. Barbour enters. Though not beautiful, she is so elegant that she *seems* beautiful. She tells Theo that he'll be sharing Andy's room, but that because Andy is still asleep, Theo can rest in the room of Andy's brother Platt, who is away at boarding school.

Platt is "a champion lacrosse player and a bit of a psychopath," with violent tendencies. Mr. Barbour accompanies Theo into the room, rummaging around for some pajamas for him to wear. Erratically, he asks if Theo would like company and then offers him a "nip" of alcohol, before retracting the offer after realizing it is inappropriate. A sleepy-looking Andy comes in and sits with Theo on Platt's bed. Andy comments that what has happened is "disturbing"; Theo agrees, and they say nothing else.

In the ensuing weeks, Theo is constantly being offered food he can't eat and trying to hide the fact that he is crying. Many of Audrey's friends come to see him, along with his social workers and a psychiatrist paid for by the city. Meanwhile, the Barbours' lives continue as normal. Andy's little siblings, Toddy and Kitsey, run around with their friends, while Mrs. Barbour hosts friends for coffee or fancy dinner parties. They do not seem to mind having Theo there, and Mrs. Barbour makes life easier for Theo in subtle ways, such as by backing up his assertions that he has no idea where Larry is. She also orders that the radio, TV news, and newspaper be kept away from Theo.

In the same way that Theo doesn't have any real family connections beyond Audrey, he doesn't seem to have particularly close friends, either. For obvious reasons (the trouble they're both in), it would not be a good idea to stay with Tom Cable, and thus Theo decides to suggest he stays with Andy, even though they are not particularly close and Andy's family are dealing with problems of their own.



On the surface, the Barbours are a more traditional and, in this sense, "normal" family than Theo's own family. Yet Mr. Barbour's rumpled appearance and his recent time in a hospital indicate that not everything in their family is as perfect as Mrs. Barbour's pristinely elegant veneer. While of course there is nothing wrong with having mental health problems, the euphemism "exhaustion" suggests the Barbours may be hiding the reality of Mr. Barbour's condition.



This passage further emphasizes the idea that the Barbours have secret issues of their own. The combination of the phrases "champion lacrosse player" and "a bit of a psychopath" again illustrates the contrast between the outward appearance of normalcy and success and the trouble lurking beneath the surface.



In contrast to the way in which Theo was given special allowances at school in the time after Larry left, here Theo is surrounded by people who keep going as if nothing has happened. As this passage shows, Mrs. Barbour does take certain measures to avoid exposing Theo to further trauma, but overall the way the Barbours deal with Theo's arrival is to go about "business as usual."



Luckily, Andy understands that Theo doesn't want to talk about what happened and doesn't bring it up. The boys became friends "under more or less traumatic circumstances," when they were both moved up a grade in elementary school. Both bullied, they formed an alliance and were each the other's only friend. This period in time embarrasses Theo now. Before being moved up a grade, Theo had never been bullied, but Andy always had. Andy is extremely smart, with an irritating manner. Andy doesn't fit in with his preppy, athletic brothers and sister. Whereas Theo regained popularity in middle school, Andy never did.

Though not very talkative, Andy is a star pupil, and would have been sent to the same boarding school as Platt if his parents hadn't been too worried about him being bullied. Now, Andy apologizes for having to study while Theo is staying with him, although Theo doesn't mind. He obsesses over how long it has been since Audrey died, counting the days. He misses her to the point of feeling suicidal. He turns over the events of the day she died and wishes he had done something differently, so that they would have avoided going to **the Met**. He feels that he has "fallen off the map" and keeps telling himself that he has to go home, before remembering that he can't.

When Andy goes back to school, Theo watches movies on the TV in Andy's bedroom. However, after two days Mrs. Barbour tells Theo she doesn't think it's good for him to be staying home, and that she's therefore sending him back to school the next day. Theo is horrified by this idea, not wanting Audrey's death to be turned into a "public fact." Just as he predicted, going back is awful. He obsesses over the fact that last time he was at school, Audrey was alive. Some people offer condolences, whereas others, including Theo's friend Tom, avoid him. When Theo approaches him, Tom offers a half-hearted "sorry," before teasing him for dressing like Platt. For the first time since Audrey's death, Theo laughs.

However, after this exchange, Tom continues to ignore Theo. Theo isn't upset, but furious, and he fantasizes about beating up Tom. He reasons that if Tom's cigarette hadn't gotten them suspended, then Audrey would still be alive, and the least Tom can do is be decent to him now. Some of the other kids are actively kind to Theo, leaving him notes or giving him hugs, but they respond to his presence with "cautious, half-terrified politeness." Adults dote on him, giving advice on how to cope with mourning that he finds ridiculous.

The use of the phrase "traumatic circumstances" draws a parallel between the origins of Theo and Andy's friendship and the situation they find themselves in now. Although being bullied might be considered a minor trauma in comparison to losing one's mother, this passage indicates that friendships can be one of the ways in which people learn to endure trauma.



This passage shows that, in a sense, it doesn't matter what the Barbours are doing. Theo is in a world of his own, so profoundly traumatized by grief that he is cut off from the world around him. Because Theo and Audrey were so close, her death means that he feels untethered from everyone, not just from her. Tragically, this leads him to contemplate suicide.



Although Theo is horrified by the idea of going back to school, it is not because the "business-as-usual" approach is harmful to him. Rather, he can't bear the way that people will change their behavior toward him, constantly reminding him of Audrey's death and making him feel even more alienated. It is for this reason that he laughs with relief when Tom acts like his cruel self, because at least this provides the comfort of familiarity and continuity.



While there are some ways of reacting to a grieving person that are objectively terrible (including Tom's tactic of ignoring Theo), this passage highlights how difficult it is to find a helpful approach. Indeed, to some extent there is no right way to be treated when you are grieving, because everyone wants something different in grief. Besides, nothing anyone does can really help Theo.



One day, Mrs. Barbour tells Theo that Social Services has called her. She gravely informs him that his step-grandmother, Dorothy, is not well, and that it therefore won't be possible for Theo to stay with her and his grandfather in Maryland. Instead, Theo will remain with the Barbours for at least another few weeks, until the end of the school year. While they are speaking, Mrs. Barbour notices the ring that Theo took from Welty at **the Met**, which he has been wearing, and compliments him on it. She asks if it is a family heirloom and Theo lies, saying it is. She scrutinizes it and notices that it is engraved with the word "Blackwell."

Theo's grandparents had suggested that he could live near them at a Holiday Inn, yet while Theo doesn't think this sounds like such a bad idea, the adults around him insist that it should not happen. His psychiatrist, Dave, expresses confidence that they will be able to find a better solution once Dorothy has recovered. In reality, Theo knows that his grandparents barely know him and do not care about him. A few days later, Dorothy sends a card offering condolences and reiterating that it will be difficult for her and Theo's grandfather, Bob, to care for him.

Andy suggests that Theo just stay with his family for good, and Mr. Barbour somewhat unconvincingly asserts that while they would all love that, it wouldn't be fair to "kidnap" Theo. He asks if Theo knows how to sail and offers to teach him how to read nautical flags. Meanwhile, Theo makes an effort to be the best guest possible, although it is hard find ways to help out when there are so many staff members employed to run the household. He struggles to fit into the routine of the house and worries that he is being a nuisance. Mr. and Mrs. Barbour don't spend much time at home and thus they don't notice, but Theo knows he is annoying Kitsey and Toddy.

Movers are booked to come to Theo's old apartment and place Audrey's things in storage, and he knows he will have to retrieve **The Goldfinch** and bring it back to the museum before they come. Some investigators have already come to the Barbours' apartment to enquire about the painting, but Mrs. Barbour shooed them away because she had important guests arriving imminently. Three days later, the investigators came to Theo's school and took him out of class to a meeting that included his social worker Enrique, one of his teachers, the school counselor, Dave, and Mrs. Barbour.

At two different moments in this passage, Mrs. Barbour misunderstands the truth of what is going on in Theo's life—not that she can exactly be blamed for it. She is worried about the news that Dorothy is ill, but considering that Theo believes that his grandparents don't want him, this is likely more of an excuse than a serious issue. Meanwhile, Theo lies to her about the ring, perhaps not wanting her to think he stole it.



Because Theo currently feels so alone, he probably thinks it wouldn't be such a big deal for him to actually live alone in a hotel near his uninterested grandparents. Yet as the adults around him realize, Theo depends on the forms of care that he is receiving more than he knows.



There is something deeply moving and tragic about the fact that, while still reeling from the death of his mother, Theo feels forced to make himself as likeable as possible so that he is not removed from the Barbours' custody. Indeed, it seems as if it would be much more fair if Theo were asked directly if he wanted to stay with the Barbours or not, and have this be the primary factor in choosing where to place him.



*Theo's theft of **The Goldfinch** puts him in a strange position. While on one side he is a highly vulnerable victim of a terrible tragedy, he is also a perpetrator of a very serious crime. While Theo arguably has little responsibility for this crime, it still means that he is in the strange situation of scheming for ways to cover up his act while in the midst of dealing with his trauma.*



The investigators quiz Theo about what he remembers from the day of the terrorist attack. When he panics, the adults assure him that it's fine to respond to their questions with, "I don't know." As he is questioned, Theo expects that at a certain point he will just have to admit that he took the painting. However, he then comes to realize that the investigators have no idea where he was when the explosion happened or what he did after. When they continue to press him on questions he can't answer, he feels like he is about to cry. They show him pictures of people and ask if he recognizes anyone, but he doesn't. Repeatedly he tells them he doesn't remember what happened, until finally the investigators thank him and leave, asking that he call them if he recalls anything else.

Theo returns to English, his last class of the day. He feels traumatized by the investigators' questions, and he falls into a daydream thinking about the day of the explosion and the eyes of the red-headed girl looking at him. The investigators hadn't shown him any pictures of the girl or Welty, although he's not sure if he would have recognized Welty anyway, considering his face was so "torn up and ruined" when they met.

Theo's nightmares have been waking Andy in the night, so Mrs. Barbour starts giving him a pill to stop him from dreaming. He is also still pretty much unable to eat, which worries Mrs. Barbour. At breakfast, Andy complains that his parents won't allow him to drink coffee, while Mrs. Barbour desperately tries to find a type of food that Theo will be willing to eat. Days later, Theo wakes up suddenly remembering what Welty said to him: "Hobart and Blackwell. Ring the green bell." However, he is not quite sure whether it is an actual memory or rather something that only occurred in a dream.

Getting up, Theo looks up Hobart and Blackwell in the White Pages. It is some kind of business in the West Village. Nervously, Theo calls the number, but at that moment Mrs. Barbour comes in, telling Theo to come to the dining room for breakfast. Following her, Theo is surprised to see Platt sitting at the table. Platt looks hungover, and Andy and his parents are having another argument about sailing, which Andy insists he hates. Mr. Barbour becomes increasingly animated as he discusses the wonders of sailing, while Theo remains distracted by thoughts of Hobart and Blackwell. He tries to sneak off as soon as possible to dial the number again, but Andy follows him.

The strange position that Theo is in is reflected in the way the investigators deal with him. At first Theo presumes that they are suspicious of him and are treating him as a potential perpetrator of a crime. In reality, they are actually treating him as one of very few key witnesses, which is why they are pressing him. Meanwhile, the adults charged with taking care of Theo resent the fact that the investigators are interrogating him at all, on the grounds that they should instead be respectful of the fact that he is a vulnerable victim.



This passage contains an important reflection on the nature of memory. Although Theo feels genuinely confused about much of what happened on the day of the explosion, the clearest image he remembers is that of the red-haired girl, because of the profound effect she had on him.



Part of what is so difficult and draining about this period of Theo's life is that he is troubled by terrible dreams and, at the same time, he struggles to distinguish between dreams and reality. Again, his grief has detached him from the world, alienating him from those around him and even from reality itself.



Again, it is easy to see why Theo feels alienated from people around him. While the Barbours are having a highly typical family argument, Theo is dealing with completely unfamiliar and emotionally draining issues, from the death of Audrey to guilt over having committed a crime to trying to follow a dying man's mysterious wishes. Of course, his alienation is compounded by the fact that he keeps all of this secret.



Theo explains about the ring, and Andy suggests that he just go down to West 10th street to visit Hobart and Blackwell himself. Andy lets slip that a lot of “strange people” have been calling the Barbour residence and asking for Theo. He offers to come downtown with Theo, but Theo knows that Andy has an extra credit trip for his Japanese class that afternoon, and thus politely declines. Andy gives Theo his phone to borrow for the trip.

Once Theo gets down to the Village, he walks around lost for 45 minutes before finding West 10th and, eventually, Hobart and Blackwell. It is an antiques shop, the kind of place Audrey would have adored. It is closed, and Theo decides to wait around, predicting it might open at noon. Yet after wandering around for a while, he sees that it’s still shut, and that it looks like it might have been a while since it was last open. Peering through the window, Theo sees a hint of motion, and remembers the instruction to “ring the green bell.” Looking around, he finds a narrow doorway with an unlabeled bell above green tape.

Theo rings the bell, and a very tall, “haggard” looking person opens the door. The man’s hair is grey, and his skin is “an unhealthy white.” He is wearing a floral robe. Theo apologizes for disturbing the man, and holds out the ring, explaining: “He gave it to me [...] he told me to bring it here.” The tall man introduces himself as Hobie, and beckons Theo inside.

PART 1, CHAPTER 4: MORPHINE LOLLIPOP

Despite Hobie’s size, he moves gracefully, leading Theo past many rows of spectacular objects. Going through the shop and into an apartment, Theo recognizes the absolute stillness of the room as the atmosphere produced by a recent death. Suddenly, he regrets coming. Hobie asks if Theo is alright, and apologizes for the mess. Theo introduces himself, saying he lives “uptown.” Hobie replies that his full name is James Hobart, but everyone calls him Hobie. He explains that Welty “was [his] business partner,” and Theo is struck by his use of the past tense. He’d optimistically imagined that, despite Welty’s injuries, he’d be able to see him again.

This seemingly innocuous passage is actually an important turning point for Theo. Whereas before he kept everything he was going through secret, the fact that he confides in Andy is an improvement. With Andy’s encouragement, he is brave enough to actually visit the mysterious business.



The fact that Audrey would have loved Hobart and Blackwell is significant. For the first time since Audrey’s death, something new enters Theo’s life that directly connects him to Audrey and the life they shared before the attack. This indicates that there was indeed some mystical, fated reason why Welty sent Theo here.



Theo arriving at a strange establishment and being invited in by an unknown, disheveled man could be the start of a highly sinister turn in the narrative. Yet there is also a sense that Hobart and Blackwell might prove to be a hopeful, comforting place.



Theo’s encounter with Hobie is important. For the first time since the terrorist attack, he is meeting someone who also lost someone close to them in the incident. Whereas up until now Theo has felt profoundly alienated from others around him, perhaps meeting Hobie will be a chance for him to begin processing his grief through bonding with another person.



Hobie asks how Theo got the ring, and Theo hesitantly explains that Welty spoke to him before he died. Hobie says he's glad there was someone with Welty as he was dying, mentioning that his body was in a horrific state. Hobie mentions Civil War photography, and then war in general. Feeling shy, Theo tries to recount his conversation with Welty, but finds that it is "like trying to explain a dream." Hobie is shocked by the news that Welty spoke to Theo, because he'd been told Welty died instantly. Theo realizes that he was told the same thing about Audrey.

Theo asks about the girl he saw, and although Hobie says she is not "okay," he confirms that she is alive. Hobie tells Theo she is not supposed to see any visitors yet. He lights a cigarette and asks Theo if he's the boy whose mother died in the attack. To Theo's surprise, he begins to cry. Hobie apologizes and asks if Theo is hungry; when Theo says he isn't, Hobie says he understands but asks Theo to "humor" him. As they walk through the apartment, Theo sees a picture of a younger Welty next to someone who looks like the redhaired girl. Hobie explains that it's the girl's mother, who died of cancer six years before. Welty was the uncle of the girl, Pippa.

They walk past Pippa's room, but Hobie doesn't let Theo go inside. He explains that Pippa has a dog in there, even though her nurse opposes it. Her skull was fractured and leg broken in the explosion, and she was in a coma for a while. Hobie notes that the investigators told him it is common for crowds of people to be physically affected in very different ways from bomb attacks. Theo asks how Pippa got out, and Hobie explains that she'd been trapped under a pile of debris and was found by a sniffer dog.

Hobie serves Theo something on toast which he can't identify, but finds delicious. It reminds him of something Audrey used to make. Hobie asks Theo what his interests are, and which subjects he likes in school. Theo realizes it is "the most enjoyable conversation [he's] had in a while," as Hobie is speaking to him like a normal kid. Theo mentions that Larry used to tease him for liking Edgar Allen Poe, then adds that Larry was an actor, although he was never particularly successful. Theo explains that Larry abandoned them, noting that he had a drinking problem. It is the first time Theo has spoken about this since Audrey's death.

Theo knows better than anyone that the official story about what happened inside the Met is not necessarily accurate. This became clear when the investigators were questioning him about the incident, but were evidently working with very little information. Theo himself has more knowledge than most about what happened, but finds it hard to express this knowledge because of its dreamlike quality.



Theo's connection to Pippa feels even more magically fated when it is revealed that she has also lost a parent (as well as her uncle). The fact that her name is Pippa links her to another famous orphan in literary history—Pip from Charles Dickens' "Great Expectations." This is especially significant considering that "The Goldfinch" is often read as a Dickensian novel.



For the first time, it becomes obvious that Theo is at least in one sense relatively lucky. Although he lost Audrey in the terrorist attack, he himself emerged physically unscathed.



Perhaps Hobie finds the right way to talk to Theo because he too is experiencing grief, and thus he understands how Theo is feeling. However, Theo himself indicates that the actual reason why this conversation is so pleasant is because Hobie treats him like a normal person. Hobie is actually interested in what Theo thinks and feels, a sign of respect that Theo has not received very frequently since Audrey's death.



Hobie mentions that he knows of Mrs. Barbour, although he has not met her personally. He says she has a “good eye” and an impressive collection of antiques. Theo is shocked that Hobie knows he is staying at the Barbours’, and Hobie explains that it was in an article in the *New York Times* about children whose parents died in the attack. Apparently, the article noted that Theo defended Andy from school bullies, which Theo points out is not really true. Theo asks if Hobie is going to reopen the shop, but Hobie explains that Welty ran the business side of things, and there’s too much information he doesn’t know.

Andy texts Theo to check if he’s ok, but Theo ignores it. Hobie mentions how moved he is by the return of Welty’s ring, and then notices that Theo has been staring at a wooden Noah’s Ark sitting nearby. He explains it was one of the first antiques he ever bought. Theo asks if he can see Pippa and Hobie agrees, though explains she’s still “a bit muddled” and that it would be best if Theo didn’t mention Welty.

Pippa’s room is very dark, but she won’t let Hobie open the curtain because it will hurt her eyes. Her head is shaved, and staples are visible by her hairline. When Theo introduces himself, she asks what his favorite piece of music is. He says Beethoven, and she replies that he looks like someone who likes Beethoven. They both confess that ever since the explosion, they both suffer from random bouts of exhaustion during the day. Theo notices that Hobie has left the room, and—to his own surprise—he takes Pippa’s hand. Apologizing, she says she has to close her eyes for a second.

Theo leaves the room, and Hobie explains that ever since the explosion, Pippa can be stiff and formal with people she knows well and very friendly and open with strangers. Apparently this is a common consequence of head injuries like hers. He explains that listening to music makes her distressed, as it makes her think she needs to practice. In reality, her chance of having a professional performance career is over. Pippa’s nurse rings the bell, and when Theo asks if he can come back to visit Pippa, Hobie pleads that he does so.

On top of all the other ways in which Theo’s life has been made surreal, he must now deal with the fact that he is also a public figure of pity. His resistance to being framed as a hero to Andy is significant. Thus far, the novel has made clear that Theo struggles to accept that he is a good person, and instead has a tendency to direct anger and blame at himself.



Even just being in the shop, surrounded by the antiques, seems to have a positive, reassuring impact on Theo. Indeed, this is one of many moments in the novel during which beautiful objects are shown to have a soothing impact on people.



In this scene, it remains open for debate whether the mysterious, instantly strong connection Theo feels with Pippa is reciprocated. She is certainly friendly and accepts his affection warmly. Yet the fact that she asks him about his favorite music recalls the nonsensical way in which Welty spoke to Theo when he mistakenly thought he was a Lycée student and musician. There is a chance that Pippa is similarly confused.



This passage exposes another way in which Theo is relatively lucky, at least compared to Pippa. Her injuries not only ruined the career she hoped to have, but also alienated her from music, which is clearly highly important to her. Indeed, in a novel about how art gives meaning to life, there could be few fates crueler than this.



Mr. Barbour is taking the children to dinner at the Yacht Club without Mrs. Barbour, who is busy. Andy asks about Theo's day, and Theo replies that it was "a little weird," but that he's happy he went. Andy tells Theo he's sorry about how "fucked up" everything is, and recalls his fondness of Audrey. Audrey liked Andy, too, to a point that sometimes made Theo jealous. Theo says he's hungry, and Andy sarcastically comments that he thought Theo had been starving himself to fit into his prom dress. Mr. Barbour accidentally overhears Theo say "fuck you," but simply says he's glad that Theo seems to be feeling better. In the coming days, the whole Barbour family notices that Theo's appetite has returned.

Theo goes to see Dave and, as usual, struggles to answer the basic question he poses about how he is doing. He has been given medication but doesn't like that it makes him feel "tired and headachy," so he has been spitting it out. Now, however, he says that the medication has been helping a little. Dave suggests that Theo seems to be feeling better, but Theo doesn't feel like "better" is the right word to describe his state. He feels hugely sensitive to the world around him, the good and the bad. Going to see Hobie and Pippa was the most "resonant and real-seeming thing" that has happened to Theo lately, but Andy is the only person he's told about it.

Dave says that the adults around Theo have told him that Theo's undergone an "upswing" lately. He asks Theo if he can explain it, but Theo just shrugs. A few days later, Theo asks Andy to "cover" for him while he goes downtown to Hobie's again. Andy agrees to tell Mrs. Barbour that Theo is at the library. When Theo arrives at Hobie's, he is surprised to find Hobie wearing a suit. Pippa's dog Cosmo is in the kitchen rather than in Pippa's room, and Hobie explains this is because Pippa's aunt Margaret does not like having him around. He tells Theo that Margaret is taking Pippa to Texas the day after next. Pippa is going to live there, although Hobie assures Theo she'll come back to New York to visit.

Theo is crushed. Hobie is clearly pretending to think that moving is the right thing for Pippa, when really he does not believe it is. He says that Cosmo is staying in New York. He also explains that Margaret and Welty had not been on speaking terms because "Margaret was quite against Pippa's mother." At this point Margaret enters the room and introduces herself using her full name, Margaret Blackwell Pierce. She says she is happy to meet Theo and especially grateful that he returned her grandfather's ring, which she claims was "lost." Shocked, Theo asks to go and see Pippa.

Again, this passage represents another turning point. Theo's renewed appetite shows that some of his abject despair has lifted—as does the fact that he is able to joke around with Andy. Most importantly, Theo and Andy communicate in a direct and earnest way about Audrey's death. It is clear that talking to Hobie has inspired Theo to open up to other people, as well. Indeed, this is one of many moments in which friendship is shown to have a redemptive effect on people.



The most important words in this passage are "resonant" and "real." Between Audrey's death and this point in the novel, Theo has been living in a state of unreality that has mostly resembled a horrible dream. However, his visit to Hobart and Blackwell has reconnected him with the world. The experience of being reawakened to the vividness of one's surroundings is similar to the impact that great works of art have on people.



This passage contains an example of a pattern that happens repeatedly throughout the book. Theo feels a burst of hope and happiness, only to have this hope dissolve into despair when circumstances suddenly change. In this case, the crush of disappointment comes in the form of Theo learning that Pippa is moving away, just after her presence started to make him feel positive and alive again. What is perhaps most difficult for Theo to deal with is how out of his control it all is.



Throughout the novel there are occasions when existing family tensions become chaotic thanks to a sudden, tragic event. In this case, Margaret is allowed to assume control of Pippa's life despite the fact that she did not have a good relationship with Welty, Pippa's guardian and father-figure, before he died. Indeed, this is yet another example of the ways in which familial relations can be damaging and painful.



When Theo comes into her room, Pippa requests that he turn off the light and then offers an earbud so they can listen to her iPod together. He notices that she's been crying, and she explains that she doesn't want to leave. They talk about the fact that both their mothers are dead, though Theo does not mention that Audrey was killed in explosion at **the Met**. They hold hands. Theo says that he's going to have to leave soon too, to go and live with his grandparents. Pippa says that she has to go with Margaret because Hobie is not her "real uncle," and Theo replies that he wishes Hobie was so that she could stay. His heart hammers.

Theo asks if Pippa remembers seeing him in **the Met** before the explosion, and she says she doesn't. They kiss, and Theo thinks the strange taste is from a morphine lollipop Pippa had been sucking. When Theo says goodbye, he feels reassured by Hobie's hand on his shoulder in a way he hasn't experienced since Audrey's death. Margaret notices that he is crying, and urges him to come and visit, boasting that she lives in "one of the biggest Tudor houses in Texas."

When Theo meets up with Andy again, Andy declares Texas "boring." He lists the things Pippa might do there, and Theo wonders how anyone can have such a robotic manner. Back at the Barbours', Theo feels horrifically lonely. Andy complains about the upcoming sailing trip to Maine, but Theo points out his fate of going to his grandparents' in Maryland isn't much better. Andy suggests that Theo work as hard as possible at his new school so he can graduate early and escape to college with a scholarship. He points out that Theo is smart and that adults like him (although Theo himself believes this is only because his mother is dead).

A week after Pippa leaves, Theo goes back down to see Hobie, who serves him a dessert that looks disgusting but tastes delicious. Hobie tells Theo that Pippa cried for hours after they spoke on the phone, and that he wishes he "knew how to make things better." Margaret has said that she doesn't think it's a good idea of him to visit Pippa until she's settled down. Theo asks why Pippa didn't know Margaret until now, and Welty explains that Pippa's grandfather, Mr. Blackwell, had three children with different mothers: Welty, Margaret, and Pippa's mother, Juliet. When Welty got tuberculosis as a child, an unsympathetic Mr. Blackwell sent him away from Egypt to live in America with relatives.

This passage contains a further explanation of the way in which the privileging of "real" family over friendship and nonofficial familial connections can end up harming people. It seems clear that it would be better for Pippa to stay in a familiar environment with someone (Hobie) who knows her well. Yet simply because Margaret is her "real" aunt, she has the right to decide Pippa's fate.



Although overall this is a tragic moment in the narrative, in the midst of this despair a strong note of hope emerges in the form of Theo and Pippa's friendship. Although they hardly know each other, they clearly have a kind of instant intimacy through their shared experiences. This provides hope in what is generally a terrible time for both of them.



This passage contains a surprising addition to Andy and Theo's dynamic: despite everything that Theo is going through, Andy remains somewhat jealous of him, because of the way in which Theo is able to charm adults. This shows that, no matter how powerless a person appears, there may be unexpected sources of power that they can still manage to manipulate to their advantage.



The story about Welty's family shows how family tensions can actually be inherited and multiplied over several generations, causing even greater problems down the line. Although Pippa is obviously not personally implicated in her grandfather's cruel personality, Welty's tuberculosis, or the tensions between the Blackwell siblings, these issues from the past come to greatly affect her life in the present.



Then, due to the political situation in Egypt, the rest of the Blackwell family had to leave. Mr. Blackwell married a wealthy Texan woman (Margaret's mother) and lived a luxurious lifestyle in Houston. He continued to have affairs, and in his late 60s had his third child, Juliet, with his hairdresser. At this point Margaret, already an undergraduate at Vassar, stopped speaking to her father. Mr. Blackwell grew to hate Juliet's mother and wanted to leave nothing for her or Juliet in his will, but Welty intervened because he was worried about Juliet, a neglected child whom nobody wanted. He brought Juliet to this house Hobie and Theo are currently sitting in when she was six and acted as her parent for the rest of her life.

Hobie then takes Theo to see his workshop, which is packed with different kinds of furniture. He asks if Theo likes "old things," and Theo, nodding, acknowledges this fact about himself for the first time. Theo explains that while the Barbour's apartment is filled with beautiful objects, it is cold and austere, like a museum. Hobie's workshop has a more comfortable, inviting atmosphere. Having noted that Theo has "a good eye for furniture," Hobie asks if he would like to help out in the workshop, and Theo says yes.

Dave is always telling Theo to get a hobby, which Theo finds a ridiculous form of advice for coping with mourning. In fact, most of the adults in Theo's life seem to believe that he should take up a hobby. The school counselor insists that it's important Theo find an activity that connects him to other people and the world, and Theo finds this annoying. Yet it turns out that Theo does inadvertently take up a hobby, in the form of helping out at Hobie's workshop. He learns the intricacies of antique furniture, including how to distinguish authentic details from fabrications. He learns that fakes tend to have a "flat, dead quality," without the special "glow" that comes from having been touched by humans over many years.

Although Theo loves the antiques and working in the workshop, his favorite thing about being there is spending time with Hobie. Hobie understands Theo better than the many adults whose job it is to "get inside [Theo's] head." Hobie treats Theo as an equal whom he actually enjoys talking to, and Theo loves hearing stories about Hobie's own childhood. Hobie's mother also died when he was young, and his father beat him. Spending time with Hobie is a total change from life at the Barbour's, where Theo is treated kindly, but distantly. It brings him comfort to know that Hobie is always only "a bus ride away."

Clearly, the problems in Welty's family were not only caused by Mr. Blackwell's cruel personality, but also by issues of class. The fact that Margaret's mother was a wealthy, high-society woman and Juliet's mother was a hairdresser was implicitly a factor in why Margaret and her mother came to resent Juliet. In contrast to his callous and shallow family members, Welty had a strong sense of ethical duty that was not overruled by class prejudice.



This is another very important turning point in the novel. Before this moment, Theo was an ordinary kid in the sense that he didn't have any particular interests or talents. Here, however, Theo realizes that he has both a special appreciation for antiques and a talent ("good eye") for them. This provides another new sense of happiness and hope for Theo.



Theo's resentment at being told to get a hobby alongside his enthusiastic embrace of the hobby he does take on provides a useful lesson about the way people—and particularly teenagers—respond to assistance and advice. Often, even the most well-meaning advice can seem irrelevant, unhelpful, and patronizing, even if it is actually prudent. The reality is that advice is often rather useless, and young people must learn to figure things out on their own.



Again, the particular comfort that Hobie brings to Theo arguably lies in the fact that he is not a family member (or a replacement family member), but Theo's friend. Although familial relationships are very important, friendships can bring particular benefits that familial relations cannot. Here, Theo emphasizes that he appreciates being treated as an equal by Hobie, which is the hallmark of a healthy, loving friendship.



Yet Andy is struggling to keep explaining Theo's absences, and he suggests that they tell Mrs. Barbour the truth. Theo isn't sure, as he's worried she will find out that he falsely claimed Welty's ring was a family heirloom. However, on a whim he tells Mrs. Barbour that he's been downtown visiting an old friend of Audrey's called James Hobart. He says that Hobie would like to meet Mrs. Barbour and suggested they all go out to lunch. Mrs. Barbour responds vaguely; she is distracted by the fact that Platt, who has just come home, is in trouble at boarding school. Andy suggests that they go to a restaurant and grab a hamburger for dinner to avoid the family drama, and Kitsey begs to come along, too.

Wanting to support Andy, Theo doesn't go to Hobie's, although the atmosphere at the Barbours' is horrible. Neither Andy nor Theo know what Platt has done, but it's clear that it's bad. Andy comments that Platt is Mrs. Barbour's favorite, whereas Kitsey is Mr. Barbour's favorite. Andy admits that if he didn't look so much like his mother he would assume he'd "been switched at birth."

During this period, Theo considers telling Hobie about **The Goldfinch**, which is still in his and Audrey's apartment. Theo has already gone so long without mentioning it to anyone that he worries it is simply too late now. He cannot return it to the Met anonymously, because ever since the explosion any unmarked package would be immediately destroyed. Although he knows there are mitigating circumstances that mean he is not fully blameworthy for the theft, he also feels vulnerable in his "homeless limbo," and is thus reluctant to confess. Then, one day, Theo comes across a part of the newspaper where he finds an article about art and the insurance industry. It includes a photo of *The Goldfinch* with a caption listing it as "destroyed."

Theo quickly scans the piece, trying to look for other mentions of **The Goldfinch**. However, at this moment Mr. Barbour enters and asks if Theo would like to join the family in Maine that summer. Thrilled, Theo immediately says yes. Although Andy remains staunchly opposed to the sailing part of the trip, he is clearly also excited that Theo is coming, too. Theo is overjoyed both by the news about Maine and the fact that *The Goldfinch* is thought to be destroyed, which gives him more time to decide whether to confess. He is still "naïve" enough to believe that he could have sold it if he needed to.

Theo's insistence on lying clearly ends up alienating him from others, and—worse—makes him seem guilty when in reality he hasn't done anything wrong. Yet it is also clear that hiding the truth has emerged from a spiral of confusion and guilt about everything that happened in the aftermath of the terrorist attack at the Met. The more Theo lies, the more he feels forced to lie—a spiral leading Theo to perpetrate immoral acts for no reason.



This passage contains further examples of the failures of family. While it is common for parents to insist that they love all their children equally, Andy feels certain that this isn't true in reality. Indeed, he feels miserable because of the ways in which he fails to resemble his family members.



Because Theo is only 13, there are obvious solutions to the dilemma of having stolen the painting that are not apparent to him. First of all, he would likely not be in serious trouble if he confessed, particularly considering his age and the mitigating circumstances surrounding the theft. Furthermore, although he could not drop off the package anonymously, he could still find a way to leave the painting somewhere and provide an anonymous tip. However, because Theo is still young and in many ways quite naïve, he remains stuck.



*Recall that Theo is trying to be the best guest possible so that he continues to be allowed to stay at the Barbours'. This is another important factor preventing him from owning up to his theft of *The Goldfinch*. Whereas if he were back in his normal life, still living with Audrey, he might have felt secure enough to admit the truth, right now his life is so unstable and uncertain that this doesn't feel like a possibility.*



Hobie tells Theo that his father owned a trucking company and believed that Hobie was spoiled by “too much education.” He stopped paying Hobie’s tuition after his second year of college, then made Hobie work for him for free in order to pay him back for the first two years. Welty was a customer of the trucking company, and after witnessing Hobie’s father cruelly berate Hobie one day, Welty asked to hire Hobie himself. After spending a day together packing up a mansion, Welty offered Hobie a permanent job at his new business in New York, which Hobie accepted.

Hobie explained that he learned about antiques just by watching others who worked in the business. Welty preferred the business side of things to restoration work. Hobie’s father never paid him any of the money he earned, and Hobie never went back to college, but it didn’t matter because he’d discovered his calling. Hobie suggests that maybe Theo will find *his* calling on the sailing trip. However, Theo himself is more focused on the signs indicating that the Barbours might be interested in adopting him. Andy recently told him that Mr. and Mrs. Barbour believe Theo is a positive influence on Andy, and that they might announce in Maine that they want to “keep” him.

Theo takes the bus back uptown. When he gets to the Barbours’, he is stunned to see his father, Larry, waiting for him with Mrs. Barbour. Larry looks tan, and is accompanied by another very tan woman with dyed hair and gold jewelry, who introduces herself as “Xandra with an X.” Shocked, Theo stares at her tattooed toe, French tip nails, and starfish-shaped earrings. By this point Mrs. Barbour has disappeared, and Larry tells Theo that he is now living in **Las Vegas**, and that he and Xandra have come to “get” Theo. Xandra says that Larry is 51 days sober. Looking at him, Theo isn’t sure if he believes this.

Larry says that they need the key to Theo and Audrey’s apartment to sort through the “mess” there. Theo suddenly remembers a fight Larry and Audrey had over some earrings of Audrey’s that had gone missing. Larry blamed Audrey for leaving things a “mess,” then became furious when he thought she was implying that he had stolen the earrings. After Larry left the family, Audrey realized that other items, such as her father’s antique coins and a bundle of cash were also gone. Lying, Theo says that he doesn’t have the key, but suggests that if he goes to the apartment with Larry and Xandra one of the doormen might let them in. Larry reluctantly agrees.

It was clearly a pattern that during Welty’s life, he would always help vulnerable people who were treated unfairly. This was true of Welty’s care for Juliet and Pippa, but also his employment of Hobie. Although Theo only knew Welty for a matter of minutes, he has come to know him indirectly via Hobie, and has thus learned that he was a profoundly moral, caring man.



While Hobie playfully suggests that Theo might find his “calling” during the sailing trip, in reality Theo has already found his calling: working in the antiques restoration business with Hobie. Just as Welty saved Hobie from his father through hiring him, so has Hobie saved Theo from the despair of mourning Audrey by having him help out in the workshop.



Once again, a hopeful moment—sparked by Theo’s friendship with Hobie, Mr. Barbour’s invitation, and Andy’s indication that his parents might want to adopt Theo—is ruined by an unexpected change in circumstances. When Theo needed Larry (or at least some kind of adult who would take care of him), Larry was not there. Now, he has arrived at the worst time imaginable.



Larry is immediately presented as a very shady, if not outright immoral person. Not only did he steal from his own wife, but he lied about it and blamed her. Theo connecting Larry’s current behavior to this memory suggests that it is unlikely that Larry has changed, or that his intentions for coming to New York are good. Indeed, his interest in going to Audrey and Theo’s apartment seems quite transparent: he wants whatever is there for himself.



Theo is overjoyed to see the doorman, José, again. Theo asks in Spanish if José will let them into the apartment, adding a request that José comes up with them, and José agrees. Xandra, whom Theo has concluded is not particularly smart, chatters away about the journey from **Las Vegas** on the ride up to the apartment. When they get in, Theo immediately sees the package containing **The Goldfinch** exactly where he left it. José subtly distracts Larry, giving Theo time to get the painting. Still chatting to José, Xandra mentions that she's from Florida. Theo picks up the bag and realizes it is empty. He briefly panics, but then remembers that the bag had been wet and that he'd put the painting on Audrey's bureau.

Theo is overwhelmed by the faint smell of Audrey in her bedroom, along with framed photographs and scraps of her handwriting. He manages to retrieve **The Goldfinch** and bring it to his bedroom, but at this moment Larry comes in, and Theo hastily throws a towel over the painting. Larry tells Theo not to bring a lot of stuff to **Las Vegas**, explaining that Theo won't need warm clothing, although he should perhaps pack "ski stuff." He then begins talking about how Audrey was difficult to live with, how she could be cold and uncommunicative. Theo actually agrees, but doesn't want his father to know this. Larry says that he left because he had to withdraw money from their joint bank account and Audrey "flipped her lid."

Larry continues to gripe about Audrey, while Theo remains silent. Eventually Xandra joins them in Theo's bedroom and leads Larry away to "show [him] something." Suddenly, Theo feels emotionally overwhelmed by all the things in the apartment, reminders of Audrey and the life they shared. He gets out his suitcase and fills it with clothes, placing **The Goldfinch** on top. Calling out to Larry, he announces that he is going back downstairs to talk to José, and Larry says alright in a somewhat stiff, strained voice. Down in the lobby, Theo runs into Goldie, who embraces him in a hug and offers heartfelt condolences. Goldie wipes tears from his eyes, telling Theo how devastated he was to learn of Audrey's death.

José joins the conversation, sharing his own fond memories of Audrey, who was kinder than the other, "snobby" residents of the building. Theo asks if he can leave the bag containing **The Goldfinch** with José, promising that he will be back to pick it up and asking José not to give it to anyone else. José agrees. He then assures Theo that he and the other doormen haven't said anything to the men who've been coming around asking about Larry. Theo is surprised by this, and doesn't know who these men might be.

Here, Theo is once again saved by friendship—in this case his friendship with José. Significantly, Theo is also able to manipulate the situation due to his own cunning and his ability to speak Spanish. In this passage, Theo's intelligence is contrasted with that of Xandra. Whereas Xandra seems somewhat ditzzy and oblivious, Theo moves through the world in an observant, sensitive, and strategic manner. Indeed, his ability to manipulate the situation is strikingly adult.



Again, Larry's callousness indicates that he has not arrived in New York because he cares about Theo or is worried about him. It is possible he has been compelled to take responsibility for Theo by the authorities, or—even more sinister—is doing it because he sees an opportunity to advantage himself. Either way, the fact that he is speaking badly about Audrey to Theo so soon after her death indicates that he is a profoundly selfish, cruel person.



The fact that Larry is such a sinister and untrustworthy presence means that Theo isn't even given the opportunity to mourn Audrey or let himself feel the intense nostalgia and anguish brought on by being back in their shared home. Fortunately, the brief moments of kindness shown to him by José and Goldie at least provide a little space for him to grieve.



Although Theo is highly intelligent and mature for someone his age, there is still much that confuses him, in part because all the information he receives about the world around him (including about his own fate!) comes with so little explanation. This prevents him from knowing whether to trust Larry, although doing so is looking less and less appealing.



Then, to Theo's even greater surprise, Goldie hands him a "giant wad of cash." He tells a story about how Audrey once paid for a computer that he'd ordered for his son—a story Theo doesn't quite believe. He wonders if the doormen have raised money for him out of pity. Due to his state of shock, Theo accepts it without asking any questions. José and Goldie advise him not to tell anyone about it and keep it for himself.

That night at a "touristy" restaurant, Larry takes a call from Audrey's insurance company, which Theo can't hear because Xandra is talking too loudly. When Larry gets off the phone he orders a bottle of champagne for Xandra and Theo, although the waiter bans Theo from drinking it because he is underage. Xandra sneakily pours Theo some anyway. Larry and Xandra end up discussing Larry's failed acting career, which "fizzled out" shortly after he and Audrey got married. Larry has always somewhat blamed Audrey for this turn of events. Watching this conversation, Theo begins to feel drunk for the first time in his life. Before he knows what's happening, Theo realizes he is speaking out loud: "She was so great and why was everybody so horrible to her?"

When Theo gets back to the Barbours', he can tell from Mr. and Mrs. Barbour's reactions that they know he is drunk. The next morning, he feels horrifically hungover. Mr. Barbour asks Theo about Larry, trying to keep his tone friendly. Platt mentions that Theo was drunk last night, and Mr. Barbour immediately sends him to his room.

Larry is in a hurry to return to **Las Vegas**, and only days after he arrives he sends movers to Audrey and Theo's apartment to pack it up. A used book seller and antiques dealer come over to see what they can sell. As everything is taken away, Theo feels as if it is his life itself that is being erased. Meanwhile, at the Barbours', Theo packs up his belongings in boxes and addresses them to his new home on "Desert End Road" in Las Vegas. Andy comments that it's like Theo is moving to "a different planet." Although the rest of the Barbours don't say so directly, all of them seem worried about Theo's upcoming move.

Hobie, meanwhile, suggests that "a change of scenery might be good" for Theo. Hobie asks if Theo is scared of going to live with Larry, and Theo says he isn't, adding that Larry has stopped drinking. He admits that he doesn't understand what Larry sees in Xandra, who does not seem "all that nice." Theo notes that he appreciates that Larry and Xandra have come to get him, because they didn't have to. Hobie reminds him that he can always call him. When Theo leaves, he thinks that it is the last time he will ever be in Hobie's house. This assumption is incorrect.

José and Goldie are both truly kind, generous men who evidently have Theo's best interests at heart. Perhaps most importantly, neither of them is naïve. They know that Theo will need to protect himself, which is why they urge him to keep the money for himself.



Everything about the evening is strange and wrong. It is odd for Larry to choose a touristy restaurant given that he used to live in New York. It is suspicious that, as a theoretically sober alcoholic, he is so intent on getting Theo to drink alcohol. Yet perhaps the strangest part of the evening is the celebratory mood. While Larry might be acting as though he is happy to be reunited with Theo, it is weird to be celebrating considering that the circumstance that brought them back together is Audrey's recent death.



Here is another example of Theo being "allowed" to break a rule because of the mitigating circumstances of Audrey's death (and Larry's suspicious reappearance). Whereas in a different context he would be punished, Mr. and Mrs. Barbour turn a blind eye.



Again, the fact that Theo is leaving New York and his relatively stable (albeit temporary) home at the Barbours indicates that whoever has made this decision does not necessarily have his best interests at heart. This is especially true considering that Larry abandoned Theo and Audrey. Yet simply due to the force of their biological relation, Larry is able to take Theo back and move him across the country.



Theo seems to struggle to admit that he is afraid, even though he doesn't hide the fact that he doesn't think Xandra is particularly "nice." Perhaps Theo feels pressure to put on a brave face and be courageous in front of the adults around him because, after Audrey's death, he no longer trusts that anyone is truly protecting him. He must therefore protect himself.



PART 2, CHAPTER 5: BADR AL-DINE

The day before Theo is due to move to **Las Vegas**, he decides to go back to retrieve the bag containing **The Goldfinch** from his old building. However, when he arrives a new doorman treats him with rude suspicion. Theo explains that he left the bag with José, but the new doorman, whose name is Marco, says that without a receipt Theo can't collect it because he is not a tenant of the building. At that moment, Goldie walks over and greets Theo warmly. He indicates that he and José did not officially log the bag in order to prevent someone other than Theo from picking it up, and Theo thanks him for this.

Goldie explains that Marco was hired after an older doorman was fired for not being able to make it to work on the day of the terrorist attack. Ever since the attack, the management have also become extra “security-conscious.” In spite of Theo's protests, Goldie hails him a taxi and wishes him well on the move to **Las Vegas**. Just as the taxi is about to drive away, José runs out to see Theo off as well. The two of them make Theo promise to send him a picture for the basement, which is covered in postcards that the tenants and doormen have sent from their vacations.

Larry is annoyed that Theo is trying to bring two suitcases to **Las Vegas**, although Mrs. Barbour assures him that it won't be a problem with the airline. Mrs. Barbour bids Theo goodbye in a bright, friendly manner; the rest of the family have already gone up to Maine. Theo feels “sick” at the prospect of leaving. He is nervous about the security check at the airport, and asks if the staff will search your luggage. When he asks about this on the cab in the way to airport, the driver replies that the search is very extensive, assuming that Theo is worried about the possibility of explosives getting through.

Xandra says she can't wait to “get the fuck out of” New York. She says she is nervous about the flight, and she and Larry kiss, which disgusts Theo. At the airport, Theo is terrified that they will open his suitcase in the security line. He is also nervous because he hasn't been in such a busy environment since the terrorist attack at **the Met**. He imagines himself being interrogated by angry security staff in a cinderblock room. Larry and Xandra notice that Theo is pale and assume he is nervous about the plane. Although Theo insists he is not scared, Larry tells Xandra to give him half a white pill anyway.

To make Theo's existing feelings of insecurity, grief, and fear worse, the world around him is changing at an alarming rate. The life he shared with Audrey is literally disappearing before his eyes, and frightening new developments—such as the frosty doorman—remind Theo that the past is a place to which he can never return.



This tragic moment highlights the wrongness of Theo's departure from New York and the life he once knew. While he can clearly never return to the existence he previously shared with Audrey, in New York he is at least surrounded by people who know and care about him. In Las Vegas he doesn't know anyone, and it is dubious whether Larry and Xandra care about him at all.



While Mrs. Barbour has a rather cold, formal manner, compared to Larry's callousness she is the picture of maternal kindness. Theo's fear about the painting being detected by the airport security show how much his crime—and his attempt to keep it a secret—is beginning to take over his life.



Xandra is obviously the opposite of Audrey in pretty much every way. Yet Theo's disgust at her presence doesn't come out of any kind of loyalty to his dad or horror about the idea of Larry kissing someone who isn't Audrey. Rather, it is simply horror at Xandra's very presence itself.



Thanks to the pill, Theo spends the plane ride “high and happy,” falling in and out of sleep. Once they arrive in **Las Vegas**, even the airport produces a kind of sensory overload. Theo is shocked to see that Larry’s car is a brand new Lexus. Gliding through the desert landscape and past the dazzling sight of the Strip, Theo feels “as if we had touched down on another planet.” He is both excited and nervous to be so radically untethered from New York, and thus his link to Audrey. He thinks about a story Audrey used to tell of how, when they first started dating, Larry would borrow a friend’s Porsche to pick her up. She didn’t realize it wasn’t his until after they married.

Theo asks how long Larry has had the Lexus, and he replies that it’s been over a year, which means he’d gotten it before he abandoned Audrey and Theo. They have now driven into the suburbs, with rows and rows of identical houses painted in pastel colors, each with a yard. As they drive, the houses get bigger and bigger, and Theo is stunned when Larry announces that they are home on a road with a sign that reads: “The Ranches at Canyon Shadows.” Xandra explains that there are multiple clusters of developments called “ranch communities.” Larry, meanwhile, is getting increasingly irritable.

They arrive outside their house, which Theo finds elegant and impressive, like “a stage set.” He can hear a screaming sound coming from inside. When Xandra opens the front door, Theo is greeted by the loud sound of the TV and the smell of cigarettes and dog shit. Xandra explains that she left the TV on for the dog, Popper, who she is now yelling at to get down from her. Popper is a rather dirty-looking Maltese; Xandra explains that she “won him in a raffle.” Looking around the house, Theo is surprised to see that it is quite empty. He thinks it would have been a good idea to bring some of Audrey’s things to fill it, instead of selling them all.

Theo’s room is just as “bare and lonely” as the rest of the house. Downstairs, Larry and Xandra are screaming at each other. Carefully, Theo removes **The Goldfinch** from his bag and looks at it. He is stunned by how “the muted colors bloomed with light.” However, soon after, Larry knocks on the door, asking if Theo wants Chinese takeout. Panicking, Theo calls out that he is coming and thrusts the painting into a spare pillowcase, then hides it under his bed.

For the second time since Larry arrived back in Theo’s life, Theo’s nervousness and horror at the prospect of living with Larry is undercut by Larry giving him drugs or alcohol to make him feel better. This is a clear example of how a parent’s substance abuse issues can come to be passed down to a child. Even if Larry himself isn’t drinking, his eagerness to push drugs and alcohol on Theo in order to soothe his emotions clearly sets a dangerous precedent.



It is becoming increasingly clear that when Larry left to start his “new life,” he wasn’t actually starting from scratch but rather continuing a life of luxury that was somehow occurring in secret while he was still technically living in New York. However Larry ended up with enough money for a car and a fancy house, the whole situation is definitely rather sketchy.



Although the house is rather stately and impressive from the outside, the situation inside is rather abject and disgusting. The fact that Popper has been abandoned this whole time is a rather horrifying sign of neglect. The contrast between the dog’s expensive breed (Maltese) and the dirty fur that should be white further indicates that there is something strange and sinister about the house and its inhabitants.



There couldn’t be a greater contrast between the strange, artificial façade of this empty house in Las Vegas and the pure, ancient beauty of The Goldfinch. In this sense, Theo’s ownership of the painting provides hope and reassurance in this moment.



In the following weeks, before school starts, Theo covertly listens to Larry and Xandra’s conversations. He discovers that Larry had been regularly coming to **Las Vegas** before he left Audrey, and had already been dating Xandra for a year by the time he left. He also realizes that Larry has not actually stopped drinking, but now sticks to the combination of Corona Light and Vicodin. Theo observes that “the new, drugged-out Dad” is much nicer to be around than Larry’s former self. He sits watching sports on cable TV and smoking cigarettes.

Theo has been finding mysterious pieces of paper covered with grids of numbers all over the house, and one day he asks Xandra what they are. She explains that she and Larry often play baccarat at the MGM Grand, and that the sheets of paper are records of games they’ve played. When Theo asks if he can come too, Xandra reminds him that children aren’t allowed in casinos. Theo is both attracted and repelled by Xandra, who is obsessed with wearing white and vanilla-flavored everything. Theo sometimes overhears her complaining about him to a friend on the phone, saying “I didn’t sign on for this.” He wants to find a way to make her like him. She works night shifts as a bar manager at a casino on the Strip.

When Xandra and Larry are at home, Theo tends to stay in his room, but when they are out he roams around the mostly-empty house. Although this is lonely, he enjoys the freedom of not being at the Barbour’s, constantly scrutinized by adults. The neighboring houses on Desert End Road are all empty. Theo has scarcely seen anyone walking around on the street. He struggles with the lack of cultural amenities such as movie theaters and libraries, but when he asks Xandra about any buses that go into the city, she acts as if he is insane. The one consolation is that the house has a pool, where Theo now spends much of his time.

From the outside, Theo’s new school looks a little like “a minimum security prison,” but on the inside it reminds him of his old one. During recess, he reads [Walden](#), which has been assigned in his Honors English class, and wonders what Thoreau would “have made of Las Vegas.” Lots of students at Theo’s new school are the children of military service members or company executives, who are just passing through the city. The most popular kids are those who’ve been in **Vegas** the longest. Theo sometimes sits at Spanish Table, sometimes at German—although he doesn’t speak German, he likes it there because many of the kids also grew up in New York.

This passage provides another example of how Theo has a remarkably sophisticated understanding of the world. He is able to sneakily listen in on Larry and Xandra’s conversations and piece together the truth of their history together; furthermore, he doesn’t judge Larry’s switch from alcoholism to pills, but instead observes that he might actually benefit from this change.



The fact that Larry is playing baccarat (a card game) at the casinos on the Strip is somewhat worrying. It suggests that the reason why he seems to have so much money is because he won it through gambling. While this in itself is arguably not such a bad thing, the reality is that as an addict, gambling puts Larry at risk. He might not know when to stop, which could lead him to burn through any money he’s made thus far, leaving himself and his family destitute.



This passage explores the ways in which Las Vegas is the opposite of New York. Unlike Theo’s hometown, Vegas (particularly the neighborhood in which Theo lives) is totally lacking in public institutions and amenities, and has little in the way of the high culture Theo grew up with (art, classical music). At the same time, whereas New York is cramped and chaotic, Las Vegas is defined by its endless space.



The landscape of Theo’s new school is so unrecognizable from his old one that, in a way, it relieves the pressure of fitting in or finding any friends. If the only factor determining popularity is the length of time one has been in Las Vegas, Theo is doomed to be unpopular from the start, and this actually liberates him from the need to try.



Theo is surprised by how many of his classmates dislike [Walden](#). He notices that the boy sitting next to him keeps laughing at what the other students are saying. This boy looks like a “runaway,” with greasy black hair and dirty fingernails. He reminds Theo of the kids who used to sit around St. Mark’s Place. It turns out that this boy will become “one of the greatest friends of [Theo’s] life.” The first thing the kid says to Theo is “Harry Potter,” a nickname he’s acquired in Las Vegas thanks to his glasses and preppy style of dress. The two of them end up sitting next to each other on the school bus, and learn that they both live in the same ranch community, Canyon Shadows.

The boy speaks fluent English, with an Australian accent that also has Slavic undertones. He tells Theo that he has lived in Russia, Scotland, Australia, Poland, New Zealand, Texas, New Guinea, Canada, Saudi Arabia, Sweden, and Ukraine, though he adds that he has spent the most time in Australia, Russia, and Ukraine. He says that he speaks Russian, Ukrainian, and Polish, but that he’s lost some fluency. He introduces himself as Boris, and says that although his mother was Polish, English is the easiest language for him to speak now. Like Theo, Boris is an only child. His father is a Ukrainian who was born in Siberia, and his mother is dead.

Boris is nonchalant about his mother’s death, saying she was an alcoholic who has “been dead for donkey’s years.” He tells Theo that of all the places he’s lived, he wants to go back to Papua New Guinea most. He shows Theo a bracelet that his Papuan friend Bami made for him. After living in New Guinea, Boris and his dad moved to north Alaska, then to Alberta, Canada. When Theo asks what Boris’ dad does, Boris replies that he mostly drinks, and Theo comments that their fathers should meet. Boris roars with laughter, then asks Theo to come over and watch TV. Theo is hesitant, but after some cajoling from Boris agrees.

When Boris and Theo get off the school bus, they have to walk another 20 minutes to Boris’ house. On the edge of Canyon Shadows, many of the houses have been foreclosed, while most seem to have never been lived in at all. Boris observes that these houses were built “too far out,” and that many of the residents can’t even get water in them. He then says that his father works in mining, which means that “People hate us, everywhere we go.” Inside, Boris offers Theo beer, mentioning that there is also vodka in the freezer. Theo accepts a beer. Boris says that his father’s alcoholism killed the nerves in his feet, and Theo says that Larry is “supposedly” sober now.

The mention of Harry Potter here is significant. Firstly, it is one of the only allusions to contemporary culture contained within the book; almost every other cultural reference is to ancient figures, such as Dutch Golden Age painters. Furthermore, the allusion also makes explicit the connection between “The Goldfinch” and Rowling’s Harry Potter series. Like the Harry Potter series, Tartt’s novel has an epic scope, (somewhat) fantastical storyline, and an addictively compelling plot.



As this passage shows, Boris and Theo are both incredibly similar and very different. They have things in common, such as being orphans, yet Boris’ incredible backstory and mastery of multiple languages clearly sets him apart from Theo. At the same time, their shared sophistication and unusual histories bring them together as friends.



Here it emerges that Boris and Theo are connected not only by shared traumas (dead mother, alcoholic father), but by their same wry, humorous way of reacting to these issues. Because Theo has spent time surrounded by adults who treat him in an overly serious, sentimental way, it is perhaps something of a relief to meet someone with such cynical humor.



Again, this passage shows how substance abuse issues come to affect the next generation. While both Boris and Theo have a clear-eyed understanding of their father’s alcoholism and how dangerous it is, this doesn’t stop them from deciding to experiment with drinking themselves. Indeed, the fact that they discuss it while drinking indicates that it almost compels them to drink, too.



Boris takes Theo into his room, which is covered in old beer bottles, books, clothes, and other fabrics, and smells strongly of smoke. They discuss watching a movie, but never manage to do it because they can't stop talking. Theo is fascinated by Boris' extraordinary life. After they have been talking for hours, Boris announces that he is hungry, but then adds that the only things to eat are bread and sugar. Theo is horrified, and suggests that they go to his house instead. Boris is on his fourth beer and seems a little drunk. They set off for Theo's house.

Theo and Boris become very close very quickly, in part because neither of them have any family and thus come to rely on each other. Theo remains astonished by all the things Boris has experienced, including "actual sex with a girl." They get the bus together and hang out every day after school. Boris is often in a dark mood, interspersed with frequent "bursts of hilarity." He explains that his Indonesian friend Bami persuaded him to convert to Islam, but that he is no longer a Muslim, because it would be improper to keep practicing the faith while drinking alcohol. Boris claims that he doesn't "believe in anything" and never has, but converted because he adored the Muslims he met in Indonesia. They gave him an Arabic name, Badr al-Dine.

Although Boris' English-language skills are excellent, he always carries around a dictionary and writes down unusual words like "celerity" and "propinquity." Much of American culture confuses him, from food to car types to popular music and TV. Boris is completely self-sufficient, shoplifting his food and signing his own report cards. He shows Theo a bus that will take them to a mall where they can steal food. Theo can make a few basic meals, and he cooks for the two of them while Boris does the dishes.

Theo suggests that they go to the strip to steal from drunk people. Boris calls Theo "Potter" and has an enormous collection of nicknames for Xandra's dog Popper. Craving love, Popper has become very attached to Theo and Boris. Boris balks at the idea of stealing people's wallets, saying there is a big moral difference between stealing from stores and from working people. Theo and Boris are now eating together every night, and Boris has got Theo into the habit of taking vodka shots after dinner. They often drink themselves to sleep while watching TV.

The beginning of Boris and Theo's friendship is a moment of hope and excitement. At the same time, however, it is defined by the uneasy background presence of parental neglect (as shown by the bread and sugar) caused by substance abuse, which is clearly having a significant impact on Boris.



While coming from New York City makes Theo a relatively "worldly" child, the things he has seen pale in comparison to Boris' experience of the world. As is normal for a teenager, Theo is envious of Boris' experiences and the maturity they apparently bestow on him (as shown by his astonishment that Boris has had "actual sex with a girl").



Again, Boris' self-sufficiency is simultaneously impressive, comic, and deeply sad. The need to provide for himself has produced maturity in him, as well as forms of ingenuity. However, the sad part of this is that he doesn't seem to have been able to experience a normal childhood of innocence and vulnerability.



The fact that Theo and Boris are drawn to each other out of shared isolation is in turn mirrored by the behavior of Popper. All three of them have been neglected, which means they approach their attachment to each other with special enthusiasm.



Theo misses the Barbour's apartment. He gets polite emails from Andy and Mrs. Barbour and also writes many letters to Pippa, most of which he doesn't send, and which she isn't well enough to answer anyway. Watching Theo write, Boris asks if Pippa is his girlfriend, which irritates Theo. Theo also writes a letter to Hobie, but doesn't send this either. Soon after, however, he gets a long letter from Hobie written on "rich paper." Hobie writes that he misses Pippa, and that apparently she's not happy in Texas, although her health is improving. He provides updates on the people around his neighborhood, and admits that he is lonely without Theo. He concludes that if Theo ever needs anything, he would be glad to help.

That night, Theo tries to visualize Pippa, but can't. Instead he remembers Audrey telling him a story which ended in her reminding him that no matter where in the world a person goes, the moon is always the same. He wakes up Boris and asks if the moon looks the same everywhere, and after some initial confusion about the question, Boris confirms it does. At this moment, the boys hear sounds from downstairs, and realize it is Boris' father coming home drunk with a woman. Boris guesses that she is "some whore," before realizing that there are two women there. They share a cigarette and fall back asleep. Theo has a distressing dream about Audrey.

Boris explains that his father often spends weeks at a time camped out by the mine. Theo is stunned to discover that Boris' father washes his suits at home in his bathroom sink, but Boris is strangely defensive about this. Weeks later, Boris comes into class with a black eye, and although he lies to the teacher about how he got it, he nonchalantly tells Theo that his father beat him after coming home drunk. In the morning, he cried and apologized. He has now departed for the mine again, but before going left Boris about \$400. Boris suggests that he and Theo use the money to go and eat in a restaurant, suggesting Mexican because the last time they ate at the local Chinese restaurant, they fled without paying.

Boris likes Xandra and is always polite to her. He says to Theo, "God, she's hot," and asks if Theo has realized that she uses cocaine. He says he can tell by the way she talks and grinds her teeth. Then, one day, Theo and Boris walk in on her sniffing something from the coffee table. Boris asks if Theo thinks she's selling it, and it suddenly occurs to Theo that he doesn't know where Larry gets his money. He notes that there is never money or checks lying around the house, although he sometimes finds gambling chips. Yet because he is under 18, he cannot cash them in at the casino. Boris advises Theo to figure out where Larry and Xandra hide their money, just in case he ever needs some in an emergency.

In contrast to Theo's new life of parental neglect, shoplifting, and drinking, Hobie is a reminder of what it felt like to have a stable, caring adult presence around. Yet while Hobie is loving and attentive, there remains an enormous distance separating them: a distance not only of literal miles, but of enormous cultural and social dissimilarity.



While Boris might not be the most stable or healthy influence, this passage shows that his and Theo's friendship has a genuinely reassuring impact on Theo. In the end, it doesn't matter that Boris is the polar opposite of everyone and everything in Theo's life back in New York: he is a friend who Theo loves and trusts, and this is exactly what he needs at this moment in life.



Boris' nonchalant attitude toward the fact that his father beats him is difficult to witness. It is clear that without anyone to care or advocate for him, Boris has developed an extremely tough, cynical manner and ability to survive without the help of others. At the same time, just because he is tough doesn't mean he isn't kind or loving. The fact that he offers to share the money with Theo shows that despite having so little himself, he is still caring and generous.



After this passage, Larry and Xandra's situation only looks shadier and shadier. The fact that they are likely earning money either from gambling or selling drugs creates a further sense of instability for Theo. While these activities are arguably not inherently immoral, they are certainly illegal, and thus jeopardize Theo's safety (as well as the safety of Larry and Xandra themselves, of course).



Larry and Xandra book themselves a Thanksgiving dinner at a hotel on the Strip. Larry invites Theo, but Theo says he will be spending the holiday with Boris. Xandra asks if Theo wants her to bring home anything from work, and Theo says that Boris likes the cocktail sausages she brings, whereas Theo likes the hot wings. She tells Theo that she doesn't mind if he smokes, but asks that he stop stealing her cigarettes.

Theo imagined Mr. Pavlikovsky to be muscular and tough-looking, and is surprised to find that he is actually thin and "wiry." It is a few days before Thanksgiving, and Boris and Theo walk home from school to find Mr. Pavlikovsky "hunched" at the kitchen table next to a bottle. Boris says something in Ukrainian, and then—to Theo's surprise—Mr. Pavlikovsky tells Theo, in thickly accented English, "Thank you [...] You are good person." He says that Theo is a son to him because of the way he accepted Boris into his family. To Theo's even greater surprise, Mr. Pavlikovsky then gives him a tight hug.

Later, Boris explains that he told his father that he would be staying at Theo's house while Mr. Pavlikovsky is away at the mine. He says that he lied about Theo's address and gave his last name as Potter, in order to avoid his father ever turning up at Theo's house.

On Thanksgiving, Boris and Theo eat potato chips, drink vodka, and watch the Macy's parade on TV. Boris asks if Theo and Audrey ever went to the parade, and Theo says they didn't. Prompted by Boris, he admits that he is "a little" sad. In reality, he is tormented by memories of last year's Thanksgiving, which he and Audrey spent together. Theo asks if Boris is hungry and Boris claims he isn't, but Theo—feeling ill from eating too many chips and smoking too many cigarettes—gets the food Xandra brought from the fridge anyway. By the time they actually eat, they have drunk so much vodka that they are on the verge of vomiting.

Boris won't stop talking and Theo tells him to shut up; Boris throws a book at Theo, then a cocktail sausage, and they collapse in laughter. Boris keeps speaking Russian and insists on changing the TV to the weather channel, because he wants to see the weather in Papua New Guinea. Theo passes out and wakes up near a pool of his own vomit. Boris is lying nearby on the sofa, snoring. Theo goes to the bathroom to be sick again, then cleans up his vomit from the carpet.

While Larry and Xandra certainly don't seem to be the best parental figures to Theo, they are not entirely neglectful. They seem to care about him on some level, even if they rarely show it.



Again, this passage complicates issues of morality. While overall Mr. Pavlikovsky is obviously a terrible parent who does unforgivable things to Boris, this passage suggests that he is not completely careless when it comes to his son. Rather, his alcoholism appears to have interfered with his ability to parent so greatly that he can barely express whatever love he does have for Boris.



Here is yet another example of the strategies Boris has been forced to develop in order to take care of himself.



Compared to the life Theo shared with Audrey, his existence with Boris is abject and starkly depressing. Yet beyond the surface, there is arguably also something hopeful and redemptive about the boys' friendship, even if it is clearly not encouraging them to lead a very healthy lifestyle. Boris may be a "bad influence" on the surface, but the attention and care he has for Theo arguably make his presence a net positive.



The fun that Boris and Theo have together constantly threatens to turn into something dark and dangerous. Indeed, this is surely part of the appeal for the boys. The fact that they both know the most depressing and scary side of alcohol consumption does not put them off drinking—it encourages them.



Theo thinks about Hobie's house, which always brings him comfort. He decides to call Hobie, and when Hobie doesn't answer, he calls the Barbours. Kitsey answers and says that the family are late for dinner; Theo asks to speak to Andy, but Kitsey says they have to go and hangs up. After Thanksgiving, Theo sees Mr. Pavlikovsky a couple more times and has brief but pleasant enough interactions with him. However, one day he gets home while Theo has Popper with him, and Boris shoves Theo out of the house, claiming his father will "kill" Popper. Theo dashes out but peeks through the windows. He sees that Mr. Pavlikovsky is using a cane.

Boris and Mr. Pavlikovsky have a fight, which mostly consists of Mr. Pavlikovsky yelling at Boris, until he unexpectedly whacks him with his cane. Theo stumbles away, picking up Popper and running from the house. He hears someone following him and is relieved to see that it is Boris. However, Mr. Pavlikovsky is following behind, and Boris hurries Theo along. Once they have safely escaped, Boris tells Theo that the fight wasn't a big deal, and triumphantly holds up a bottle of vodka he stole on the way out of the house. He suggests that they go to the playground and have a drink before heading to Theo's house.

On the playground, Boris tells Theo that Mr. Pavlikovsky has killed people, and once beat a man to death at the mine in Papua New Guinea with a pipe wrench. Once both of them are very drunk, they stumble to Theo's house, Boris singing a Polish song. On Theo's request, Boris teaches him the song, translating the lyrics into English. They get back to the house to find it empty. In the light, Theo can see that Boris is covered in blood. He looks in the bathroom for something to clean Boris' wound with but finds only shampoo and perfume, then remembers Audrey saying that perfume is antiseptic. When Theo sprays it on Boris' wound, Boris yells and punches Theo in the face. They both collapse into hysterics.

The boys strip off their clothes and jump into the pool, which Theo realizes too late is a bad idea. He gets out but Boris pulls him back in again, and this brings back traumatic memories of being inside **the Met** after the terrorist attack. Theo tells Boris, "Don't ever do that to me again" and tries to get revenge, but at that moment sees that Boris is white and that his nose is bleeding again. He tries to help Boris out but the two of them end up collapsed on the steps of the pool, "too exhausted even to climb all the way out."

Again, Theo is separated from the Barbours and Hobie not only by distance, but by a shift in lifestyle so radical that he is barely recognizable compared to the person he was in New York. His attempt to speak to them on the phone while drunk suggests that while he may be loath to admit his vulnerabilities in general, drinking forces him to show his feelings.



Boris' constant assurances that Mr. Pavlikovsky's treatment of him is nothing to worry about aren't particularly convincing. Yet the domineering role Boris has taken in their friendship means that Theo has little choice but to go along with what he says.



This period in the novel can come to feel repetitive, as Boris and Theo end up essentially doing the same thing over and over again. Indeed, this sense of repetition is reflected in the landscape of Las Vegas itself, with the identical houses and desert landscape stretching out forever. Of course, repetition is what defines addiction, and it is Boris and Theo's repeated excessive drinking that creates this monotonous rhythm.



While Theo seems briefly traumatized by Boris pushing him underwater, the fact that he gets over it so quickly indicates that he is not actually angry. This is arguably because he truly trusts Boris at this point, and knows that Boris would never harm him intentionally.



Theo wakes up the next day in his bed with Boris. Both feel like they are about to be sick, and Boris goes to the bathroom to vomit. When he returns, Theo realizes that the wound on Boris' forehead likely needs stitches. Boris announces that they are late for school, and they both burst into laughter. Boris finds a glass of vodka and gets on top of Theo, trying to pour it on him. Theo throws Boris off him, then goes to the bathroom to vomit himself. When he returns to his room, Boris says that last night he told Theo not to put the glass on the floor, as it is bad luck. They go downstairs, which looks like a "murder scene": there's blood and clothes everywhere, and a pile of vomit in the pool.

Again, the abject scene described here evokes the feelings of horror and regret that are part of the cycle of addiction. Waking up hungover, Boris and Theo feel horrified by their drinking (symbolized by them balking at the glass of vodka) and its consequences. Yet whatever nausea and misery they feel now will ultimately not stop them drinking again—at only 14, they are already trapped in a cycle.



Theo comments that what Mr. Pavlikovsky did to Boris was "crazy," but Boris brushes it off, saying he "provoked him on purpose" in order to give Theo and Popper a chance to escape. He dismisses Theo's claim that Mr. Pavlikovsky should be in jail, insisting that his father really loves him. Boris admits that back in Ukraine, he once tried to kill his father by locking him out while he was drunk in the snow. Boris emphasizes that if anyone knew the truth about his father hitting him, he would be deported. He jokes that he would rather kill himself than be sent back to Poland. Theo is hungry, and says they should have gone to school because the cafeteria serves pizza today. Boris points out that it is "too late now."

Boris' resistance to the idea of Mr. Pavlikovsky going to jail is not entirely rooted in a belief that Mr. Pavlikovsky is innocent or doesn't deserve punishment for the way he treats Boris. Rather, Boris believes that his father going to jail would only make life worse for him (for example by meaning that he would be deported). These are the kinds of ruthless calculations that define Boris' overly adult view of the world.



Theo often has nightmares about the terrorist attack where he wakes up screaming, but fortunately Boris is never fazed by this. Sometimes, when Theo is having a nightmare, Boris puts Popper on his chest for comfort. Theo soothes himself by thinking about the Barbours' apartment or Hobie's house. Hobie writes him a letter saying that if he'd known Larry was going to sell Audrey's things, he would have tried to buy some of them for Theo, because holding onto things can provide relief during difficult times. The letter is enclosed within a book called *Wind, Sand, and Stars* by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, which Theo reads and rereads several times.

Here Theo receives two very different kinds of comfort from two very different friends. While the care that Hobie shows him is definitely more legible and healthy in a traditional sense, the book emphasizes that this doesn't inherently make it better. Rather, both Hobie and Boris' care for Theo is equally valuable because both are based in genuine love.



Boris is the only person in **Las Vegas** whom Theo tells about the way Audrey died. Boris has an intuitive understanding of Theo's relationship to Hobie, admiring how dedicated Hobie is in writing to Theo. He asks if Hobie is an "old poofter," and Theo, shocked, says he doesn't think so but doesn't know. Boris remains nonchalant, saying it doesn't matter—what's important is that Hobie is kind. Boris has also developed sympathy for Larry. He has a better understanding of the way in which Larry makes money from gambling, and is eager to celebrate whenever Larry wins. He is also impressed by the fact that Larry was an actor, despite Theo emphasizing that he was never particularly famous or successful.

Part of what makes Boris such a good friend is that he is so nonjudgmental. Theo's life is obviously very bizarre, but rather than balking at this or trying to understand it according to preexisting norms, Boris simply accepts it for what it is. Not only this, but he tries to see the best in everyone and everything—including Larry.



Boris and Larry enthusiastically discuss politics together, and although it makes Theo cringe to see Larry imitating Boris' accent, Boris himself doesn't really care. Boris tells Theo that Larry really loves him and wants to repair their relationship, which Theo finds hard to believe. Theo becomes increasingly frustrated with Boris' sympathy for Larry, and dismayed by the way that Larry can charm people who don't know him well. Eventually, Boris assures Theo, "If you hate him, I hate him too," but adds that he must be kind and respectful because he is living in Larry's house.

While Larry has barely noticed Boris moving in, Xandra is a different matter. It is almost Christmas, and the approaching holiday is making Theo feel down. Boris dismisses Christmas as being "for little children," but then suggests that they have a festive dinner on Christmas Eve with Larry and Xandra. To Theo's surprise, Larry and Xandra love the idea, and give him and Boris money to buy ingredients. Yet on the night, while the boys are still cooking, Larry comes in, dressed up and seeming drunk, and announces that he is taking them out. He says they will eat the food they are cooking tomorrow, for Christmas Day lunch.

Neither Boris nor Theo has spent much time on the Strip before, and tonight, they are overwhelmed by what they see. Larry has made a reservation at a fancy Italian restaurant and tells the boys to "Order what you like [...] Go wild." They do so, and Boris eats enthusiastically, thanking Larry (whom he calls "Mr. Potter"). Larry himself doesn't eat much; he is sweating and ecstatic about his latest win. He talks about bringing Boris and Theo over to meet Diego, the dealer at the baccarat table, but Xandra warns him about "getting too chummy with the dealers." Boris gives a short toast in which he thanks everyone for their "company" and wishes them all health and happiness. Larry hands Xandra a jewelry box, and gives \$500 in cash each to Boris and Theo.

PART 2, CHAPTER 6: WIND, SAND AND STARS

A year passes. Boris and Theo continue their routine of hanging out and getting drunk together, while Boris teaches Theo Russian. The two of them are constantly laughing, although they are now so close that they often don't feel the need to speak aloud to one another at all. They both show signs of malnourishment and Theo's teeth are rotting, but he mostly feels pretty happy. However, this all changes shortly after Theo turns 15, when Boris meets a girl he calls Kotku, a nickname that comes from the Polish word for "Kitty cat." Her real name is "Kylie or Keiley or Kaylee." She is three years older than Theo, but only one grade ahead of the boys in school.

Boris' willingness to try and see the best in Larry is, paradoxically, made even more moving by his willingness to abandon this strategy if it will make Theo happy. Boris and Theo's friendship is defined by absolute loyalty. In this sense, it is arguably more like what a familial connection is ideally supposed to be: defined by loyalty, trust, and unconditional love.



Boris is certainly more of an adult than Theo, as shown by the fact that he doesn't have any kind of sentimental attachment to Christmas, whereas Theo does. However, this extreme maturity is not necessarily a good thing. It means that Boris is hardened to the world and accepts when people treat him badly. At the same time, these low expectations certainly help his ability to survive and even thrive in awful conditions.



Boris' decision to call Larry "Mr. Potter" highlights the fake, invented aspect of the whole situation in which they find themselves. From the outside, the four of them might resemble a "normal" family: a mom, dad, and two brothers. Of course, this is very far from the actual reality. Yet the nickname Mr. Potter indicates that Boris is happy to go along with whatever strange and haphazard approximation of family that presents itself, which is rather hopeful and moving.



The juxtaposition of Boris and Theo's happiness and devotion to one another and their declining physical health highlights one of the most important issues in the book: not everything that feels good is good for you. Of course, this is also one of the most important lessons of addiction, and Boris and Theo's frequent drinking explains how these two seemingly opposite states come together.



Boris meets Kotku when he buys weed from her, and immediately announces to Theo that he is “in love.” Kotku wears a lot of black and has orange-and-black streaked hair. Theo thinks she’s “cute—hot, even,” but downplays this to Boris. Boris is especially thrilled that she is 18, and looks even older. At school, Kotku has a reputation for being a “slut,” and there is a rumor that her mother is a sex worker. Theo doesn’t care about Kotku’s bad reputation, but he is horrified by the way she has “assumed ownership of Boris.” The couple hang out more and more frequently, leaving Theo totally alone. The first time the three of them hang out together, Theo admits that he finds her a little “desperate,” but to Boris this is part of her charm.

Kotku actually already has a boyfriend, a 26 year old pool cleaner, but Boris insists that she wants to break up with him. Boris invites Theo to Kotku’s house, telling him to bring a girl called Hadley from school, but Theo refuses. He says that Hadley is “on the honor roll,” and therefore not likely to want to hang out with Kotku. Boris is furious, (correctly) guessing that Hadley has said negative things about Kotku, but Theo assures him this isn’t true. They are both drunk, and Theo doesn’t want them to fight.

Many other girls have crushes on Boris, including the hottest girl in their year at school. However, Boris isn’t interested in them. He dismisses girls who “work too hard,” saying he likes Kotku because “she is like us [him and Theo].” Theo is disturbed by the implication that he is a delinquent. Kotku and her mother live in a grim hotel-like establishment called the Double R Apartments, and Boris has been spending more and more time there. When he sees Theo, he won’t stop speaking about Kotku. Boris emphasizes that Theo should spend more time with her, saying that she likes him like “a little brother.”

Theo looks down on Kotku because she is unintelligent, but he is also afraid of her. He is devastated by the impact on his friendship with Boris. He feels that there is no word to describe their bond. Now, he misses Boris desperately, and spends time getting high alone, hanging out with other kids he barely knows, and practicing skateboarding. Boris would frequently steal little things from Theo, but was also so generous with him that Theo didn’t really mind.

Clearly, Boris is drawn to people who also find themselves in rather abject circumstances. The fact that he is drawn to Kotku’s desperation is arguably somewhat predatory, suggesting he wants to take advantage of her. At the same time, this is also the same quality that compelled Boris to begin a friendship with Theo, and their connection is defined by genuine care, rather than cruelty and manipulation.



Theo’s interest in Hadley suggests that, despite how much his friendship with Boris has changed him, there is part of him that still lingers to the values instilled in him by Audrey and his life back in New York. Part of him still wants to be “good” and to succeed in a traditional sense, which means avoiding corruption by bad influences.



Before Boris met Kotku, Theo was all too happy to exist in a category with him. Perhaps Boris made their delinquency seem fun and exciting, rather than depressing. Meeting Kotku brings Theo into contact with the reality of the implications of his new lifestyle. Theo does not want to end up socially isolated because of his delinquency or repeating grades in school.



Despite everything, there was something beautiful and, paradoxically, even pure about Theo’s friendship with Boris (even though this may seem like a strange word to use in this context). While their friendship prompted them to lose their innocence together, their friendship itself was defined by pure, genuine love.



A physical intimacy also developed between them, which initially surprised and embarrassed Theo. This mostly consisted of embracing each other as they slept, although there were also other nights when, high and drunk, the intimacy would turn sexual. Theo concludes that this is “fun and not that big of a deal,” and because they never talk about it, it mostly doesn’t even seem real. Now, Theo misses Boris even more because of the drinking and fights that have been escalating between Larry and Xandra. Larry is mostly in a good mood because football season has begun. He chatters away to Theo, explaining his tactics and telling him that “this has been a really amazing year for me.”

When Theo comes downstairs to watch Larry betting, Larry hands him \$20 or even \$50, saying this is to pique his interest in gambling. Theo at times finds it difficult to keep up with what Larry is doing, but enjoys spending time with him in this state all the same. Sometimes, Larry’s elation gives way to a mysterious look of “unease,” which Theo doesn’t think is caused by the game going badly but rather something else. Theo always gets an uneasy feeling himself when the games draw to a close, and at this point he goes up into his room, smokes weed, and looks at library books which remind him of Audrey.

Theo once tried to look up information about **The Goldfinch** on the computer at school, but panicked once he landed on the website of the Missing Art Database, which asked him to sign in with a name and email address. He feels paranoid that investigators may have tracked him to Las Vegas and regrets searching for information about the painting from his school’s IP address. *The Goldfinch* is still in Theo’s room, wrapped in a pillowcase which is taped to his headboard. Having learned from Hobie about how delicate antique objects are, Theo only ever touches the painting by the very edges. He likes taking it out to look at occasionally, because if he stares at it long enough, nothing else in the whole world seems real.

Theo reads about the explosion that killed Fabritius and reflects on the way in which the world is governed by chance. When Theo stares at **The Goldfinch**, it is like the world stands still for a moment, and he is enveloped in an awestruck peace. Most of the time, he doesn’t think about the chain on the little bird’s ankle, holding it in place.

Overall, Boris and Theo’s sexual intimacy does seem to be, as Theo asserts here, “not that big of a deal.” Of course, this is not because it would be more serious or meaningful if one of them was a girl, but rather because their sexual intimacy seems almost to grow naturally out of their extreme closeness, rather than transforming their relationship in any serious way.



It is rather heartbreaking to witness Theo be so eager to receive Larry’s attention despite how poorly Larry has treated him in the past. Indeed, this is characteristic of children who have been neglected by their parents. While Theo may know abstractly that he shouldn’t trust Larry, he cannot help but crave a normal, loving connection with him.



This passage provides important information that contextualizes Theo’s still-unfolding crime of stealing the painting. While of course the longer he continues to keep it a secret the more immoral the act becomes, his willingness to care for it and preserve it properly shows that Theo is not harboring it out of any kind of selfishness. Indeed, it indicates that he hopes to restore it to public ownership one day.



The Goldfinch provides a very literal example of the sense of calm and meaning that beautiful objects provide in the midst of the sadness and chaos of mortal life.



Larry has been extremely kind to Theo lately, taking him out for fancy dinners every week. Although Boris sometimes comes too, to Theo's surprise he actually prefers it when it is just him and Larry. At one dinner, Larry says, "I really have enjoyed getting to know you since you've been out here, Theo," and Theo is moved to the point of feeling embarrassed. Larry thanks Theo for giving him "a second chance" and apologizes for abandoning him. He says he always felt left out within their family because Theo and Audrey were so close, but adds that this isn't an excuse for how he behaved. Larry then says he wants to put \$10,000 in a savings account for Theo, and asks for Theo's social security number so he can open one in Theo's name.

Theo hasn't seen Boris much lately, but a few weeks before Thanksgiving Boris comes over to Theo's house and tells him that Larry has been having a "bad run" lately. Theo has no knowledge of this, and asks if Larry isn't perhaps "bullshitting" Boris. Boris admits this might be true, because it can sometimes be hard to know if Larry is being earnest or playful. Theo points out that Larry has a tendency to exaggerate his misfortunes, and Boris agrees. Boris announces that he is hungry, and when Theo points out there is nothing in the house, Boris decides to go to Kotku's.

Although they are still passionately obsessed with each other, Boris and Kotku have started fighting constantly. Kotku's boyfriend is no longer an issue, as he has joined the Coast Guard, although Kotku still spends long periods of time on the phone with him. Meanwhile, Boris is extremely paranoid and jealous about other boys from school being interested in her.

Back at Theo's house, just after Boris leaves, the doorbell rings—the only time Theo has ever heard this happen since moving to **Las Vegas**. Theo answers it to find a tan, thin man standing before him, wearing gold-rimmed sunglasses, a cowboy shirt, and a toupee. The man calls Popper "cute" and says that he has three dogs of his own at home. Theo introduces himself, and the man observes that he must be from Manhattan. The man himself explains that he is from Canarsie, and is named Naaman Silver. After chatting away about his family history for a while, Silver asks if Larry is at home.

Larry's renewed investment in his relationship with Theo seems almost too good to be true—and indeed, the very end of this passage suggests that it perhaps is too good to be true. While Larry certainly seems to be making lots of money and (as indicated by his decision to give Boris and Theo \$500 each at Christmas) is happy to be generous with it, his request to know Theo's social security number is unavoidably suspicious.



This passage heightens the suspicion prompted in the previous scene. If Larry is having a bad run, why is he choosing this moment to put \$10,000 away in a savings account for Theo? Theo's unwillingness to believe Boris worryingly suggests that he is too invested in trusting Larry and is losing his (necessary) skepticism when it comes to his father.



Boris obviously has a tendency to form overly intense attachments with people; this is true of his relationships with both Kotku and Theo. In both cases, the intensity isn't entirely healthy.



Mr. Silver is an almost comic example of a shady Las Vegas figure—someone whose intimidating aura is undercut by their rather humorous appearance. Yet despite Mr. Silver's ridiculousness, he still has a sinister energy, and this is in fact amplified by his friendliness to Theo, which seems fake (or even designed to subtly intimidate him).



When Theo says Larry isn't, Mr. Silver replies, "I'm gonna be straight with you [...] I got five points on your dad." He says that Theo doesn't need to know what this means, adding that he doesn't usually like coming to a person's house, but that he was forced to because Larry is difficult to track down. At this moment the phone rings, and although Theo tries to ignore it, Mr. Silver insists that he answer. Theo is unsurprised to hear that it is Boris. He tells Boris he can't talk right now, and when he returns, Mr. Silver suspects that it was Larry on the phone, even though Theo insists it wasn't. Mr. Silver goes to leave, asking that Theo tell Larry he came by, and to say that "gambling's for tourists [...] not locals."

Half an hour later Boris returns, fuming that Kotku is not answering her phone. Theo tries to tell Boris about Mr. Silver, but Boris barely listens. He is convinced that she's hanging out with another boy from school. The boy also calls her "Kotku," stealing Boris' pet name. Theo, meanwhile, is very high, and having an intense experience sucking on a peppermint. Boris jokes that if Larry doesn't pay Mr. Silver, he's going to end up facing "the Three Rs": "Revolver, roadside, or roof."

When Larry comes back and Theo tells him about Mr. Silver, Theo can tell he is trying to act causal, but that he might actually be very disturbed by this news. Larry asks that Theo doesn't mention Mr. Silver to Xandra. Larry spots the end of the joint in the ashtray and asks where Theo and Boris have been buying weed. Without answering, Theo asks if everything is alright. Larry vaguely assures him that it is, before saying he's going upstairs to make some calls.

Theo goes back to his room and locks the door, distressed about **The Goldfinch**, which he thinks is not safe in the house. He considers storing it in his locker at school, and although this is risky—in large part because there are random locker inspections—he figures it would be better than leaving it at home to be discovered by Larry or Mr. Silver. He takes the painting out of its careful wrapping and looks at it, once again experiencing the same profound sense of peace and reassurance. He then wraps the painting back up, returns it to the pillowcase, and places it in his book bag. Trying to go to sleep, he is wracked with anxiety, and he focuses on a Hart Crane poem he is studying for school to calm himself.

This passage makes it indisputably clear that Larry's gambling habit has turned dangerous, and that—as Boris warned Theo—he is likely having a "bad run." While Larry's gambling operation has obviously brought him some success, overall it appears to be putting both him and his family in danger.



It is difficult to tell if Boris' unwillingness to take Mr. Silver seriously is because he is too distracted by Kotku, because he never takes anything too seriously, or because Mr. Silver doesn't pose any real threat. Unfortunately, the last option seems the least likely.



One positive thing that can be said for Larry's parenting skills is that, at least here, he is not a hypocrite. He seems entirely uninterested in punishing Theo for getting high, which is just as well considering that substance abuse defines Larry's own life. At the same time, this lenience seems to be because he doesn't care.



*There are two different examples of artworks that provide Theo comfort in this passage; *The Goldfinch*, and the Hart Crane poem. Indeed, the comfort that artworks provide helps explain why Theo doesn't confess to stealing the painting even though it is getting more and more stressful to hide it. In this sense, hiding the painting is almost like an addiction. While the painting soothes him, the stress of hiding it detracts from this effect and arguably makes it not worth it.*



The next day at school, Kotku has a cut lip. When Theo asks Boris about it, Boris admits that he hit her, but says, “I didn’t want to [...] She made me!” Theo replies that he doesn’t care because he has his own problems to worry about. That night, Larry comes home in a spectacular mood, having picked up Chinese food for dinner. When Xandra goes off to wash the dishes, Theo asks if he sorted everything out with Mr. Silver, and Larry explains that “it was just a mix-up.” Apparently, when Larry went to meet Silver by the pool at Caesar’s Palace, all Silver could talk about was how nice Theo was.

At school, Boris and Theo discuss Boris hitting Kotku again, and Boris implies that he wanted to hurt her. However, then he excitedly tells Theo that he and Kotku dropped acid last night. He says it was “fantastic” and that he still has some left. He explains that everything in the world felt connected and “friendly,” and he and Kotku made up and realized how in love they were. He admits that he is still a little high now.

A week passes, and Theo decides it’s safe to bring **The Goldfinch** home from school. When he takes it out of the pillowcase, he sees that it has been re-wrapped intensely, which Theo blames on how high he was when he did it. He gets a kitchen knife and begins carefully sawing through one corner, but at this moment he hears Xandra downstairs and hastily hangs it back in the pillowcase behind his headboard. Boris has promised that he and Theo will take the remaining hits of acid soon, suggesting they go to the abandoned playground where they’ve gone before to take ecstasy.

Theo’s calm mood is soon destroyed by Larry pulling him aside and asking him to call Audrey’s lawyer. Theo is surprised; he was barely aware that Audrey even had a lawyer. Larry explains that he wants to quit gambling while he’s ahead. He says he knows that he is an alcoholic, and that although he’s been careful thus far, gambling might bring out his “addictive tendencies” sooner or later. He says that he’s hoping to invest in a new restaurant with a friend, and that he needs a large sum to start off with in order to pay the hefty “restaurant taxes.” Theo says it’s ok if Larry wants to use the money he put in his savings account.

Though “The Goldfinch” is, of course, written by a woman, some readers might object to the seemingly casual misogyny present in the narrative. There are few prominent female characters, and those that do exist are either idolized to an unreal, saint-like degree (Audrey) or dismissed as trashy according to rather sexist terms (Xandra, Kotku). The casual presentation of Boris’ beating of Kotku arguably heightens this issue.



Boris and Kotku have a rather archetypal toxic relationship, defined by a constant oscillation between high highs and low lows. Of course, in this sense their relationship contains the seductive back-and-forth between hope and despair that characterizes drug addiction.



While Boris’ toxic and abusive relationship with Kotku has come to resemble an addiction, he and Theo continue to experiment with literal drugs. Despite the fact that this is, of course, highly illegal and perhaps inadvisable for two people who are quite young, the book suggests that their experimentation is not wholly bad for them. It can be a source of excitement, hope, and joy.



Larry’s speech about wanting to quit gambling before his addictive tendencies get the better of him is convincing. Yet at the same time, one of the hallmarks of alcoholism and other addictions is learning to manipulate others by convincing them that the addict has everything under control. Larry knows just what to say to sound responsible—but does that mean he actually is responsible?



Larry seems briefly confused, then says that he's actually thinking of another solution—something that will only be “short-term.” He asks Theo to call Audrey’s lawyer and speak to him himself. Theo is confused. Larry asks that Theo explain that it’s him, then ask to send over \$65,000 for private school fees. Startled, Theo says he doesn’t want to go to private school. Larry explains that the money is for the restaurant, which will soon start turning such a huge profit that they will all be rich. When Theo begins to protest, Larry mocks him and anxiously urges him to make the call. Out of nowhere, he slaps Theo.

Larry is now holding Theo and screaming at him, threatening to beat him up if he doesn’t do exactly what Larry is asking. Tears automatically fall from Theo’s eyes, and Larry apologizes weakly, demanding that Theo trust him. He insists that this is only a temporary solution so he can pay off creditors in order to get the restaurant running. Theo calls the number and asks to speak to Audrey’s lawyer, Mr. Bracegirdle. To his surprise, the sympathetic voice on the other line says that the two of them have actually met before.

Theo then remembers Mr. Bracegirdle coming to the Barbour’s apartment not long after Audrey’s death. Now, Bracegirdle fondly reminisces about how he and Audrey met by chance, then developed a “beautiful friendship.” He notes that when he came to visit Theo at the Barbour’s he briefly mentioned Audrey’s estate, but that it wasn’t the right time to discuss it properly. Prompted by an angry look from Larry, Theo blurts out that he wants to go to private school. Bracegirdle seems surprised, but then grows encouraging, and a long discussion ensues about elite schools on the East Coast.

Theo asks if Audrey left him any money, and Bracegirdle replies that she was too mired in her own financial struggles to leave him much, but that she did set up a 529, plus a “little UTMA,” a fund that can be used for education purposes only. When Theo asks if it’s possible for Bracegirdle to transfer him \$65,000, Bracegirdle’s tone shifts, and he sternly declares that this isn’t possible at all. He explains that whatever school or college Theo was attending would have to retrieve the money from the UTMA directly. Bracegirdle continues to chat about the other regulations and features of the money Audrey left, then concludes that she probably set it up this way in order to avoid Larry accessing it.

What began as an innocent-seeming and even reassuring conversation about Larry stopping gambling has escalated to a sinister and scary place—culminating in Larry’s disturbing act of violence. While Larry is trying to appear calm and collected, it is obvious that, for whatever reason, he is desperate to get this money and is prepared to do whatever it takes to do so.



Larry ruthlessly takes advantage of Theo’s vulnerability and desire to trust him. This is a stark contrast to the kindness of Bracegirdle’s voice on the other end of the line, which implicitly reminds Theo that he is a child who deserves love and protection.



While it is horrifying to see Theo acting as Larry’s puppet, it is also difficult to imagine how Theo could possibly resist what Larry wants him to do. Despite the independence he has been forced to have due to Larry’s parental neglect, Theo is still entirely dependent on him (for shelter, if little else). The fact that Larry hit him makes it even more obvious that Theo has no choice but to comply with his wishes.



This passage makes clear that the last thing Audrey would have wanted was Larry to steal Theo’s money, and that tragically, she predicted that Larry would try to do so. This is evidently the cause of Bracegirdle’s shift in tone. While he seems angry with Theo, he probably realizes what is actually happening: Larry is trying to access the money via his son.



Bracegirdle then explains that about two months after Audrey's death, someone came to the bank in Manhattan and tried to withdraw money from Audrey's account using a forged signature. He asks if Theo received the letter he wrote on this matter, and Theo says he didn't. Bracegirdle explains that he recently received a suspicious phone call from someone pretending to be Theo's lawyer. Whoever it was had Theo's social security number and was requesting "a rather large line of credit in [Theo's] name." As Bracegirdle explains that Theo shouldn't worry because the account is secured, Theo is shocked into silence. When he gets off, Larry lets out a howl so dramatic that it sounds like he's being tortured.

Later that night, Boris and Theo sit in the playground, waiting for the acid to kick in. Boris says that Larry told him Theo had a "fortune." He then says that he has some news of his own: his father has to move to Australia for work, then probably back to Russia. Boris insists that he isn't going with him and that he is going to run away instead. When Theo asks if Kotku is coming, Boris looks sad and says he doesn't know. At that moment, Theo feels the acid start working. Boris explains that while both he and Kotku have experienced homelessness, it was much worse for her. She left home because her mother's boyfriend was abusing her, and she ended up doing sex work to survive.

Theo suddenly apologizes for not liking Kotku, and Boris admits that she doesn't like Theo either. They discuss how it looks like they are inside an old black-and-white film, and then burst into hysterical laughter. Theo is stunned by the way in which he can imagine something and then make it true, and how everything seems light and funny. It ends up being one of the best nights of his life.

Boris stays over at Theo's house, and the next day they laze around, watching cartoons, drinking orange juice, and smoking weed. At around 3.30pm, the doorbell rings. Boris goes to answer it, but immediately comes back, looking frightened. Mr. Silver is at the door, accompanied by a large, tattooed man holding a baseball bat. He greets Theo warmly, but then goes on to ask if Larry is at home, saying he has a "problem" with him. Theo can see that there are more men sitting in Mr. Silver's parked car. He says that Larry owes him \$50,000 and has been avoiding him. He says that next time he comes round, he won't "be so nice."

Every part of this passage makes Larry seem more and more suspicious. At this point it is practically undeniable that Larry has been lying, that the money is likely not for a restaurant, and that he probably has little interest in ever paying Theo back. Indeed, his "howl" at the end of the passage suggests that he is in debt and that he wants the money to pay the debt off. His anguished reaction suggests that the consequences of not paying the debt will be very bad indeed.



As if they are cosmically connected, both Theo and Boris' (already bad) relationships with their fathers crumble in this part of the novel. Considering what a terrible father Mr. Pavlikovsky is, it is hardly surprising that Boris does not want to join him in Australia. Yet the reality of what he faces as an unaccompanied teenager with no money is also rather bleak.



The acid increases Theo's ability to empathize with Kotku and Boris' willingness to be honest about the fact that Theo and Kotku don't like each other. In this sense, the drug has a positive, healing impact on the boys and their friendship.



Mr. Silver now makes it inescapably clear why Larry wanted to take the \$65,000 from the fund Audrey left for Theo. This prompts reflection about why Larry didn't simply tell Theo the truth about why he needed the money. Perhaps he (wrongly) doesn't trust that Theo cares about him enough to give him the money for this reason. Or perhaps, like Theo and the painting, he has gotten into the habit of lying and now can't get out.



Once Silver and his men leave, Boris admits that he's basically eaten nothing for two days. Although acid suppresses one's appetite, he can feel that his stomach is a mess, and Theo says he will look around for money so they can go out for pancakes. Theo splashes water on his face and observes the bruise from where Larry hit him. Just as they are getting ready to leave, they spot Xandra, who is standing "with a funny look on her face." She announces that Larry has been in a car accident, and that the hospital called her at work. His blood alcohol content was .39%. Theo asks when Larry is coming home from the hospital. Sitting down with the same strange expression, Xandra says that Larry is dead.

During the rest of the day, Xandra's friends come over, some of whom are surprisingly nice and "normal." Boris shares his weed with everyone, and someone even manages to get Domino's to deliver to the house, something that Theo has never been able to do himself. Over the course of the evening, Theo learns that Larry had veered into the opposite side of the highway, straight into a tractor-trailer, killing him immediately. Others were hurt, but fortunately no one else died. Xandra is far less concerned about Larry's blackout state than the fact that he had been heading west of **Las Vegas**, into the desert. She is confused and devastated that he seemed to be fleeing without telling her.

Theo is in a state of shock and doesn't cry. Xandra goes back and forth from seeming fine to collapsing into tears. At one point Boris tells Theo he has to go, because he promised Kotku he would meet her at her mother's apartment. Theo begs him to stay, and after calling Kotku, Boris says he will stay there. Xandra has obviously taken a pill or two and is almost unconscious; Boris and one of her friends carry her upstairs to bed. The friend offers to stay and seems on the verge of leaning in to make out with Boris, but Theo aggressively signals that she should leave.

With everyone gone and Xandra unconscious, Boris and Theo rifle through her things. They take \$229 in cash from her wallet, and Theo sees that her real name is actually "Sandra." They find something that looks like a Coke can, but realize it has things inside it, and they screw off the top to reveal its contents. There is cash in there, as well Audrey's earrings, which disappeared just before Larry abandoned her and Theo. Boris, meanwhile, has found a large amount of cocaine. He taps some out and sniffs, offering the bill to Theo. Theo refuses, even as Boris insists that it will make him feel better.

This enormous plot twist is one of the major climaxes in the narrative. Of course, in many ways it is an anticlimactic climax. Not only does Xandra tell the boys in a very blank, matter-of-fact manner due to her shock, but the narrative had indicated that there may soon be a violent showdown between Silver and Larry. Instead, there is only the sudden information that none of this matters anymore, because Larry is dead.



While Xandra is surprised by the fact that Larry was fleeing from his commitment to her and his responsibilities in Vegas, this can hardly be surprising to Theo. Indeed, Larry is simply repeating the exact same thing he did when he abandoned Theo and Audrey. Larry habitually avoids his problems, a habit exacerbated by his addiction. Indeed, here his avoidance of responsibility is so extreme that it results in his actual death.



The fact that Boris blows off Kotku in order to stay with Theo shows that he still has some sense of priority. He can see that Theo really needs him, and this trumps his commitment to Kotku, providing hope that his and Theo's friendship will not be permanently destroyed by his and Kotku's relationship.



Boris and Theo have developed a ruthlessness thanks to the extreme difficulties they have both suffered. While they may feel some degree of empathy for Xandra, this is certainly not enough for them to stop themselves looking through her things and then stealing from her. Indeed, this ruthlessness and lack of moral compass has arguably been necessitated by the boys' need to take care of their own survival.



Boris observes that Xandra has about four or five eight balls, and suggests they keep one for themselves and sell the rest. Theo counts the cash, which comes to \$1,321, and splits it evenly between himself and Boris. He says this will be enough for both of them to buy plane tickets. Boris is shocked that Theo is suggesting that they leave tonight, but Theo insists they have to flee before Child Protection Services come and place him into care. Boris says he feels bad for Xandra, but Theo insists, “*She* doesn’t want me.” Boris says he doesn’t want to go to New York, suggesting California instead. Even though neither of them knows anyone there, Theo agrees, as long as they leave that night.

Boris repeats that he needs more time. He says he has something important to tell Theo, but he is worried Theo will be angry. Furious, Theo simply starts packing his things. Boris asks what Theo will do in New York, and Theo says he will call Andy. Boris reminds Theo he’d previously said that the Barbours didn’t want him, but now Theo dismisses this. Popper runs over, and Theo suddenly realizes he doesn’t have a plan of what to do with the dog. He considers taking the train, just so he can bring Popper. At that moment, Xandra wakes up and asks a nonsensical question, but after Boris tells her not to worry and go back to sleep, she disappears again.

Boris offers Theo his phone to call a cab, then tells Theo to keep it. He asks if Boris will join him in a couple of days, and Boris says he “won’t say no,” although his tone implies otherwise. Theo is feeling more and more delirious, struggling not to collapse. Boris once again offers him cocaine, promising that it will help him sober up. Theo doesn’t believe him, but takes some anyway. The result is like a “miracle”: he instantly feels better. Boris explains that he could sell the amount they took from Xandra to the rich, popular girls in school for thousands of dollars.

As both the boys take cocaine, Theo starts to talk enthusiastically about their life in New York together. Boris grabs Theo and kisses him on the mouth, then kisses Popper. He points out that Theo’s cab has arrived. He wishes Theo luck and says, “I won’t forget you.” Later, Theo regrets not asking one more time for Boris to join him. More than anything though, he regrets that he didn’t say “I love you.”

Theo’s insistence that he leaves before Child Protection Services reaches him might seem irrational. After all, it is not like this authority is confined to Las Vegas—they will be able to find him in New York, as well. However, given what has happened to Theo so far it is understandable why he wants to take control over his own fate before other people start intervening.



In a reversal of their usual dynamic, Boris is now being sensible about pointing out all the (legitimate) reasons why Theo’s plan to flee to New York is not a very solid one. At the same time, however, it is unlikely that Boris is actually motivated by practical considerations. There is clearly an ulterior motive for his stalling, such as Kotku.



This passage suggests that it may actually be the cocaine that is keeping Boris in Las Vegas. It would, of course, be inadvisable to take that amount of cocaine across state lines. To Boris, the drug symbolizes not only a lot of potential fun, but a serious business opportunity.



Boris and Theo have a deeply romantic friendship. This does not mean that they are in love with each other in the traditional sense. However, their friendship is undoubtedly a love story, complete with a reluctant, tragic separation.



When Theo asks the cab driver to take them to the train station, the driver informs him that dogs are not allowed on the Amtrak. He suggests that Theo get the bus instead, although he is not sure if minors are allowed to buy bus tickets without parental permission. Theo thinks about spreading Audrey's ashes in Central Park, which he did even though it is technically forbidden. The driver turns around and tells Theo that he will need to put Popper in a bag. At the station, the woman at the ticket office tells Theo that anyone under 15 can't get a ticket without parental permission. Fortunately, Theo has a New York ID that confirms he is 15.

Theo also sees a sign stipulating that no animals of any kind are permitted on the bus, so he decides to conceal Popper. Fortunately, there is a bus leaving soon, at 1.45am, with a connection to New York. At this moment, the cab driver walks over and reveals a cardboard box inside a bag in which he's concealed Popper beneath. He explains that the box ensures that the bag doesn't look "dog-shaped." The driver gives Theo some potato chips and advises him to keep subtly feeding them to Popper during the journey. He then urges Theo not to look at the bag, as this will attract attention to it. The driver then reveals that he's a part-time magician, and the tips he's given Theo are drawn from magic.

Theo struggles to sleep on the bus, but is at least glad that Popper doesn't make any noise. When they get off in Colorado, he and Popper are overjoyed to run around, and Theo even spots a hippie coffee shop where he buys food for himself and vegetarian dog biscuits for Popper. On the bus, Theo reads *Wind, Sand and Stars*. In Kansas, they have another rest stop, and Theo and Popper get to run around again. Back on the bus, they finally both manage to sleep. They have an hour and a half layover in St. Louis, giving Theo time to walk Popper again. They get back on a different bus, and Theo falls asleep quickly, only to be woken by the bus driver, who tells him, "You can't have that dog on the bus."

Theo panics, and the driver repeats the same sentence. However, she then turns around and asks the other passengers if they have a problem with Popper. No one responds, and so she says Theo can stay on the bus for now, as long as no one complains. As the driver walks away and Theo flushes with relief, he wonders about how he grew so attached to Popper, who isn't a particularly smart or cool dog, but rather feminine, toy-like, "gay." For a while, he feels too tense to go back to sleep, but eventually drifts off again. He has sent Boris several texts that have gone unanswered. When they get to Buffalo he sends another.

As a minor forced to make his own way through the world, Theo constantly finds himself in violation of rules. Sometimes these rules are serious and legitimate, but more often than not they seem rather pointless. This is one of the main ways in which the novel explores the distinction between illegality and immorality.



The kindness of the cab driver and the revelation that he is a magician can be seen as a way of reflecting on Theo's time in Las Vegas. Vegas is a surreal place, as illustrated by everything that has happened to Theo and by the connection that so many ordinary people there have to the gambling, tourist, and entertainment industries. Yet the care and generosity of the cab driver suggests that, for all its strangeness, Vegas has redeeming aspects.



Theo's bus journey across the country is an important moment in the coming-of-age aspect of the narrative. Breaking free from everyone—his dead parents, his supposed guardian Xandra, the friendship with Boris he has come to rely on—Theo takes control of his own life, choosing his own fate. This sense of freedom is reflected in the vast American landscape that Theo passes through on his way to New York.



The bus driver's decision to ask the other passengers if they mind Popper being on the bus is arguably an example of how decisions should be made. Rather than imposing arbitrary rules that people will break anyway, making decisions via consensus is a way of creating rules that actually have ethical weight to them, and that can change if necessary.



By the time the bus finally pulls into Port Authority, it is evening, and Theo, feverish, has difficulty walking. The city is “so much dirtier and unfriendlier than [he’d] remembered.” He craves a drink, and longs for Mr. Pavlikovsky’s readily available supply of vodka. He is so hungry that he turns into an expensive cupcake shop and immediately buys the first cupcake he sees, which instantly makes him feel better. Theo worries about bringing Popper to the Barbour’s, because Andy is allergic to dogs. Passing the New York Public Library and Central Park, Theo finally feels a sense of returning home. It makes him expect Audrey to be waiting in their apartment, asking him what he wants for dinner.

Suddenly, Theo sees Mr. Barbour right in front of him, carrying his briefcase, obviously on his way home from work. He runs up to him, calling his name. However, when Theo catches up Mr. Barbour violently pushes him away, saying, “No more handouts! [...] Get lost!” Although Theo “ought to have known mania when [he] saw it,” instead he just feels overcome with embarrassment. He falls back, dodging a creepy man and running further into the park. He looks at his phone to find a text from Boris, saying he hopes Theo isn’t too angry and asking that he rings Xandra, who has been hassling him. Theo tries to call Boris but he doesn’t pick up.

Theo buys three hot dogs from a park vendor, giving one to Popper. He feels baffled that he is only five blocks from the Barbour’s, and yet now feels unable to go there. A creepy man approaches him, and he dashes away. He walks ten blocks south, but eventually feels too cold and tired and jumps in a cab. He feels bad about showing up at Hobie’s house without any prior warning, especially because ever since Boris’ comment about Hobie being an “old poofter” Theo stopped responding to his letters. Now he feels consumed by guilt.

Arriving at Hobie’s house, Theo sees that the shop is shut up and dark. Theo begins to think through his slim options when suddenly the door opens to reveal Pippa, “dressed like a boy.” She greets Theo with polite formality, and he realizes that she doesn’t remember him. However, when he introduces himself she embraces him in a tight hug, welcoming him inside and asking him a barrage of questions. Seeing Popper, Pippa laughs and picks him up. Theo is overwhelmed with relief. In the kitchen, Theo eats mushroom soup and tells Hobie and Pippa the whole story of how he got here. Hobie insists that Theo needs to call Xandra and explain where he is.

While Theo’s determination to return to New York made the city appear almost akin to some kind of promised land, in reality it can be a bleak, frightening, and unwelcoming place—particularly for someone who no longer has a home there. The hope Theo had about returning to the city and the despair that greets him when he arrives there again mirrors the swing between hope and despair triggered by addiction, and has certainly been exacerbated by his high and comedown from cocaine.



Theo’s retrospective voice provides an important additional layer of information here. Through this particular perspective, Theo simultaneously informs the reader that 1) the reason why Mr. Barbour acted with such apparent cruelty was because he was experiencing a manic episode, but 2) Theo did not realize that at the time, and this prompted him to believe that Mr. Barbour was truly angry and resentful of him.



Theo’s neglect of his friendship with Hobie does not seem to come out of any actual fear of Hobie or feeling that their relationship was inappropriate (indeed, it is clear that Theo has always felt absolutely comfortable and safe with Hobie). Instead, Theo seems more concerned about being associated with someone who others might think is gay.



Throughout the novel, Hobie’s house symbolizes all the things that Theo most needs and craves: hope, comfort, authenticity, responsibility, and care. This is a particular contrast to his harrowing journey and encounter with Mr. Barbour, as well as the fun but unsavory nature of his lifestyle in Las Vegas.



Reluctantly, Theo calls Xandra, explaining that he has taken Popper with him. Xandra says she “ought to call the cops” on Theo, because she knows he and Boris stole from her. Theo replies that she stole Audrey’s earrings, but Xandra says Larry gave them to her as a gift. She warns Theo that the way he and Boris are headed, they will both be in prison before they are eighteen. After she says she can’t blame Theo because neither of his parents were that great, Theo tells her, “Fuck you.” Xandra then apologizes, and asks Theo if he’s ok with Larry being cremated. She then asks for an address she can give child services, so they don’t treat Theo as a missing person.

Theo says that Xandra can give the address of his lawyer, Bracegirdle, telling her to look him up herself. In response to Theo’s rudeness, Xandra emphasizes that Larry was Theo’s father, and Theo seems to care less about his death than he would if Popper died. Theo replies, “Let’s say I cared about him exactly as much as he did about me.” Xandra says that Theo and Larry are more similar than Theo realizes. Although Theo angrily hangs up, these words haunt him.

PART 3, CHAPTER 7: THE SHOP-BEHIND-THE-SHOP

Theo wakes up feeling like he is in a “different universe.” Theo looks in the mirror and is horrified by his reflection; he has a bruised jaw, blotchy face, and puffy eyes. He can hear the sound of public radio coming from the kitchen, which brings him comfort. Hobie hands Theo breakfast and tea, which Theo promptly spills. Theo apologizes and begs Hobie not to “make [him] go.” Hobie tells him not to be silly, and when he sees Theo staring at the place where Cosmo’s basket used to be, he mentions that Cosmo died recently. Hobie asks if Theo has spoken to his grandfather, and Theo explains that his grandfather and step-grandmother hated Larry and didn’t seem upset about this death.

Just as Theo asks if Hobie will talk to Bracegirdle, Pippa comes in. Theo is “dazzled” by her, and can barely understand her excited chatter about dogs. Seeing Theo unable to speak and looking so unwell, Hobie sends him back to bed, promising to bring oatmeal. He assures Theo that he can stay “as long as however [he] like[s],” and says he will call Bracegirdle. Theo falls asleep and wakes to Pippa entering the room to take Popper out. She offers him some colored pencils to draw with, which baffles Theo. After she leaves, Theo gets a text from Boris saying he is at the pool at the MGM Grand. He has been doing the cocaine they stole from Xandra with the popular girls from school. Theo tells Boris to call him later. Boris never replies.

This passage shows that although Theo has demonized Xandra at times, she is actually not a bad person. Like Theo, she is a victim of Larry’s dishonesty, selfishness, and cruelty. This has not only left her isolated and in a difficult situation, but implanted false ideas in her head, such as the notion that Audrey was a terrible person. Yet in her effort to be sympathetic to Theo, she ends up further offending him.



This is one of the starkest moments in the novel’s exploration of the limits and failures of family. Whereas Xandra indicates that Theo should feel sadness and sympathy about Larry’s death because he was Theo’s father, Theo is resolute that this familial connection is meaningless considering Larry didn’t actually love him.



Theo’s terror that he will make a wrong move and be forced to leave Hobie’s house is a typical characteristic of children who have experienced neglect and abuse. Understandably, because he has just spent years living with a father who didn’t love him, it is difficult to trust that Hobie actually cares about Theo and won’t turn him out.



The contrast between Pippa’s offer of colored pencils and Boris’ text about doing cocaine at the MGM Grand is a comically extreme example of the divide that characterizes Theo’s life. Forced to grow up young, Theo has experienced things that make him struggle to relate to Pippa and her innocent, childlike view of the world. Yet just because Theo has entered the adult world doesn’t mean he is (or should be) finished with childhood—particularly the aspects of his childhood he loved and has now lost, like art.



Theo spends the next few days in a delirious fever. Hobie regularly brings him aspirin and ginger ale. At one point Pippa comes in and gives Theo an origami frog she's made. She takes his iPod and looks through the music, which Theo got from Audrey, announcing her approval. She remarks on the lack of classical music, and says she's "been listening to a lot of Arvo Pärt lately." Theo is practically unable to say anything to her at all, and she asks why he is he is staring at her. He wonders if Pippa suffers from the same traumatic nightmares, flashbacks, and anxieties as him. He thinks she can tell by her wild laugh that she does.

On Monday morning Theo calls Bracegirdle and tells him what happened to Larry. Bracegirdle is horrified, and admits he had been a little misleading about the money in Theo's account because it had seemed suspicious. It would be possible to withdraw money from the 529, although with a "large tax penalty." He notes that there is a little less than \$65,000 in it, though. Bracegirdle explains that he knew the "last thing" Audrey would have wanted was for Larry to have Theo's money. When Theo gets off the phone, he goes to his room and cries.

Theo dreams that Larry is scolding him for messing up a travel reservation. He is awakened by Pippa coming into his room and announcing that she is leaving. Seeing Theo's look of confusion, Pippa reminds him that she is in boarding school, and that she only came to see a doctor in New York. She notes that Theo slept through the Thanksgiving celebration at Hobie's. Theo asks which boarding school she attends, and is shocked to hear her say the name of a Swiss school which has the reputation of being populated by "only the every dumbest and most disturbed girls." Pippa herself comments that it's a "school for loonies." She says she lives with the French-speaking girls, who don't talk to her.

Hobie comes into the doorway and tells Pippa that they have to leave. Pippa says she might come back during the spring vacation. When they go, Theo rushes into the window to get one last glimpse of her. He then walks through to Pippa's bedroom, and is delighted to find it exactly the same as before.

This passage illustrates the idea that maturity comes in different forms. Whereas Pippa's innocence is conveyed through her interest in childlike activities and her open, trusting manner, she also has the intelligence and taste of an adult. Theo, meanwhile, gained cultural knowledge from Audrey, but has fallen behind in this respect thanks to his years of delinquency with Boris.



Although Theo often feels isolated, in reality there are a number of adults who go out of their way to take care of him—even those who, like Bracegirdle—don't even know him particularly well. Thanks to the interest and care shown by these people, Theo allows himself to experience a moment of vulnerability and cry.



While Theo has escaped the horror of being sent to live somewhere against his will, Pippa remains trapped in that fate. It is obvious that she would still prefer to be living with Hobie in New York, but she is not allowed to do so. Although it is unclear why she is at a boarding school with a remedial purpose, perhaps the injuries she sustained during the terrorist attack are still causing problems from her and preventing her from going to a mainstream school.



Because Theo's life has been characterized by so much chaotic upheaval, he is comforted whenever he finds any continuity, even something as simple as Pippa's bedroom looking the same.



When Theo and Hobie meet with Bracegirdle, he observes how much Theo has come to resemble Audrey. Theo knows that in reality he looks much more like Larry. During the conversation, Theo realizes that Audrey and Bracegirdle must have been very close. Bracegirdle tells him that he expects there will be no problem with Theo continuing to stay with Hobie. He adds that Theo won't need to go back to school until next term and that he personally thinks it would be best for Theo to go to boarding school. He offers to make a call to a friend at a school called Buckfield in order to get Theo a place. Theo stays silent, hoping this suggestion will disappear.

While Bracegirdle is well meaning, he is yet another example of a long string of adults who make decisions for Theo without really accounting for what Theo himself wants. Rather than properly asking Theo this, Bracegirdle assumes that Theo wants what he himself thinks is best. Of course, Theo did at one point tell Bracegirdle he wanted to go to private school, but by now it has been clarified that this is because Larry forced him to lie.



Theo applies to an early-college program in Manhattan, hoping that if he gets accepted this will allow him to keep living with Hobie. He studies intensely, to the point that it feels almost like a form of self-harm. However, he is happy to be distracted by studying. He is tortured by thoughts of what would happen if he gave **The Goldfinch** to Hobie, imagining every possible outcome from Hobie fixing the whole situation to him calling the police on Theo. Yet even more distressing than this are Theo's thoughts about Larry. He worries that Larry might have thought that Theo intentionally withheld the money from him.

It might seem crazy that Theo feels any guilt whatsoever about Larry, particularly considering Theo obviously bore no responsibility for rescuing Larry from the financial mess he got himself into. Yet Theo is a good person, who cannot help but feel bad about any suffering he might have inadvertently caused Larry, no matter how unjustly Larry treated him.



The living stipend that Bracegirdle has arranged for Theo helps him feel less guilty about staying at Hobie's. It also allows him to pay for his dental bills, Popper's vet bills, and to buy himself winter clothes, a phone, and a laptop. Theo finds Hobie's house much more comfortable and cozy than the Barbours', which always had an atmosphere like a stiff rehearsal. Hobie conducts his life in an old-fashioned way, eschewing a TV and cell phone in favor of novels and trips to the movie theater. He only opens the shop occasionally, and when he does it is usually only his friends who come by.

This passage further emphasizes that Theo's life back in New York could not be more different than his life in Vegas. Vegas was defined by extremes of deprivation and excess: Theo often didn't have enough money for food, yet indulged in huge amounts of alcohol and drug use. In New York he has financial security, yet, none of the dramatic "highs" of his old life with Boris.



Pippa texts Theo and they joke about how Hobie only likes to go to old, empty restaurants, which he patronizes out of worry that otherwise they will close. Dinner is the central part of Hobie's day, and Theo loves how elaborate it always is with him. He enjoys eating with the friends who come over for Sunday lunch, although he sometimes worries that one of them will know the Barbours and alert the family to Theo's presence. Theo still hasn't told Andy that he is back in the city. The guests often discuss Welty, who Theo learns was outgoing and charismatic, with an impressive ability to make people trust him. One guest observes that Welty knew that by giving Theo his ring, he was deliberately sending him to Hobie.

In many ways, Hobie symbolizes not just an old-fashioned way of life, but in particular an old (and dying) version of New York. Although the novel is not particularly entrenched in the current affairs of the era in which it is set, there are several hints to the ways in which gentrification is changing the city. Hobie tries to counter this (for example with his restaurant choices), but it seems like a losing battle.



Theo is terrified that Hobie will find **The Goldfinch**. After Pippa texts him that Hobie will only come into his room to dust and change the sheets, Theo starts dusting obsessively. Theo only leaves the house if it is to accompany Hobie to an auction or gallery; the rest of his time is devoted to studying at home. He always feels a little thrill when people assume that Hobie is his dad. Theo sometimes wonders sadly why Audrey hadn't married someone like Hobie or Bracegirdle instead of Larry, someone who shared her interests and would have treated her with kindness and generosity.

Theo takes his exams in January and comes away unsure about how well he performed. He tries to prepare himself for the possibility of not getting into the early-college program. Although he has tried to suggest going to a high school in New York, Bracegirdle is adamant that boarding school would be best for him, and that Audrey would want him to have a "fresh start." Leaving the exam, Theo passes a newsstand with a headline noting that a raid in the Bronx has unearthed "millions in stolen art." Having bought the newspaper, Theo reads that the police were tipped off to the home in the Bronx where they found three paintings, including a Rembrandt, which had been missing from **the Met** since the attack.

Still reading, Theo learns that the paintings had been stolen by a paramedic who had been treating victims after the explosion. The house where they were found belonged to the mother-in-law of the paramedic; the two of them, along with the paramedic's brother, face "combined sentences of up to twenty years." The final paragraph of the article notes that the discovery has sparked hope that other works missing from **the Met** may be found. It explains that usually stolen artworks are quickly taken out of the country, but this incident suggests that "these missing pictures may be here in the city right under our noses." Reading this, Theo feels nauseous. He is even more disturbed to see that the same story appears in every newspaper.

Later that night, Hobie brings up the case at dinner with Mr. and Mrs. Amstiss, remarking how horrifying it is that someone would take advantage of a violent tragedy in order to steal artwork. That night, Theo is too distressed about **The Goldfinch** to sleep. He reads more articles about the recovered paintings online. He thinks about the fact that the paramedic's mother had claimed that she had no idea the paintings were in her house, and was still being tried. As an antiques dealer, Hobie would be given even less of the benefit of the doubt. Theo takes two of the pills he stole from Xandra, and tries to console himself with the detail that stolen paintings tend to be impossible to find unless someone tries to sell or move them.

*While Theo was in Las Vegas, it was possible for him to hide **The Goldfinch** because he was so neglected, with Larry and Xandra barely noticing his existence. However, at this point it is obvious that continuing to hide the painting at Hobie's house is unsustainable.*



The juxtaposition of the two biggest issues facing Theo in this moment is comic, if only because one of them is so (relatively) ordinary and the other so bizarre. On one hand, Theo must deal with the possibility of being sent away to boarding school—an understandably stressful but innocuous problem. At the same time, he must also figure out how to hide a piece of artwork worth an astronomical sum of money, which has authorities all over the world searching for it.



The newspaper article gives a sense that the world is closing in on Theo, and that his secret will soon be discovered. At the same time, because of his youth (and his lack of incentive for stealing the painting), it also seems likely that no one would suspect him. Yet in a sense, the reasonable likelihood is beside the point; Theo is becoming increasingly consumed by paranoia, which is a destructive enough force on its own.



Despite what Hobie says at dinner, it is almost certain that if he actually knew the full truth about why Theo took the painting, he would forgive him. (This is even more true considering that Welty is the reason why Theo took it in the first place.) As Theo knows, Hobie is at far greater risk not knowing about the painting, because if it is discovered he will get in trouble anyway. Yet Theo's trust issues mean that he still cannot bring himself to reveal the truth.



PART 3, CHAPTER 8: THE SHOP-BEHIND-THE-SHOP, CONTINUED

Theo is so terrified about the painting that he can barely process the news that he has been accepted to the early-college program. Yet when Theo hands Hobie the letter of acceptance, Hobie takes him out to celebrate at a “struggling little neighborhood Italian,” along with his elderly friend Mrs. DeFrees. Hearing Hobie tell people about how hard he studied, Theo feels guilty and embarrassed.

To Theo’s surprise, the early-college program isn’t very demanding. Instead, it is a “geeky academic paradise” with no tests or grades, and plenty of opportunity to pursue whatever niche interest that students find appealing. Theo takes the minimum of four courses: Studio Art, French, Intro to European Cinema, and Russian Literature in Translation. In class, he only participates when he has to, and he doesn’t participate in any extracurriculars or hang out with the other students. Yet although he feels lonely, he is also profoundly alienated by the other students, who he finds “earnest, well-meaning, undamaged, clueless.” He cannot relate to teenagers who only care about succeeding academically and who are terrified of any wrongdoing, however minor.

Theo hates the fact that all the teachers seem to know that he is the son of someone who died in **the Met** attack, and they alter their behavior toward him as a result. Over time, they seem increasingly disappointed by the fact that Theo is not taking advantage of the opportunities the school offers. Theo himself has come to believe that he was only let in out of pity. His midterm reports are harshly negative. The only thing that brings Theo satisfaction is working in Hobie’s workshop. He feels totally cut off from his life in **Las Vegas**, although he thinks about Boris all the time. With Boris, the present was the only thing that mattered, and Theo got the sense that “life was full of great, ridiculous possibilities.”

Theo thinks about Larry sometimes too, reminded of him when he passes Chinese restaurants, as this was the food that Larry always craved. Theo worries about the temporary and “informal nature” of his life at Hobie’s. Bracegirdle has encouraged Theo to consider living in the dormitories at the early-college program, but Theo thinks this is impossible, as it the possibility that **The Goldfinch** will be taken or discovered is too great. In order to deal with his anxiety, Theo spends as much time as possible helping Hobie in the workshop. Hobie passes on a huge amount of knowledge about antiques, including the all-important task of restoring an item while ensuring that it still looks aged.

Over the course of the novel thus far, Theo has become convinced that he is a bad person. For this reason he always feels guilty, even when he has done something objectively good.



This passage contains an important reflection on how Theo’s experiences have fundamentally changed him and made it such that he struggles to exist in the world like a normal teenager. He remains alienated from things that used to interest him, and can’t relate to other people his age. The only other teenagers he likes (Boris and Pippa) have also experienced profound trauma. Beyond them, he prefers the company of adults.



Experiencing the death of both his parents and the extremes of life in Las Vegas, Theo has lost a sense of investment in the future. This is unsurprising: when life shows itself to be so profoundly chaotic, why would a person devote all their time toward working toward future goals? Unfortunately, losing faith in the future as a teenager means being labelled a delinquent and alienated from other people your age, as well as adults who expect certain kinds of hard work, dedication, and success.



This passage reveals how much Theo’s paranoia about The Goldfinch is coming to dominate his life, making decisions for him and preventing him from being able to exist in the world like a normal person. Yet despite the immense amount of stress that harboring The Goldfinch triggers, the painting also provides Theo with something priceless: a sense of purpose.



Theo's days are so similar that time passes quickly. At night he reads *Eugene Onegin* or one of the many furniture books that had belonged to Welty. The time he spends in the workshop with Hobie passes mostly in silence, but he never feels lonely, and even comes to feel that he and Hobie have developed a form of wordless telepathy. Hobie tells Theo that when he is repairing an antique, the person he is truly trying to “impress” is the restorer who will be working on the piece 100 years into the future.

One day, Theo comes home to find the house full of firemen; Hobie explains that there is a mouse infestation, and that one of the mice chewed through a wire, starting a fire. Theo suggests that they get a cat, but although Hobie agrees, he never does anything about it. Another time, Theo comes home to find Hobie kneeling in his room. He panics, thinking Hobie is looking *under* the bed (where **The Goldfinch** is hidden), but in fact he is simply reaching for a putty knife on the floor, as he is replacing Theo's window pane.

After eight tense months, Theo finally finds a “solution.” He is close with the men who do moving-and-storage work for Hobie, including a Russian Jew named Grisha who was born in the USSR and immigrated to the US at two years old. Theo befriended Grisha by showing off the Russian curse words that Boris taught him. One day, Grisha asks Theo to help move things into Hobie's house from the truck, and after suggests that Theo accompany him back to the storage unit, as they are a man down that day. Theo agrees.

En route to the storage unit, Grisha talks about how Hobie is a good man, but says that he is destroying Welty's once-thriving business. Grisha argues that there are plenty of customers desperate to buy from Hobie, but they are unable to do so because the shop is always closed. He also argues that some of the shop's existing customers are purposefully taking advantage of Hobie in order to get low prices. Grisha declares that the business will go bankrupt soon unless someone comes onboard to save it. He reflects that this person needs to be “someone like Welty,” who is both savvy and kind.

The novel suggests that loving beautiful objects is a noble pursuit because it connects people across time. Hobie clearly conveys this idea when he tells Theo that he is trying to “impress” the antiques restorer of the future who will carefully observe the work Hobie did in the past.



*Once again, it becomes clear that Theo's paranoia is having a terrible impact on his life. This further emphasizes the similarity between Theo harboring *The Goldfinch* and an addiction: in both cases, the secrecy required ends up having a hugely destructive, isolating effect.*



Theo's friendship with Boris has enabled him to make friends with people he wouldn't have otherwise. Despite all the ways in which Boris may have been a “bad influence,” it is also clear that their friendship opened up Theo's world.



Hobie may be supremely competent in many ways—an expertly skilled antiques restorer, and a perfect guardian to Theo—but he is so bad at managing the business that it is on the brink of collapse. Indeed, Hobie's character provides a good lesson about how morality is deeply important, but being overly moral can end up becoming self-destructive.



They get to Hobie’s storage unit, which is large and crammed with objects. Pretending to be casual, Theo asks what prevents people from keeping stolen or illegal objects there, and Grisha says nothing stops them at all—“bury something here and no one will find it.” Later that night, Theo looks through the Yellow Pages, perusing different storage companies. Although there are many specialist art-storage companies, he worries that this will draw unwanted attention, and he thus chooses one that is high-security but “inconspicuous.” The next day, Theo skips class and brings **The Goldfinch**, still inside its pillowcase and now wrapped in a Bloomingdale’s paper bag, then buys a small, cheap tent.

Although Theo prepares a detailed backstory, the people at the storage unit are totally uninterested in hearing it. He has placed the Bloomingdale’s bag containing **The Goldfinch** inside the tent bag, and pays a year’s rent in cash for the locker in which he will place the painting. Walking away from the storage unit building, Theo feels “giddy” with relief. He finds himself walking near his old apartment building, and decides to walk over, hoping to catch José or Goldie. However, when he gets closer he sees that it is a construction site, and the beautiful art-deco lobby has been reduced to a pile of rubble.

Theo asks one of the construction workers what’s going on, they explain that the owners sold the building and that it’s being turned into “upscale condos” which will sell for \$5 million each. Distraught, Theo thinks about the doormen and the other building residents, some of whom had lived there for over seventy years. As he walks away he becomes more and more devastated, realizing that the building had been “the last touchstone of the past.” He feels the ground disappear beneath him.

*Theo is definitely concerned about preserving **The Goldfinch** and making sure it doesn’t get damaged, but his decision to store it in a normal unit (rather than an art specialist unit) confirms that he is more worried about being discovered than the painting being ruined. (Of course, this is in a way rather obvious considering that the best way to ensure the painting’s preservation would be to turn it into a museum.)*



This is another moment at which the book explores the issue of gentrification. Just as Hobie’s New York is disappearing, so is Theo’s—and this is extra painful for Theo considering how the New York of his childhood was a tie between him and Audrey.



This passage echoes the words Audrey said at the very beginning of the novel about the tragedy of losing “things.” Part of what makes losing things so harrowing is that people expect them to be consistent. Even after Audrey’s death, Theo depended on the idea that their apartment building would still be there. Now he feels totally lost.



PART 4, CHAPTER 9: EVERYTHING OF POSSIBILITY

Eight years pass. Theo is walking up Madison Avenue, feeling “upset and preoccupied,” when he hears someone call his name. The man is wearing shabby but preppy clothing, with the look of “privilege gone wrong.” He reintroduces himself as Platt Barbour. Whereas previously Platt had an arrogant, boisterous look, he now appears anxious and exhausted. When Theo asks about Platt’s life, Platt replies that he is living in the city and has just started a new job at an academic publishing house. Theo asks after Andy, saying the last he’d heard was that Andy had an astrophysics fellowship at MIT. Platt replies that Andy is dead—he and Mr. Barbour drowned in a sailing accident five months ago.

The deaths of Andy and Mr. Barbour provide a hugely important turning point in the narrative. When Theo lived with the Barbours, they had a quality of seeming almost untouchable, in large part thanks to their wealth, privilege, and power. It was obvious that they struggled to relate to Theo’s experience of grief. However, now Theo and the Barbours are united by the shared experience of loss.



Theo is dumbstruck. He had often thought of calling Andy, but never got around to it. Platt apologizes for telling Theo so bluntly on the street, and suggests they get a drink nearby. He takes Theo to an almost empty bar, and explains that Mr. Barbour had bipolar disorder. His first manic episode happened while he was at Harvard Law; he'd started a fire on the street and was arrested. After he married Mrs. Barbour and started taking medication his condition stabilized. As a younger man, he'd spent enormous sums of his family's money and got into "trouble" with underage girls. Yet after being better for a while, he became ill again, behaving in an erratic, destructive manner.

Platt explains that the true nature of Mr. Barbour's condition was kept hidden from the children. They sent Platt off to boarding school at an extremely young age, pretending it was to benefit his own growth. While Platt was away, Mr. Barbour spent time in a mental institution, where he received electroshock therapy. The problems developed again "a few years ago." He became intensely paranoid, and frequently created public disturbances. He spent more time in a mental institution, and after being discharged "was never quite the same." Six months ago he took a leave of absence from work to spend time in Maine, and because Andy was nearby in Boston he went to spend time with him.

Platt explains that Mr. Barbour's condition led him to go out sailing in dangerous conditions. He reminisces about how Mr. Barbour was obsessed with the water, then mentions that Mr. Barbour's own sister—whom Kitsey is named after—also died by drowning. Platt reflects that Mr. Barbour felt "immortal" on the water. At the time of the accident, Andy and Platt were both staying with Mr. Barbour in Maine. When Platt had arrived, Mr. Barbour was already deep into a manic episode and Andy had locked himself in his room to avoid him.

On the day of the accident, Mr. Barbour, Platt, and Andy all went out on the boat together. Mr. Barbour fell in the water first, followed by Andy. Mr. Barbour's mania meant that he'd grown skinny from not eating, which led him to die of hypothermia in the water. Andy, meanwhile, somehow escaped his lifejacket and drowned. Now, Platt miserably reflects on how cruel he always was to Andy and says he'll "never forgive [him]self." Theo thinks about the "torture" to which Platt subjected Andy, and how Andy was convinced that Platt wanted to actually kill him. Platt asks that Theo come to see Mrs. Barbour, and although Theo is hesitant, Platt insists.

Platt's honest explanation of Mr. Barbour's history of mental illness is the first proper indication of how much the two deaths have transformed members of the Barbour family. Before, the Barbours used the euphemism of "exhaustion" to discuss Mr. Barbour's health issues, and where possible tried to avoid mentioning it at all. However, the deaths of Andy and Mr. Barbour have evidently made Platt value openness and honesty.



Platt's explanation about being sent off to boarding school extremely young so he wouldn't witness his father's mental health problems prompts reconsideration of Theo's earlier labelling of the young Platt as "a bit of a psychopath." Whereas Platt undoubtedly behaved badly, here it becomes clear that this was probably because he knew something was wrong and was upset about being sent away from his family while still only a child.



It is especially strange that Mr. Barbour should have felt immortal on the water considering his sister drowned. Yet this detail highlights an important idea in the novel: brushes with death often have the impact of drawing a person toward death, particularly if they experienced the loss of a loved one.



Theo's reflection about Platt's poor treatment of Andy shows that Theo is not the kind of person to sugarcoat reality. Even though it is moving and tragic to witness Platt be so overwhelmed with regret about his treatment of Andy, this still does not change the truth, which is that Platt treated Andy in an unbearably cruel manner.



When they arrive at the Barbours' apartment, Platt steers Theo away from the living room, explaining, "We're very informal now" and directing him toward Mrs. Barbour's bedroom. Theo goes to greet Mrs. Barbour, who is lying in the enormous bed. She embraces him tightly. She observes that Theo has become handsome, putting down the canvas she'd been embroidering. Two Yorkshire terriers jump up and begin yapping at Theo's feet. Looking around, Theo observes that this is where all the objects that don't quite belong elsewhere in the apartment end up. Mrs. Barbour offers Theo something to drink, but he declines. She says, "I'm so glad you came," and Theo offers her his condolences.

Both of them struggle to speak, and Theo holds Mrs. Barbour's hand. She tells him that when he died, Andy was engaged to a Japanese woman. She then mentions that the two little terriers had been a gift brought by a friend after the funeral, and that she's extremely grateful for them. When Theo tells her that he's working as an antiques dealer, she lets out an exclamation of happiness. Mrs. Barbour laments that none of her own children ever developed an interest in antiques, or the arts in general. She says she noticed Theo looking at the small Rembrandt drawing that hangs in her bedroom. Mrs. Barbour asks Theo to stay for dinner. Although he says he has to leave, he promises to come back for dinner another time.

As Theo is leaving, Platt mentions that he's seen Tom Cable a lot recently, who Platt recalls was a "pothead" and "thief" as a teenager. Platt grimly implies that Tom and Kitsey have been dating. Walking away from the Barbours', Theo feels stunned. Theo recently had a brief affair with a girl who was once one of the most popular kids in his and Andy's school, and she mentioned that Andy was still a geek, but in a way that was almost "retro and cool."

Although Theo had liked the idea of catching up with Andy, he was too fixated on the business to properly think about anything else. Thanks to Theo, the shop is now turning a huge profit, and in gratitude—and despite Theo's protests—Hobie has made him partner. The reason why Theo was so reluctant to accept is that he'd "intentionally sold a fake to a client," who is now furious. For some time, Theo has been running a cunning scheme: he sells a fake to a client and, if the client finds something wrong with it, buys it back at a loss. This makes him look upstanding and trustworthy, and most of the time customers are then assured that the antique is genuine.

The arrangement of the Barbours' apartment is symbolically significant. Most of the apartment is elegant, austere, and carefully curated. When Theo was young and the Barbours used to receive guests in these parts of the apartment, it represented the false image they were projecting out into the world. Now that they are "informal," honest, and vulnerable, they receive visitors in Mrs. Barbour's room, which represents the messy truth of the family.



Despite having become a more humble, informal, and honest person, Mrs. Barbour still retains the quality of wishing her children were different than they are. However, in a way this makes it perfect that Theo has reentered their lives. Rather than putting pressure on her children to change, Mrs. Barbour can now live out the fantasies of what she hoped her children would be like through Theo.



Theo experiences the particular pain of learning that Andy was successful and happy—engaged to be married, with a prestigious fellowship, and even "cool" in his own way—but knowing that he will never be able to directly witness this happiness for himself.



In a sense, Theo is now confronted with the same issue that used to plague the Barbours. On the surface, everything is wonderful—he is happy, successful, and respected—but in reality he is hiding terrible secrets that threaten to destroy him. Even worse, these secrets also jeopardize his relationship with Hobie.



A handful of times, the customer has accepted Theo's offer to buy it back. Yet simply by virtue of having been (however briefly) part of an esteemed client's collection, the fake object has acquired greater value. Theo is then able to sell it for far more money than it had gone for in the first place. Every time Theo has tried this scheme, it has worked—until now. The client who is causing trouble is “a prize Upper East Side swish” named Lucius Reeve. Reeve knows that he's been swindled, and even worse, he thinks Hobie is part of the scheme. Although Theo has repeatedly insisted that he is entirely to blame for the “mistake,” Reeve isn't buying it.

The two go to lunch at the Harvard Club, and as Theo begs Reeve to listen to his explanations, Reeve insists that he has been intentionally deceived by both Theo and Hobie. Theo plays it cool, but in reality he is in a state of total terror that Reeve has still not deposited the check that he gave him twelve days ago. He doesn't know why Reeve is holding out or what he wants. The pieces Theo's been selling are what Hobie calls “changelings,” extremely damaged pieces that Hobie fixes up (albeit to a drastically altered state) and which had previously been sitting in the storage unit, untouched and forgotten. Sometimes these are inventive “Frankensteins,” but other times they convincingly replicate the norms of the piece's era.

It has never occurred to Hobie to sell the changelings, even though a fortune could be made from doing so. Theo used the money from selling them to pay the shop's debts. Now, Reeve says that Theo's insistence that he takes care of the whole business side of things is suspicious. Theo indignantly claims that he's not going to stay and listen to this, but does not move. He has developed several “tricks” to encourage clients to buy the changelings, including selling them for a little under market price (thereby convincing clients they are getting a deal), or hiding them at the back of the shop and letting clients “discover” them themselves. The operation is risky; Theo once had to abruptly terminate a purchase because Mrs. DeFrees happened to walk in.

Theo goes to the Pond in Central Park to meet Jerome, the drug dealer from whom he buys Oxycontin, Dilaudid, and other opiates. Stealing the pills from Xandra back when he left Las Vegas triggered a dependency in Theo that has lasted all this time. Theo finished the early-college program in six years rather than the usual four, without achieving anything of note. However, this didn't matter, as all along he knew that he wanted to work for Hobie's antiques business. Grisha's predictions about how Hobie was driving the business into the ground had been correct. The first time Theo made a sale at the shop, he hiked up the price of a silver teapot from \$250 to \$850. Although the customer looked mildly surprised, she still bought it.

Theo's scheme threatening to unravel brings to mind many classic stories of tragic heroes felled by hubris (overconfidence and pride, which ultimately backfires and leads to someone's downfall). Although Theo may have initially begun the scheme with good intentions (to save the shop from bankruptcy), it got out of control and now threatens to implode, destroying the business and his life.



From a sympathetic perspective, it is clear that Theo admires Hobie's mastery and values his “changelings” as beautiful items in their own right. However, this is of course no excuse for deceiving people in order to sell them. Furthermore, it is especially terrible that Theo did this behind Hobie's back, betraying his trust and jeopardizing his reputation.



This passage contains an interesting exploration of how skill is not necessarily a moral good. Theo is excellent at his job, but this involves being very skilled at tricking and deceiving people, which is obviously unethical. Furthermore, it is a talent that may ultimately end up ruining Theo's career.



The pattern of risky hope, euphoric highs, and panicked despair that characterize Theo's fake antiques scheme should be familiar to the reader by now, as it mirrors the experience of drug-taking. Perhaps more than anything, the fact that the scheme is a secret that got out of control is the thing that most likens it to an addiction. Indeed, Theo's fraudulent activities are made even more dangerous by the fact that he is combining them with an actual opiate addiction.



Theo soon learned that there is no such thing as an “objective” price for an antique, because “any object [...] was worth whatever you could get someone to pay for it.” Having discovered this, he raised the prices of most objects in the store while keeping a minority of them low, because he knows that the bargains in the shop have attracted a loyal customer base. Theo is not only motivated by saving the shop from debt, but also because he finds the whole enterprise fun and satisfying. He enjoys the challenge of selling a piece, and tailoring his pitch to each customer.

However, it has all gone wrong with Lucius Reeve. Reeve is a mysterious figure; Theo can find little information about him aside from his “respectable Fifth Avenue address.” Theo stands at the Pond, feeling troubled. Each of the benches in the area bears the name of a benefactor, except Audrey’s favorite bench, which was sponsored by an anonymous donor and inscribed with the words, “Everything of Possibility.” When Theo gets back to the shop, Hobie observes that he is “white as a sheet.” He is standing with the Vogels, a couple whom Theo doesn’t like much because of how many pieces they purchased for next to nothing from Hobie. Now they buy from Hobie directly in order to avoid Theo’s raised prices.

Hobie invites Theo out to dinner with them, but he politely declines. As they are walking out, Mrs. Vogel mentions Pippa’s boyfriend, Everett. Theo himself was horrified when Pippa brought Everett, a “shoddy” English music librarian, on her most recent visit from London. Theo found him “innocent, bland, infuriatingly cheerful” and hated spending time around him. Pippa had been warm and affectionate with Theo, but this only tormented him further. The best part of the visit was when Popper bit Everett on the thumb. Theo was horrified to learn that Pippa and Everett were living together in London.

Theo, meanwhile, is involved with two women, both of whom are themselves in other relationships and neither of whom know about the other. He thinks about Pippa constantly, and is “torment[ed]” by the photos of her dotted around Hobie’s house. Pippa is not considered beautiful by most people; many find her “odd-looking” and “spooky.” To Theo, she represents the innocent, perfect past that existed before Audrey’s death. Theo even considers bribing Everett to leave Pippa, imagining himself writing a check for \$50,000 or \$100,000. He is convinced that he and Pippa belong together, and obsesses over anything connected to her in a “stalker”-ish manner. He’s tried to kiss her twice, and both times been gently rebuffed.

This passage further emphasizes that Theo has been cursed by how good he is at his job. He enjoys the skills required to deceive someone and the high of pulling it off, and this becomes addictive. Furthermore, the passage also raises the interesting point that, in a sense, there is not a clear line between selling a fake and selling anything at all: both require a particular form of persuasion and charm, which Theo has mastered.



This passage provides an important example of how Theo’s crimes are mitigated by the fact that he is saving Hobie from being taken advantage of. Of course, just because Hobie is selling the antiques for criminally low prices, doesn’t give Theo an excuse to deceive customers. It is obvious that the answer lies somewhere in the middle of their two oppositional approaches.



Theo’s childish hatred of Everett indicates that he adores Pippa as much as ever. Furthermore, Theo’s reasons for hating Everett so much appear to be largely unfounded. While Everett may be annoying, there is no evidence that he is cruel to Pippa or wrong for her in a serious way. Rather, Theo is simply being driven mad by jealousy.



This passage makes it seem as if it is Theo’s enduring, unrequited love for Pippa that is ruining his own chance at romantic happiness, pushing him into deceitful relationships with unavailable women. However, it is also clear that Theo has a lot of other reasons to have a messed up romantic life, including all the trauma of his childhood and his resulting difficulty in trusting people. Perhaps Pippa is really more of an excuse than the actual reason for his romantic misbehavior.



With Hobie and the Vogels gone, Theo crushes an OxyContin pill into powder and draws it into lines, which he then sniffs. He is overcome with pleasure and relief. Days later, he goes back to the Barbours' for dinner. On the way, he buys three bunches of lilies, but the smell reminds him of Audrey's funeral and he throws them in the trash soon after. When Theo gets to the apartment, Toddy embraces him so warmly that Theo feels "awkward." Toddy explains that he's in college at Georgetown and only back for the weekend. He says that living with Theo when he was younger inspired him to work in the nonprofit sector, helping "disadvantaged" young people.

Toddy's comment about being inspired by Theo to help disadvantaged young people is a starkly comic moment, highlighting the foolishness of very privileged people. Of course, the reality is that when Theo was staying with the Barbours, Toddy resented him (as was hardly surprising for a very young child). Yet Toddy has now spun the narrative into an account of how he was inspired to do good in the world.



Kitsey comes in and hugs Theo. In the years since he's seen her, she's become very beautiful. She is followed by Platt, who apologetically says that Mrs. Barbour would like them to come and eat in her room. Kitsey enthusiastically offers to make Theo a drink, and Theo asks for a Stolichnaya on the rocks, which surprises Kitsey. She admits that she was worried Theo "hated" the Barbour children for being cruel to him when he lived with them.

The fact that Kitsey accurately remembers and honestly acknowledges the fact that she and the other children were cruel to Theo is endearing. Perhaps (like Platt and unlike Toddy) she is more comfortable with speaking the truth.



The dinner is a strange mix of past and present, and Theo is struck by how much it feels as if he has returned home. He notices that Kitsey watches him throughout most of the meal. After, Platt—who seems quite drunk—tells Theo that Kitsey is on anti-depressants, and that he hopes they work better for her than they did for him. Platt explains that, of all the family, Kitsey was closest to Andy.

The Barbour children are each dealing with their grief in starkly different ways. Platt is more open about his feelings and seems to have developed a drinking problem, whereas Kitsey takes antidepressants and covers up her feelings with a cheery exterior.



Now Kitsey is taking a leave of absence from Wellesley, and isn't sure if she'll go back at all. Kitsey was also good at handling Mr. Barbour, and was usually the one to go and see him. Yet in this case she had begged Andy to go instead. She feels extra guilty because she is a skilled sailor, and thus perhaps could have saved Andy and Mr. Barbour from death. Platt asks Theo to take Kitsey out for dinner, saying it would "thrill Mommy senseless."

It is notable that Platt has very actively engineered the reentry of Theo into the Barbours' lives. Perhaps feeling unable to help his family members himself, he sees in Theo an opportunity to provide happiness and hope for them, and is eager to seize it.



Leaving the Barbours', Theo reflects that Andy's death was both a terrible shock and seemed pre-destined somehow, as if Andy was cursed as a child. Jerome has warned him that "an every-other-day habit [is] still a habit"—and Theo does not always even stick to the every-other-day part. The smallest inconveniences can trigger a desperate craving for pills. The pills Theo had stolen from Xandra—Vicodin, Percocet, and OxyContin—lasted until his 18th birthday, at which point he started buying on the street. He now spends thousands every few weeks on pills, and has had to change drug dealers in order to avoid judgment.

Given Theo's backstory, it was perhaps inevitable that at some point he would sink into an addiction of some kind. Of course, the habit he picked up ended up being particularly extreme, especially in terms of cost. It is obvious by now that Theo's drug dependency is directly linked to his fraudulent antiques scheme. Whereas he initially only needed money to save the shop from financial ruin, he now needs to be able to keep up an enormously expensive habit.



It would be much cheaper to do heroin instead; yet although Theo occasionally does a bump and loves it, he sticks to pills because he hopes their high price will one day make him stop. On a more immediate level, it also motivates him to go to work and sell as many antiques as possible. Theo also doesn't want to develop an alcohol dependency because of the way alcohol tends to impede people's ability to function normally. As it stands, his opiate addiction allows him to keep living a stable, productive life. Occasionally he loses control, takes too much, and acts strangely in public, after which he always dials back his doses.

Theo met one of the women he is currently sleeping with while they were both waiting for Jerome and realized they shared an addiction. He has bought all the health products and supplements he will take in order to be able to quit, and he keeps them in a shopping bag at home. When he gets home from the Barbours', he takes a slow-acting morphine tablet in order to get to sleep. In the morning, he snorts Roxicodone. Unable to bring himself to flush his pill stash, he puts it in a tin and gets in a cab to leave the pills at the storage facility.

This is only the third time Theo has been to the storage unit since he originally brought **The Goldfinch** to be kept there. Each of the other times, he has come to pay another two years' rent. He is overcome by a desire to open the package and look at the painting for the first time since he left Las Vegas. He is also tempted to take it home with him. However, he then thinks about the security camera and immediately leaves, overcome with panic. In the next few days, Theo goes into withdrawal and gets very sick. Hobie thinks he has the flu and urges him to eat, which Theo feels unable to do.

Yet Theo's physical torment is nothing compared to the mental "horror." To him, life appears to be nothing more than a series of "hells," and he cannot bring himself to understand why people keep going. After eight days off the drugs, Theo is able to take Popper on a brief walk and eat the breakfast Hobie has made him. Now Hobie mentions that he didn't want to say anything earlier, but Theo got some calls while he was sick, from a girl called Daisy Horsely (the invented name of Carol Lombard, the engaged woman Theo is sleeping with). Hobie adds that Theo also got a call from Lucius Reeve—which causes Theo to choke—and Platt.

Theo is a classic example of a high-functioning drug addict. In fact, as this passage shows, his addiction does not just fail to interfere with his work life—it actively stimulates his productivity. This highlights the fact that addiction can affect people in many different (and sometimes surprising and counterintuitive) ways.



It is obviously important for Theo to believe that he could quit whenever he decided to, which is why he keeps a supply of supplements ready. Of course, the belief that one could quit if one really wanted to is one of the most common features of addiction. In reality, it is a form of self-delusion.



Theo takes advantage of going to the storage facility in order to make an attempt at quitting pills, by leaving his stash inside the storage unit. The fact that he stores the pills here next to The Goldfinch makes explicit the connection between Theo's secret harboring of the painting and his addiction. His life is constructed out of secrets-embedded-within-secrets, and this threatens to get out of control.



In a sense, detoxing allows Theo to withdraw from his life and the many problems he faces. While detoxing, all he has to focus on is getting through each day. Yet as soon as he feels better, he is forced to face reality again, including all the secrets and the problems that threaten to unravel his life. It is this moment of re-confronting reality that often triggers addicts to relapse.



Theo calls the Barbour's and speaks to Kitsey, who asks him to come back for dinner. He then speaks to Platt, who asks if he can subtly help sell some of the family's furniture. Platt doesn't want to inform Mrs. Barbour, who he suspects might oppose the plan. Platt assures Theo that they don't need to sell anything, which Theo does not believe is true. Theo then decides to say that he has another customer—Reeve—who is causing a fuss over a piece, and asks if Platt will pretend that the piece used to belong to the Barbour family. He tells Platt what to say if Reeve calls, and Platt happily agrees to help out. Theo then says that out of gratitude, he'll give Platt a 10% cut of the piece, which is \$7,000.

Theo is relieved when he gets off the phone that he feels euphoric. Platt is the perfect person to help him: from a respectable background, yet capable of being intimidating and familiar with shady dealings. Theo calls Reeve, and asks to meet him downtown. Theo chooses a busy restaurant in Tribeca which Theo hopes will "throw Reeve off-balance." Theo is right; Reeve is uncomfortable with the location, yet reluctantly sits down at the table where Theo is waiting. After their food is served, Reeve says, "I know about the museum." He asks why Hobie has told everyone in New York the story of how Theo showed up with Welty's ring, as this allows people to make the "connection."

Theo feigns ignorance, but Reeve continues, saying that he knows that Theo was the only person to walk out of Gallery 32 that day. He accuses Theo of taking **The Goldfinch** to Hobie, and concludes that Hobie has been "farming it out" as a way of making money ever since. Theo is now genuinely confused. As Reeve keeps talking about the painting, Theo keeps insisting that he has no idea what he means. Reeve chastises Theo for letting the painting get into the hands of "street thugs" who don't appreciate its value.

Finally, Reeve says he wants to buy the painting from Theo, offering only \$500,000 with the implication that if Theo doesn't accept, Reeve will turn him in to the police. He says that he wants to preserve the painting, which is something that clearly doesn't worry Theo "or the people you're working with." By this point, though, Theo's genuine confusion seems to have unsettled Reeve, who retrieves a printed online article about the painting. The article notes that it is believed that **The Goldfinch** was recently used as collateral in a deal between drug traffickers in Miami. The DEA recently raided a house which they believed contained the painting and accidentally killed an innocent person in the process.

Both Platt and Theo are involved in some kind of shady, secretive activity, the full truth of which they are keeping from each other. However, this allows them to help each other out. Yet while this appears like a solution to Theo's problems, the fact that it is so shrouded in duplicity is dangerous. It seems likely that it will somehow end up proving too good to be true.



*Again, the oscillation between hope and despair strikes. In the midst of despair, Theo finally found hope in the form of recruiting Platt to convince Reeve of his legitimacy. This produces a euphoric high, yet this high is almost instantly destroyed when Reeve hints that he knows Theo stole *The Goldfinch*—news that will likely plunge Theo into an even worse despair.*



In the midst of the absolute horror of finding out that Reeve knows he took the painting, Theo is at least given a glimmer of hope via the fact that Reeve clearly doesn't know the accurate version of the story. At the same time, Reeve's insistence on implicating Hobie is clearly horrifying for Theo.



*Of course, the article indicating that *The Goldfinch* is not actually in the storage unit in Brooklyn and is instead being used as collateral by gangsters is a gigantic twist in the plot. However, before attending to this, it is important to notice the incongruity between Reeve's professed desire to preserve the painting and his offer to buy it from Theo. If Reeve's actual motivation was preservation, he wouldn't offer to buy it but instead turn Theo straight over to the police.*



The article explains that it is not uncommon for stolen artworks to be used as collateral. There is a quote from a spokesperson for the art crimes division of Interpol, who laments that thanks to the botched operation, “this painting has gone underground, and it may be decades until it’s seen again.” Theo puts down the article and bursts out laughing. He calls Reeve “delusional,” and when Reeve threatens to call the art crimes police, Theo tells him to go ahead. He asks that when he wants to discuss the piece he sold, Reeve should call him.

As Theo leaves the restaurant, he is shaking and his mind is spinning. He thinks about calling Jerome, but then decides not to. He reasons that he will have to tell Hobie about stealing the painting, which will surely lose him his job. Although Reeve was wrong about Theo being connected to the drug traffickers, who are clearly using a fake version of **The Goldfinch**, Theo still feels nervous about the fact that Reeve knew he took the painting in the first place. If people found out that he took it, Theo thinks he would likely face five to ten years in prison. He believes he “deserve[s]” this fate.

Theo approaches Hobie in the workshop and admits that he’s gotten “in a jam.” Theo tries to stress the seriousness of the situation, but Hobie does not seem to imagine that it could be anything particularly grave. Theo tells him about Lucius Reeve (though he omits the detail about Platt), and then keeps talking, continuing his confession until Hobie asks him to stop talking. Theo apologizes, and Hobie drily comments that Reeve is clearly stupid to have been fooled into paying \$75,000 for an antique that clearly wasn’t authentic. He is horrified that Theo tried to buy the piece back, as this could put them in serious legal trouble. Hobie admits that sometimes “the edge between puffery and fraud is very cloudy indeed.”

Hobie says he’s not going to “scold” Theo, but Theo then explains that the piece he sold to Reeve wasn’t the only time he pulled this trick. As he explains the whole scheme, Hobie is shocked into silence. When Hobie asks how long Theo has been operating the scheme, Theo claims it’s only been one or two years, when in fact it is over five. Horrified, Hobie says that Theo will have to tell all the clients he lied to that he has doubts about the authenticity of the pieces, and offer buy them all back for the same price at which he originally sold them.

Cunningly, Theo amplifies his own confusion and uses this as a way of disguising his fear. Of course, Theo is both genuinely confused by the information about the painting and terrified that Reeve knows (half of) the truth. Yet as long as Theo seems totally clueless about the whole thing, he might be able to trick Reeve into thinking he is entirely—not just partially—mistaken.



When Theo first stole The Goldfinch he was only a confused and traumatized 13-year-old following the advice of a dying man. Yet as the years have gone on, he has stopped viewing himself as innocent and come to believe that he deserves punishment for taking the painting, even as he is also doing everything possible to avoid that punishment.



It is almost painful to witness how willing Hobie is to give Theo the benefit of the doubt in this passage, particularly because the reader knows that Theo is still not telling the full truth, but instead minimizing the damage he has actually done. At this point it should probably be obvious to Theo that the more he lies, the worse the situation is ultimately going to get, but as the book has shown, lying can have an addictive quality. Once one starts, it’s hard to stop.



Here the extreme extent of the contrast between Hobie and Theo’s behavior is made clear. Whereas Hobie is morally upstanding and believes that honesty is always the best solution, Theo cannot stop lying, stacking his lies on top of one another such that he threatens to be crushed by them.



When Hobie asks how many of the fake pieces Theo's sold, he says a dozen, when in reality it is three times this number. Theo then admits that he doesn't have a full list of customers to whom he sold fakes. In some cases, it doesn't matter, as Theo never claimed that the pieces were authentic anything; however, there are many customers to whom he straight-up lied. Hobie is shocked that he managed to pull off the scheme, exclaiming, "They're not even good fakes!" This isn't true, but Theo thinks it isn't the right time to say so. Warily, Hobie points out that the entire reputation of the business is on the line.

Theo is miserable. He and Hobie trusted each other absolutely; Hobie is the closest thing to family he has. He apologizes again, and Hobie notes that in a way, what he has done is remarkable, and that he is clearly a "genius" salesman. Hobie also admits that he is partly to blame, as he let Theo start working for the business and expected him to perform financial miracles. Hobie also remained willfully ignorant about how Theo managed to turn their financial situation around so dramatically. Now he sees that it was obviously "too good to be true," and that without Theo's scheme the business likely would have sunk. Hobie asks that Theo try to fix it, and that they don't speak of the matter again.

Theo walks upstairs, knowing he won't be able to tell Hobie about **The Goldfinch**. Over the years, there has been much speculation as to the fate of the painting. Some believe that it burned in the fire caused by the explosion. Theo, meanwhile, claims to have been in another gallery entirely from the one where the painting hung when the explosion took place. There are even witnesses confirming that he was with Audrey in the same gallery where she died.

Theo sits in his room, staring out of the window, when he notices a person standing on the opposite side of the street. At first the person is still, then turns and walks away quickly. Theo concludes that he must be "seeing things," though he isn't completely sure. He pours himself some vodka and calls the Barbour's. Mrs. Barbour and Platt are both out, so he opts to ring back later. He thinks about Reeve, reasoning that Reeve has nothing to gain from turning him in to the police. Moreover, as long as Theo doesn't go to the storage unit, Reeve cannot prove he has any connection to **The Goldfinch**.

In different ways, both Theo and Hobie have issues with being overly humble. While Hobie underestimates his skill as an antiques restorer, Theo is convinced that he is a bad person. In Theo's case this becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy, such that he keeps committing more and more unethical acts because he's already decided that he is bad.



Unlike Theo, who has the worst possible opinion of himself, Hobie sees the best in Theo. He is upset about what Theo has done, but still looks for excuses to show why it wasn't entirely Theo's fault, trying to shift the blame to himself. This shows that Hobie would probably be the ideal person to confess to about The Goldfinch. However, it is unlikely Theo will be able to bring himself to do it.



There were many reasons for Theo to believe that he was safe from being discovered as The Goldfinch's thief. Yet as the encounter with Reeve shows, the only way to actually be safe from such exposures is to be honest in the first place.



While this chapter ends on a note of some relief, it is clear that it cannot last long. Again, Theo's situation at this point in life is akin to the proverbial house of cards. At any second, everything threatens to come crashing down around him.



PART 4, CHAPTER 10: THE IDIOT

It is just before Christmas; Theo and Kitsey are having a long lunch after a morning of setting up their wedding registry, and Theo has just given her Audrey's emerald earrings as a gift. Kitsey expresses her gratitude, but says she's not sure they're right for the wedding day, which irritates Theo. They have spent the past few weeks apartment-hunting, which Theo found unbearably stressful. Making the registry had seemed like a nice distraction, but in the end it was only Kitsey who showed enthusiasm, while Theo blankly agreed to whatever she wanted. He can never muster much enthusiasm for new objects, which he sees as inherently inferior to antiques.

Now, at lunch, Kitsey assures Theo that she will wear Audrey's earrings to their wedding, and affectionately tells him he needs to nap. He remembers how "lucky" he is. Their relationship developed fast; only a couple of months after Theo went over to the Barbours' for dinner, they were seeing each other almost every day. They are "very different people," but get along well. Theo was glad for the relief the relationship brought from his obsession with Pippa, which he always knew was unhealthy and somewhat ridiculous. When he and Kitsey started spending time together, it was the first summer she'd ever spent in the city. She is light, charming, playful, and beautiful.

Kitsey was the one to propose, doing so on Park Avenue just before they went into a party. Theo happily agreed, but now he feels frightened by the wedding's escalating magnitude and expense. Telling Mrs. Barbour about their engagement was one of the most special moments in Theo's life. Now, however, Theo feels inexplicably depressed, just when he is supposed to be happiest. Part of the issue is that he will never truly be "over" Pippa, and he and Kitsey are so busy planning the wedding and socializing that they hardly get any time alone together. He has "never felt so sure of the future," particularly because of how happy the engagement has made Mrs. Barbour, who is thrilled that Theo will be "an official part of the family."

Theo was also happy about how shocked Pippa sounded when he told her about the engagement over the phone. He'd boasted that he'd been in love with Kitsey since they were both children, which is something he now believes is actually true. Every day, Theo is reminded of his luck. Kitsey always brings "fresh air" and joy to his day, and everyone loves her. Theo is almost "disturbed" by how little trauma she seems to carry with her regarding Andy and Mr. Barbour's deaths. Now, he tells her that he has to go downtown, and she asks if he will come back uptown to see her later. She lives with two roommates in an apartment near the arts organization where she works. Theo says he isn't sure, but she begs him to try.

The surprise news that Theo and Kitsey are engaged means that the reader must quickly make a judgment about whether or not this seems like a good match. There certainly seem to be tensions between the couple, but considering they are in the midst of the highly stressful task of wedding planning this is perhaps only to be expected.



In many ways, Kitsey does seem like an ideal partner for Theo. While he can be prone to melancholy, Kitsey is loving and cheerful. Furthermore, the fact that she is a member of the Barbour family means that by marrying her Theo gets to achieve the dream of becoming an official part of a family again, as well as being with someone he loves.



Although it is obvious why Theo would be happy about marrying Kitsey, there is also clearly an extent to which he seems to be doing it to please other people, rather than for himself. In a way, marrying Kitsey is also a way of insisting to himself that he no longer loves Pippa, even though he also secretly admits that he thinks this will never actually be possible.



The description of Kitsey's joyful outward appearance and the fact that she seems bizarrely undisturbed by Andy and Mr. Barbour's death suggests that there may be another truth lying below the surface. Of course, people deal with grief in different ways, and it will not always be obvious when someone is mourning. At the same time, the fact that he doesn't know how Kitsey is coping is clearly disturbing to Theo as her fiancé.



Eight months have passed since Theo last saw Reeve at the restaurant in Tribeca, and he hasn't heard anything from him since. Neither has any client complained about the fakes, although he's sure "it [is] only a matter of time." He doesn't want the truth to emerge before the wedding, but having it come out after seems almost worse. The Barbour's are in some kind of financial trouble, partly due to the fact that in the final years of his life, Mr. Barbour's mania led him to make extremely unwise investments. Theo knows that, on some level, the Barbour's are expecting him to help save them from financial ruin.

Meanwhile, although Theo hasn't seen Reeve in person, he has received a series of threatening letters from him. One day, Hobie finds one of the letters, and, confused, asked Theo what it's all about. Theo makes up a story about Reeve attempting to blackmail him into joining a crooked scheme, which prompts Hobie to keep the letter, in case they need to report Reeve to the police. Theo tries to protest, but Hobie insists, and says he will ask Mrs. DeFrees if she knows anything about Reeve.

Theo still thinks about **The Goldfinch** all the time, even downloading pictures of it to his computer despite how this could risk incriminating him. He has begun to feel like Josef Fritzl, the Austrian man who kept his daughter locked in a basement for 20 years. He frets about what would happen to the painting if he died, and constantly worries that about the temperature and humidity in the storage facility, even though he has checked that these are sufficient for storing art countless times.

Theo was planning to ask Grisha to bring cash to the storage facility to pay the next two years' rent on his behalf, but a few days ago Grisha approached him himself and asked if he was all "square" in a legal sense. Grisha explains that he's not judging Theo, but has noticed that people have been hanging around the store, and is worried that they are going to follow him. He thinks they might be undercover police. Theo thinks about the man he thought he saw standing outside his window. Grisha admits that recently, one of the men came into the shop and asked for Theo by name, adding, "I did not like the looks of him at all." Grisha asks if he needs to worry and Theo tries to assure him he doesn't, although neither of them seem convinced.

The Barbour's hope that Theo will rescue them from their financial situation adds another layer of pressure—and with it, duplicity—to Theo and Kitsey's marriage. While hiding the truth of their own finances, the Barbour's do not realize that there is also a dark secret behind Theo's miraculous financial success.



Again, instead of revealing the full truth to Hobie, Theo gave half-truths, which have now landed him in an even stickier situation. Hobie thinks Theo is more innocent than he actually is, leading him to rely on handing Reeve into the police if they need to. Of course in reality, it would be highly dangerous for Theo to report Reeve to the police.



*The comparison to Josef Fritzl, one of the most monstrous figures in the contemporary public imagination, is surprising because of how extreme it is. Of course, part of the connection to *The Goldfinch* is that, in addition to the fact that Theo keeps the painting hidden away in a locked room, the painting itself depicts a bird imprisoned on a chain.*



*Here Theo's life threatens to start unravelling again. With Reeve, there was some perverse reassurance to be found in that he was annoyed at having being cheated by Theo and thus he was unusually motivated to dig up dirt about *The Goldfinch* to bring Theo down. For Grisha—someone whom Theo is close to and trusts—to begin suspecting him shows how out of control Theo's scheme has become.*



After leaving Kitsey outside Barney's, Theo goes to the bar where Larry used to drink and considers taking a shot of whisky in his memory. However, he then changes his mind and keeps walking. He thinks about going to see a movie, but at the theater he finds that the films he wants to see have already started. He goes to another theater downtown, but encounters the same problem there. By the time Theo gets to Union Square, he has persuaded himself to call Jerome. Theo thinks about the wedding, and dreams about the days before their engagement when he had "Kitsey all to [him]self." He hates the constant social obligations that dominate Kitsey's life—and now his too.

Theo is especially "squeamish" about the prospect of having children. Larry had been the same way, and Theo is sure that it's a genetic disposition. Theo thinks about taking pills again after being so long clean and feels excited about how low his tolerance will be. Instead of opiates, he has been drinking a lot, which makes him irritable rather than placid and pleasant, as he feels when he does opiates. However, when Theo tries calling Jerome it goes straight to voicemail, and it seems as if he may have changed his number. He considers trying to find a dealer on the street, but doesn't know how. He remembers Jerome telling him about a bar in the East Village where the bartender sold pills from behind the counter for double their street value.

Theo goes into a couple of bars, asking for the bartender, who he thinks was called Katrina. In one, the bartender asks if he means Katya, and Theo stumbles his way through answers to the man's questions, opting to leave before he is kicked out. As he is walking away from the bar, he hears someone shout, "Potter!" Theo turns around to see Boris, taller and with a few more scars, standing before him. He is too shocked to speak properly. Boris said he came by the shop earlier, then tells Theo he looks "terrible," with dark rings under his eyes. He then asks if Theo "hate[s him] forever." A thin woman walks over and says that she's heard a lot about Theo, then introduces herself as Myriam.

Acting as if he's silently been beckoned away, Boris asks if he can find Theo in an hour to talk. After speaking with Boris in Ukrainian, Myriam links her arm in Theo's and points him toward an old Polish bar where Boris will meet him. Theo waits in the bar for three hours, during which time he has three large vodkas. When Boris arrives, Theo tells him he was almost about to leave, and Boris apologizes but says he came as quick as possible. He mentions being married, but when Theo assumes Myriam is his wife Boris says she's not, and shows Theo a picture of a blond woman accompanied by two small blond children, all on skis. It looks like a Swiss muesli ad.

In trying to distract himself in order to stop himself from giving into his addiction, Theo "honors" Larry in a grimly appropriate way. Indeed, the mention of Larry in this passage emphasizes the extent to which Theo's addiction connects him to his father, a connection that Theo himself would obviously abhor, even as he also at times entertains affectionate thoughts about Larry.



Theo's relapse evidently has multiple triggers: the stress caused by Grisha and Reeve's suspicions, the taxing nature of his social calendar with Kitsey and the fact that he never gets to see her alone, and the experience of being haunted by his past, particularly his addict father. At the same time, it is also clear that the pull of Theo's addiction is strong enough that he may have relapsed without any of these triggers, particularly due to the way he finds opiates more appealing and manageable than other substances, like alcohol.



Note that this is the third time Theo has randomly run into someone from his past on the street in New York (first Mr. Barbour, then Platt, and now Boris). Of course in a busy city like New York these things can easily happen, but the way in which each of these encounters occurs at turning points in Theo's life makes it feel as if they are somehow fated.



The contrast between Boris' continued seedy, mysterious demeanor and the family that looks like a Swiss muesli ad is comic. Despite apparently maintaining some kind of sordid existence (which is obviously fitting for him), Boris seems to have managed to also achieve the dream of a healthy, happy, wholesome family.



Boris explains that the twins in the photo are his kids. He says that he barely knows them, and that they live Stockholm with his wife, a former ski champion. As Theo wonders if Boris is lying, the waiter delivers traditional Polish food to the table, even though the bar technically doesn't serve food. They take a shot of vodka. Boris explains that Myriam is his "right-hand man." They toast to their meeting and drink another shot. Boris explains that he runs a small business which is, officially speaking, a housecleaning agency. He spends six to eight weeks a year in the US, and most of the rest in Northern Europe.

Boris says that after Theo left **Las Vegas**, he didn't sell any of the cocaine they took from Xandra. He gave some of it away, which made him very popular, but he did most of it himself. Like Theo, he also took the opiates, which Larry had evidently been addicted to. It turned out that Xandra had been selling cocaine at her job, and that the square-looking couple who'd come over after Larry's death were "bankrolling" her. They were furious after Xandra lost her supply, and although Boris felt bad, at this point it was too late—he'd already done all the drugs. Boris explains that he lived with Xandra for four or five months in the house in Las Vegas, before she moved back to Reno.

Backing up, Boris explains that he initially went to see Xandra after he'd been up on coke for multiple days in a row and was in a state of deep despair. It was Christmas, and although she at first wouldn't let him in the house, when he asked if he could stay there, she eventually said yes. Boris admits that he "blamed some things" on Theo. At that point Xandra was in a bad way as well, too afraid to leave the house. It turns out that while Silver wasn't even much of a serious threat, the couple were.

By this point, Boris had a reputation for having a supply of high-quality cocaine, and soon everyone at school wanted to buy from him. He started buying from someone he knew who sold low-quality cocaine, then selling it at school for a higher price. Soon, he was making a lot of money and was "everybody's best friend." He was doing drugs every day and night while still turning a huge profit. He notes that nowadays, he rarely touches cocaine. He then asks Theo about his life.

Boris' "housecleaning agency" is evidently nothing of the kind. The fact that Boris spends so much time traveling internationally and that his business has a fake "front" suggests that he is involved in the criminal underworld, although it is not yet clear in what capacity. Regardless, Boris seems to be a pretty successful "businessman."



When Theo left Las Vegas, it is as if the entire life that remained there was cancelled or deleted—at least in his mind. Encountering Boris again is a reminder that his life there (and the people in it) did not actually cease to exist when he left. It is particularly surprising that Xandra and Boris, who had no direct connection to one another, continued to live together like family members.



Here it emerges that Boris and Xandra bonded over their shared fear and trauma. This is yet another example of how friendships can form in unexpected ways in the void left by the failures of family.



It seems that this was the beginning of Boris' "business" and entrance into the criminal underworld. An important connection between him and Theo emerges here: just as Theo's savvy at selling bad antiques has made him very successful but in a dangerous manner, the same is true of Boris and his skill at selling drugs.



Theo explains that he is in the antiques business, and immediately Boris tries to hire him, promising to pay him twice what Hobie does. Theo, who is now very drunk, says no and insists that he loves his job. Theo tries to leave, saying there's something he wants to show Boris, but Boris stops him. Theo keeps insisting, and Boris, suspicious, asks if his driver can take them there. Theo says this is fine, and Boris reluctantly gets up to go. Theo takes them to Hobie's, but as he opens the door Boris refuses to come in. Hobie and Mrs. DeFrees are there, seemingly on their way out to dinner. Before Theo can introduce Boris, Boris sees Popper and screams in delight, falling over backward while Popper bounces on him, barking ecstatically.

Although Hobie and Boris are happy to meet each other at last, Theo cuts the conversation short because he worries that he and Boris are too "boisterous" and are upsetting Mrs. DeFrees. Back in Boris' car (this time accompanied by Popper), Theo befriends the driver, Gyuri, who expresses his joy over the fact that Theo and Boris have reunited. Gyuri mournfully admits that his own childhood best friend recently died. For some reason, Gyuri thinks the Theo is a college professor, and asks him questions about God.

Gyuri drives them to a club in Queens, then looks after Popper while Boris and Theo go inside. The club is populated by Russians, and Boris—now very drunk—introduces Theo to various people. Theo is stunned by how much gold jewelry all the men are wearing. After a while, everyone in the club seems to know Theo, and a woman named Zhanna with fake breasts reads his palm. Eventually, Boris and Theo get back in the car. They drink vodka and do bumps of cocaine. Boris reminisces that it was Larry who taught him how to dress well.

Theo notices a blue Star of David tattoo on Boris' wrist, and asks what it's about. Boris explains that after his drug dealing operation at school started to go wrong, so he decided to pretend to be Jewish so Mr. Silver would hire him. He admits that he stupidly didn't know that tattoos are "against the Jewish law." Mr. Silver knew Boris was lying, but hired him anyway. Boris worked for him for a year, and claims he never did anything illegal, only ordinary things like running errands and walking his dogs. Mr. Silver became like a "father" to him. Then Boris shows Theo another tattoo, a rose with the name Katya, which Boris says is for the love of his life.

Simply being back around Boris has prompted Theo to return to his old ways of being from when he lived in Las Vegas. No longer cautious and reserved, Theo is full of enthusiasm, urgency, and spontaneity. Boris' reencounter with Popper is an example of the kind of wild, euphoric joy that dominated his and Theo's friendship while they were teenagers.



As the reader will recall from when Theo and Boris first met, Boris loves to tell extravagant stories about his life and journeys all around the world. It seems that Theo has entered the canon of these stories in the form of a college professor.



As soon as Boris and Theo are back together, it is as if nothing between them has changed—apart from the fact that Boris is now rich enough to afford an extravagant lifestyle and driver. There is a sense of timelessness to their friendship, both because they are so close and because their extremely wild and reckless way of being is a form of existing intensely in the present.



The fact that Mr. Silver became a father figure to Boris is one of the funniest and most unexpected twists in the novel. Yet it demonstrates one of Boris' most enduring and endearing traits: his ability to form connections with people in the most unlikely of circumstances. Indeed, Boris' use of the term "father" shows that he is enthusiastic about making such connections because of the failures of his "real" family.



Boris and Theo are both too wired to sleep, so they stay up talking and drinking beer at a 24-hour bar. Theo tells Boris that in college he took a Conversational Russian class, but that he was terrible at it. Yet it still made him happy to be reminded of Boris by learning the language. Boris asks if Theo is feeling better now, noting that he looked practically suicidal when they initially ran into each other. He asks about the business and enquires if Mrs. DeFrees is Hobie's wife. In truth, Theo isn't sure about the nature of their relationship. He always thought Mrs. DeFrees was a widow, yet it turns out her husband is still alive. Theo thinks she and Hobie are probably just "good friends."

Boris then repeats his offer for Theo to come work with him. He says that every good thing that's happened to him is thanks to Theo, and he wants to both make amends for what he did and let Theo share the profits. Theo says he doesn't want to be involved in anything "dodgy," and that after making some bad decisions he's trying to straighten his life out. Boris then says, very seriously, "I've been trying to get it back for you." He mentions "the Miami stuff," which he regrets went so wrong. He has been obsessing over how to get "it" back, and also wanted to see Theo to apologize in person. He says he knows how much Theo loved it, and he even came to love it himself.

Theo, bewildered, asks Boris to explain what he's talking about. Boris says he begged Theo to stay just one more day so he could have given it back to him. As Theo realizes what Boris means, he repeats the word "No" in disbelief. Boris explains that he took **The Goldfinch** as a "sort of joke," keeping it in his locker in school. He wanted to give it back to Theo, but because Theo insisted on leaving the night Larry died, he couldn't. Boris admits that the painting has made his whole fortune. Still in shock, Theo asks what is inside the package he has, and Boris is astonished that Theo's never opened it up to look in all these years.

Theo is in shock and can hardly speak. Boris tells him that he loses his memory when he drinks. He observes that when they were teenagers, Theo was suicidal, and often expressed a desire to die while he was blackout. He says they both did "crazy things back then" that Theo probably doesn't remember, although then assures Theo that he's not talking about their sexual history, adding, "I will say, you are the only boy I have ever been in bed with!" Boris dismisses this sexual experimentation as a normal part of the growing up process, but then says, "I think maybe you thought it was something else."

The connection between Hobie and Mrs. DeFrees is one of many relationships in the novel that defy easy categorization. Indeed, one of the main messages of the novel is that the traditional categories of relationship—father, brother, friend, lover—are often insufficient to capture the messy complexity and intensity of actual connections, particularly those that exist outside of the biological family.



This is the moment when the most significant plot twist of the many twists in the novel begins to emerge. When Lucius Reeve showed Theo the story about The Goldfinch being in Miami, Theo understandably dismissed it as definitely fake. After all, Theo has seen and touched the painting (or at least what he thinks is the painting) inside the storage unit. Yet now that story begins to unravel.



It turns out that after spending years tricking antiques customers into buying fakes, Theo himself has been keeping a fake in the storage unit this whole time. In this way, he has proved his own belief that people only see what they want to see to be true. Of course, there are many moments at which Boris' betrayal could have been exposed—however, by sheer luck (or fate?) this never happened.



This passage contains an important reflection on the way that people hold onto different narratives about their shared histories. Just as Toddy constructs the narrative that Theo staying with him inspired Toddy to do good in the world, so does Theo believe that he kept The Goldfinch (as well as his suicidal ideation) secret from Boris all those years.



At this point Theo tries to leave, but Boris stops him. He says that, particularly when Theo first started drinking vodka, he would cry and make confessions to Boris. He would claim that he was to blame for Audrey's death, and express a desire to die so he could be with her again. Theo once jumped into the pool from the roof, and another time tried to set the house on fire. It was also while he was blackout that Theo told Boris that he had stolen **The Goldfinch**, and he brought the painting down from his room for Boris to see. Although Boris found it hard to believe that Theo had stolen a priceless masterwork, he could tell immediately that the painting was real.

When Theo still insists that Boris can't have stolen **The Goldfinch**, Boris shows him a photo of the back of the painting. Theo is speechless. He gets up and leaves, ignoring Boris calling after him. He gets straight into a cab, arriving at the storage facility at 8.30am. He cuts into the packaging and rips it open to find Boris' Civics workbook enclosed within. Theo goes home and takes some pills to try to help him sleep. They don't work, and after two hours he gets up again, drinks coffee, and goes down into the shop. Outside it's raining, and Theo is overcome by a death-like misery.

Theo knows that, on one level, Boris has "done [him] a favor." Now he cannot be blamed or punished for **The Goldfinch's** disappearance, which should be a relief. However, all he feels is "despair, self-hatred, shame." Hobie gets back from the auction around 2pm, clearly in a good mood. He remarks that it was funny to meet Boris in person after hearing so many stories about him. He says that last night Kitsey called, and Theo remembers with horror that they are supposed to go to dinner at the Longstreets' later. Hobie suggests that they invite Boris over for dinner while he is in New York. Theo doesn't reply.

Having initially forgotten about it, Theo realizes that he left Popper with Boris, and is now scheming about ways to get him back while also explaining his absence to Hobie. However, after a while Boris turns up at the shop, accompanied by Popper. He announces that they had a lovely day together. He apologizes again, and promises that he's going to "make it right." When Theo doesn't say anything, Boris keeps talking, begging him to reply and saying he's felt guilty all day. Eventually, Theo asks why Boris took **The Goldfinch**, and Boris at first says it wasn't safe in the house, what with Mr. Silver coming around all the time. However, he then admits that's not the whole reason. He wanted it because he realized he could take it—"Chance makes the thief."

Boris' revelation here also draws attention to the fact that the version of the story the reader has read is not fully accurate. By including Boris' account of things Theo doesn't remember, Theo exposes himself as an unreliable narrator. The reader is thus left wondering what other aspects of the narrative Theo has forgotten or misconstrued.



*Theo's despairing reaction to the discovery that what he thought was **The Goldfinch** was only Boris' Civics Workbook suggests that, despite all the stress the painting caused him, it was important to Theo to believe that it was there. Indeed, it became such a central fact about him that he now feels lost without it.*



Again, despite the fact that it technically should come as a relief, the revelation that the painting is gone is so horrifying to Theo that he feels unable to get on with the rest of his life. Indeed, the fact that everything else is continuing as normal is bizarre and abhorrent to him, almost in the same way that it was hard to believe that he had to keep living after Audrey died.



*Theo's utter fury at Boris, although clearly rooted in his attachment to **The Goldfinch** on some level, cannot fully be explained just in terms of Theo's love for the painting. In reality, Theo is probably equally (if not more) devastated by Boris' betrayal. Although they haven't seen each other in years, the bond between the two men was so strong and formative that realizing Boris deceived and betrayed him seems to have left Theo unable to function.*



Boris says he was sure Theo knew he took the painting years ago. He adds that he doesn't know exactly where it is now, but thinks it's somewhere in Europe—Belgium, Germany, or Holland. He says he is going to track it down and will let Theo know what he finds. Awkwardly, the two say goodbye. After Boris goes, Theo closes the shop and heads to the Barbour's apartment, bringing with him an exhibition catalogue called *Printmaking in the Age of Rembrandt* for Mrs. Barbour. She is thrilled by the gift, and tells Theo that she actually saw the exhibition back when she was a college student in Boston. Talking to her, Theo feels much better already.

Previously, Theo tried to call Kitsey to cancel dinner with the Longstreets, but he hadn't been able to get through. Kitsey blames her regular "communication blackouts" on her broken phone, but also refuses to get a new one. In order to get himself out of the house, Theo took some opiates, and now feels better than he has in months. Mrs. Barbour observes that Forrest Longstreet had been in the same class as Theo and Andy at school, and was part of the group that bullied Andy, although Forrest was too unintelligent to be much of a bully himself.

Mrs. Barbour recalls the torments to which Andy was subjected, and the nonchalant responses of the bullies and their parents. When Theo tells her details about the bullying she hadn't known at the time, she observes, "You knew Andy better than I did [...] I never saw him for who he was and in some ways he was my favorite child." She admits that she was always trying to turn him into a different person. They look briefly at the exhibition catalog, before Platt barges in and announces that Kitsey is running late. He says that she's been playing golf, which Theo observes is strange because the weather is terrible. Mrs. Barbour suggests that Theo and Platt go out for a pre-dinner cocktail. Theo gets a cheery text from Kitsey saying she's late and will see him soon.

Over the next week, Theo endures a "grueling" social calendar with Kitsey, where they hardly get to spend a moment alone together. He fixates on one upcoming evening, Tuesday, when both Hobie and Kitsey will be busy and he will finally get some time to himself. That evening, Theo is finishing up at the shop, and Boris arrives saying that he is going uptown to "talk to some people" (about **The Goldfinch**) and asking if Theo wants to come too. Reluctantly, Theo agrees. As Gyuri drives them up, Boris explains that the man they are going to meet, Horst, is a German friend of Myriam's born into a profoundly wealthy family.

Because Theo's life has been defined by so much radical uncertainty and devastating shocks and losses, consistency is very important to him. He finds reassurance in people who stay the same in some fundamental way, like Hobie and Mrs. Barbour, and, of course, he finds comfort in objects. More than people, objects can be relied upon to always be the same, and thus always provide the same comforts.



The fact that Kitsey can be difficult to get ahold of yet still refuses to change her phone is the first crack in the perfect façade she presents to the world. Of course, it could be totally meaningless—yet the fact that Theo mentions it indicates that it probably isn't.



To say that Mrs. Barbour is consistent is of course to gloss over the massive amount of change she has undergone over the course of the book, particularly in the wake of Andy and Mr. Barbour's deaths. Clearly, she is a very different person now than she was back when Theo first moved in with her. At the same time, there is a sense in which she has become more like herself, allowing herself to be more honest and express the opinions that she held back before. In this sense, she is both changed and consistent.



It is certainly unfortunate that just as Theo is trying to clean up his act in preparation to marry Kitsey and leave behind the shady dealings of the past, Boris comes along and drags him back toward an extremely shady side of life. At the same time, Theo certainly has the ability to refuse to follow Boris in this regard. There is evidently a part of him that cannot resist falling back into the underworld.



A heroin addict, Horst has been disowned by his family, and is abandoned by his girlfriend Ulrika, who is also an addict, whenever he runs out of money. Horst's friend Sacha was the one who messed up the transaction in which **The Goldfinch** was lost in Miami. After the men involved were arrested, Boris only got half the "goods" he was owed, and didn't get the painting back. The spot where Gyuri drops them is near the Barbour's house, outside fancy townhouses on Fifth Avenue. Boris explains that this is Horst's father's house. A blond woman (Ulrika) answers the door without saying anything. The house is majestic, but covered in litter. Books, cigarette butts, oil pastels, beer bottles, and burnt tinfoil are strewn all around. Theo also notices some significant artworks and antiques.

A man enters, looking somewhere between the ages of 30 and 50, with a grubby, "punk" look. After introducing himself, Horst invites them to stay for dinner. Theo catches sight of sleeping bags behind the tapestry, and notices a "homeless smell." Boris refuses the dinner invitation, but he and Theo accept glasses of wine. Horst says he thinks **The Goldfinch** is in Ireland, but Boris seems to think this is unlikely. While Horst and Boris talk, Horst encourages Theo to look at the paintings hung around the house, saying he can give Theo a "good price" for them. They discuss one painting, then Horst gives a long speech about *The Goldfinch* and whether the painting could be considered a trompe l'oeil.

Eventually, Theo begins to enjoy discussing **The Goldfinch** with Horst, pleased to meet someone who also knows the details that he has treasured for so long. Horst says he saw the painting for the first time when he was 12, and Theo says he was about the same age when he first saw it, too. Boris is impatient, complaining that listening to them is like watching "the education channel on television." They talk about art and antique dealing, even though "dealing" is not quite the right word for Horst's illegal activities. Horst tells Theo about a Canadian man who makes art forgeries "to order." A person could make a huge amount of money by swapping a real piece in a private collection for one of these forgeries.

Suddenly, a young "wild-haired" man enters, with an old-fashioned thermometer inside his mouth. He looks unstable, with one sleeve rolled up. He drops to the floor. Commotion ensues, and Boris suggests to Theo that they leave. Regretfully, Horst says they will have to keep talking later, calling the young man a "dumbass" in German. As they walk away, someone bundled up in a sleeping bag on the floor grabs Theo's ankle and tries to talk to him, but Boris pulls him away. Once they are out of the building, Boris assures Theo that there is nothing to worry about—sometimes the people at Horst's house do too large a shot of heroin, but they'll be ok. Theo is doubtful, but Boris assures him that Horst will have Narcan.

The physical proximity of the Barbour's apartment to Horst's house is symbolically significant. On one level, the Barbour's could not seem further from the seedy, drug-filled underworld in which Horst lives. At the same time, their literal proximity emphasizes that they are really not so different. Whether wealth takes on an elegant veneer or not, the reality is usually much darker than might initially seem to be the case.



This passage further emphasizes the close link between the criminal underworld and elite culture and society. At the same time, the sight of the sleeping bags and the "homeless smell" also connects Horst to the least privileged members of the population. This highlights the way in which drugs collapse the distance between a wealthy society addict like Horst and an addict who lives on the street.



For all of Theo and Boris' closeness, they were never able to connect over art. Boris is simply impatient and uninterested in so-called "high art." Somewhat ironically, he ends up involved in it anyway, due to his role in the criminal underground. The difference in Boris and Theo's attitudes indicates that when dealing with art theft, it might be better to be cold and detached like Boris, because emotions can interfere with one's ability to get this kind of "business" done.



There is something distinctly hellish about Horst's house, particularly in regard to the fact that it was a once beautiful place destroyed by neglect, litter, and various vices. In this sense, the house resembles the picture of Dorian Gray from Oscar Wilde's novel of the same name, which portrays an evil man who retains eerily perfect good looks while a portrait of him decays, bearing all the physical evidence of his sins.



Boris explains that Horst always has a different crowd of young people hanging around him, usually rich kids who steal art for him from their family's collection. Theo remembers a time when he passed out from taking too high a dose of opiates with an ex-girlfriend and lost consciousness, causing her to almost call 911. Boris explains that Sacha is Ulrika's brother; the two are very close, and Boris never imagined that Sacha would betray Horst. Horst still trusts him, but Boris thinks he is wrong to do so. He doesn't believe that **The Goldfinch** is in Ireland. Boris suspects that the "whole bad deal" and the arrival of the police was an elaborate setup, allowing Sacha to take the painting for himself.

Boris explains that **The Goldfinch** will never be sold, but it could remain within the underground being used as collateral "forever." This kind of collateral is highly prized by drugs, arms, and human traffickers. In response to Theo's alarm, Boris assures him that he has nothing to do with human trafficking, having come very close to being sold himself as a boy. Theo says he wants the police to find the painting, and Boris dismisses this as "all very noble." He adds that he feels optimistic about finding the painting, as it is going to move within a very small circle.

Boris is late to another appointment, and thus drives off without dropping Theo home. Theo decides to go to Kitsey's apartment, which is nearby. Although she is out at "Girl's night," Theo has a key and decides to wait for her there. Theo loves Kitsey's apartment, which is sparsely decorated but comfy, with a fridge always stocked with "Girl Food: hummus and olives, cake and champagne." When he gets there, Theo is surprised to find the chain of the front door locked. Theo knocks loudly until Kitsey's roommate Emily answers. She tells him that Kitsey isn't home and that she doesn't know what time she'll be back. When Theo asks to come in to wait for her, Emily refuses, saying it's a "bad time." Theo is incredulous, but unable to do anything when Emily closes the door.

Theo calls and then texts Kitsey to see if she wants to meet him, then goes to head downtown. However, just as he tries calling again, he sees Kitsey "arm in arm" with Tom Cable. They are carrying a bag from the wine shop where she and Theo often go. As Theo watches them, they kiss, and he sees that it is more full of "mournful tenderness" than any kiss he's shared with Kitsey. As they approach her apartment, Theo can see that Kitsey looks sad. Yet her sadness is also mixed with "joy" to be with Tom. For the first time in his life, Theo sees Kitsey crying.

*In a sense, the details of the deal in which **The Goldfinch** got lost and the network of people involved don't matter too much. The purpose this detail serves is to highlight the complexity of the art underworld, which consists of a tightly-wound network of friends, associates, lovers, and enemies. In this sense, it is again a kind of dark inversion of high society.*



Theo's horror at Boris' mention of human trafficking is in one sense understandable, but also shows how people's moral boundaries are rather arbitrary. It is simply a fact that the drug trafficking trade, for example, cannot be properly de-linked from human trafficking (and other underground markets). Participating in one means that one is at least tenuously linked to the others.



At first, the idea of going to Kitsey's pleasant, girlish apartment is the perfect antidote to the disturbing scenes Theo has just witnessed at Horst's house. However, the strange and suspicious reaction of Emily to Theo's arrival means he doesn't get the relief he is searching for. Instead, his already disturbing day only gets worse.



At this point, several clues that seem unrelated all begin to add up: Kitsey's communication "blackouts," her mysterious golfing trip in the rain, and the fact that she is never emotionally vulnerable with Theo. Because Theo was consumed with problems of his own, he didn't make the connection between these clues. Now, however, it is all too clear.



Theo doesn't sleep much, and he sits in the shop the next day in a daze. Memories are spinning through his mind, obvious signs that Kitsey was having an affair and evidence that Mrs. Barbour knows about it, too. He is supposed to go to the birthday party of Kitsey's friend that night, and he gets a text from Kitsey asking him to call her. As he is debating what to do, Boris arrives, and says he can only stay for a second but wants Theo to know that he has a lead on the painting. Theo asks for details, stressing that the painting needs to be kept in certain conditions. Boris says he doesn't know much and can't guarantee that the painting is being stored properly.

Boris also says that earlier Horst found out Theo's last name and wanted to tell him to stay away from Lucius Reeve. He adds that if Theo needs any help, both he and Horst will back him up. Boris goes to leave, apologizing that he can't stay longer. Just before he goes, Theo asks what Boris would do if thought his girlfriend was cheating on him. Boris says he would wait until an unexpected moment, then ask her outright. Boris asks if Kitsey is beautiful and intelligent, and Theo confirms that she is.

Boris then observes that Theo doesn't love her "too much," because otherwise he would be acting crazy with grief in this moment. He says that this is a good thing, adding, "Stay away from the ones you love too much. Those are the ones who will kill you." When Theo gets to Kitsey's apartment later, she chats away somewhat manically. She suggests they go to an Indian restaurant Theo once took her to, a place he used to go with Audrey that is now "the saddest restaurant in Manhattan." Theo quickly tells her to drop the act, saying he saw her with Tom in the street. Kitsey denies there's anything going on between them, insisting that Tom is just "an old friend."

Kitsey says that Tom got bad news himself the night before, and turned up unexpectedly just before "Girl's night." Theo says he doesn't believe a word of what she's saying. He notes that when he first bumped into Platt on the street months ago, Platt mentioned that Tom and Kitsey were dating. Apparently Tom has been "writing bad checks lately [and] stealing from people at the country club," something Kitsey instantly denies. Theo says he now understands that Kitsey probably felt she couldn't keep publicly dating Tom after Andy and Mr. Barbour died, but kept doing it in private. Kitsey promises that she will stop seeing Tom, saying she thought it didn't matter before she and Theo were married.

The two concurrent "plots" in Theo's life—the painting and Kitsey's affair—create a kind of chaos, leading Theo to have emotional whiplash. While he was hoping to soothe his feelings about the painting by seeing Kitsey, he is now devastated about his relationship with Kitsey, and the only promise of relief comes via the possibility that they will find the painting again.



Although Theo is seemingly still angry with Boris and likely hesitant to trust him again, he still values Boris' opinion, particularly as someone who is bold and resilient. For this reason, he turns to him for advice about Kitsey despite the tensions between them.



Boris' advice to Theo is somewhat counterintuitive, but intriguing. Whereas conventional wisdom holds that people should be with whoever they love the most, Boris is suspicious about this most passionate form of love. In light of this line of thought, he would probably advise Theo to stay away from Pippa and maintain his relationship with Kitsey instead.



It is rather hypocritical of Theo to bring up Tom's illegal and immoral behavior considering what Theo himself gets up to behind Kitsey's back. The fact that he has discovered Kitsey cheating has given Theo a moral high ground that he is arguably embracing a little too enthusiastically, because it happens to him so rarely.



Kitsey accuses Theo of enjoying his accusations because he is smirking. He mocks her, and eventually she responds, "I don't expect you to understand but it's rough to be in love with the wrong person." She says she knows that Theo doesn't really care if she's in love with someone else, and adds that she knows about his drug habit and "sleazy friends" and doesn't mind. She points out that everyone knows Theo is an addict, but has "straightened out" since he and Kitsey got together. She emphasizes that Mrs. Barbour adores Theo, and that him coming back into her life gave her the will to live again. Kitsey concludes that her marriage to Theo "makes sense for everyone involved, not least us."

To Theo's surprise, he begins to feel less angry. Kitsey kisses him on the cheek and says, "Let's both be good, and truthful, and kind to each other, and let's be happy together and have fun always." He ends up staying over. They order takeout. It isn't hard to keep "pretending," which Theo now admits is what they were both doing the whole time. Their relationship now reminds Theo of the first girl he dated. He was 16 and she was 27, with a boyfriend living in California. Theo obsessed over her, but never really loved her, and found it difficult to even talk to her. Now he wonders he loves Kitsey.

Theo wakes at 4am and smokes a cigarette. He is consumed by panic about the condition of **The Goldfinch**. He notices that Kitsey's phone isn't in the place she usually keeps it on the side of the table. He imagines her and Tom talking, and realizes that he can actually see how they are well matched. He imagines Tom "calling her silly names in bed and tickling her until she shrieked." Unable to fall asleep again, Theo leaves without telling her. When he gets back to Hobie's house, he is stunned to see Pippa there, still wearing her pajamas. She explains that she's going to Montreal to see a friend called Sam, before meeting Everett in California. Her plane was rerouted and she decided to stop by for a visit.

Pippa notes that it was good timing, as Theo's engagement party is the next day. She wishes him congratulations on his marriage and kisses him on the cheek. She says Hobie has gone out to the bakery to pick up the blueberry biscuits that were always her favorites as a child. Pippa then tells Theo that she's burned some CDs for him but doesn't have them with her; Theo says he's burned CDs for her, too. In fact, Theo has lots of gifts for Pippa, most of which he won't give to her. For him, buying her things is a way of "being with her." Feeling nervous, Theo hurries to his room, but then shouts an invitation for Pippa to come to the movies with him that night. She agrees.

Kitsey is insightful enough to know that Theo doesn't love her as much as he could, but ironically, she doesn't realize that this is (at least in part) because he is also in love with someone else (the "wrong person"). In this sense, they are actually quite perfectly matched. On the other hand, it is understandable why Theo would be resistant to getting married based on mutual lies.



Although Theo is likely in a state of shock, perhaps it is also something of a relief to hear Kitsey articulate the reality that their marriage is an arrangement built on mutual secrecy. This version of marriage may be based in a somewhat old-fashioned, conservative idea of prioritizing showing a "good face" above all else, but perversely, it may actually liberate both of them to be themselves.



The sudden arrival of Pippa thanks to her plane being rerouted is another coincidence that seems to have been determined by fate (at least, this is certainly how Theo would likely choose to interpret it, considering he is so committed to the idea that they are meant to be together). Yet in a sense, Pippa's arrival doesn't change the situation between him and Kitsey, which has been exposed as more of a mutually beneficial arrangement than true love.



Theo and Pippa appear to have a very romantic friendship, but it is difficult to tell if this impression emerges purely because the story is told from Theo's perspective. It is easy to imagine that if this were Pippa's narrative, the reader might be given a very different impression of the relationship between Pippa and Theo.



Theo spends all day thinking about his plans for the evening: what he will wear, where he will take Pippa for dinner. Hobie knows about Theo's love for Pippa, although they've never discussed it. He asks about Theo and Pippa's plans that evening, and Theo is forced to admit they're going to a movie he's already seen. He asks Hobie not to mention to Pippa that he's seen it. Hobie offers to watch the show while Theo gets ready for the evening. Theo is so happy that he hums a tune on the way to the theater, yet when he sees Pippa he is overcome with nervousness. Inside the theater, Theo subtly keeps an eye on Pippa, and is horrified when he realizes that she doesn't seem to like the movie, and is actually sad.

After they leave the theater, Theo says he noticed that Pippa didn't like the movie. In some kind of daze, Pippa tries to call a cab to take them home, but Theo suggests they get some food first. Luckily, the wine bar they randomly dash into is very cozy and romantic. Their conversation is long, covering many topics, and Theo feels thrilled to be in her company. He doesn't think anyone listens to him like she does, and being around her makes him feel like a better person. As Pippa explains that she actually loved the film, Theo gazes at her and thinks that this is "one of the great nights of [his] life."

With great sadness, Pippa talks about the fact that the attack at **the Met** ruined her chances of being a professional musician. She adds that she can't even go to concerts because they trigger her PTSD. Yet the issue isn't so much the crowds, and more the intense jealousy and resentment she feels of the people who are able to have careers in music. Going to a concert puts her in a terrible mood for days, and she ends up arguing with herself. Pippa doesn't need to have a job; she supports both herself and Everett with Welty and Margaret's money. She also says that she doesn't like London.

When Theo tells Pippa to move back to New York, she says she's been considering it. She observes that Theo doesn't like Everett, but says that he would if he knew him better. She adds that Hobie is always trying to get her to move back to New York. Yet she admits that she likes the fact that in London, she is not constantly reminded of her life before the attack. She feels that her life froze at the age of 13, and even notes that she stopped growing that day. While she is talking, Theo takes her hand. She admits that she obsesses over the details over the day, and how she could have avoided being at **the Met** if she had done things differently. Theo says he feels the same way, but then notes that it is of course crazy to be blame oneself for not being able to predict the future.

Hobie has always had the ability to almost psychically intuit Theo's feelings, which can backfire when—as in this case—Theo would rather keep his true, doomed love for Pippa a secret. At the same time, it is curious that Hobie's intuition doesn't seem to work when it comes to the fraudulent scheme Theo has been running.



It is interesting that Theo classifies this as one of the greatest nights of his life, considering it is founded on a fundamental secret and (likely) lack of reciprocity. Perhaps Theo's inclination for isolation and secrecy has meant that on some level he comes to favor fantasy over reality.



Despite Pippa's immense privileges, the deaths of Welty and Juliet, and—perhaps more than anything—the loss of her potential career as a musician have doomed her to be a tragic figure. While she may experience joy again, her life will always in some sense fundamentally be ruined—something that, of course, closely aligns her with Theo.



When Theo advises Pippa to move back to New York, he is not thinking of her best interests (however much it might actually benefit her to move back), but of his own selfish desires. It is clear that Theo's love for Pippa is a desire to possess her, not a desire for her to be happy—and this is shown by his ongoing hatred of Everett, despite the fact that she seems to genuinely love him.



Becoming increasingly upset, Pippa recalls that she begged Welty to come uptown with her on the day of the attack, because she wanted him to take her out to lunch before her audition for the Juilliard pre-college program. Theo tells Pippa that Welty “knew what he was doing,” then hesitantly explains that he has gone to see a woman named Barbara Guibbory who hosts “past-life-regression” seminars upstate. Although Pippa looks confused and a little alarmed, Theo continues, explaining how he believes that Welty’s energy has stayed with him ever since the day of the attack. This is why Theo was drawn to antiques, and why he was instantly so skilled at doing Welty’s old job. Their meeting must have been fated.

As Theo is talking, Pippa stares at him intensely, taking seriously everything he says. The next day they are “awkward” with each other again, with all the emotional intensity of the previous evening gone. He thinks about the long, vulnerable talks they’d had the previous summer, sitting outside on the stoop long after it was dark. As soon as they went back inside, though, the “spell was broken,” and they became shy and formal with each other again.

Theo’s engagement party is taking place at a highly esteemed private club, hosted by Kitsey’s godmother, Anne de Larmessin. Hundreds of people are invited, only about a dozen of whom are Theo’s guests. The mayor and both New York senators will both be there. Because Mrs. Barbour failed to do so herself, Anne has taken over the planning of every aspect of the wedding. The irony of this is that Anne disapproves of Theo so much that she practically refuses to look at him. Before heading to the party, Theo gets “good and looped” on opiates. When he sees Kitsey she comments that he looks “sad” and he replies “I am,” but she doesn’t seem to hear him.

Mrs. Barbour sees Theo and introduces him to the man she is talking to, Havistock Irving. Havistock says he knows who Theo is because he knows Hobie, and knew Welty. Havistock also mentions that he is a “close associate” of Lucius Reeve. He notes that Theo sold Reeve a “very interesting chest-on-chest.” Theo comments that he’s been trying to buy the chest back, and Havistock notes that Reeve has been doing research on other pieces Theo has sold, too, indicating that he knows they are not authentic. Theo panics. At this moment, Kitsey comes over, and Havistock takes her aside to get a drink and “have a good long gossip about your fiancé.”

While going to a past-life regression seminar might appear bizarre, overall the novel supports Theo’s interpretation that he was destined to meet Welty and that Welty has stayed with him ever since that day. This certainly seems evident in the fact that Theo loves the antiques trade and has such a natural aptitude for the business. At the same time, it remains unclear whether Theo and Pippa were truly fated to meet (and, by implication, be together).



Perhaps the reason why Theo and Pippa always become stiff and formal with each other after their intense talks is simply because it is too traumatizing to linger in that state of emotional vulnerability for too long.



The engagement party is a perfect metaphor for Kitsey and Theo’s relationship: designed to please others by putting on a show of happiness that masks the reality underneath. Of course, the complicating factor in all this is that Theo genuinely wants to please Mrs. Barbour—this is actually a big incentive of him getting married. The novel leaves it ambiguous whether this is even necessarily a bad thing.



The oscillation between hope and despair returns in full force here. Just as it seems as if Theo and Kitsey reached an equilibrium and agreement to maintain the façade of their relationship, Havistock Irving comes along and threatens to ruin everything. If Irving ends up revealing the truth of Theo’s fraudulent scheme, then the reason for Theo marrying Kitsey in the first place will dissolve in a rather dramatic way.



Mrs. Barbour says that she is glad Havistock is gone because small talk tires her. Theo is so panicked that he is drenched in sweat. Mrs. Barbour notes that Havistock is a busybody who volunteers at the New York Historical Society, and thus “knows everything, and everyone.” She says he can be charming and is good about “visiting the old ladies,” but disapproves of his fondness for gossip. Wearily, she announces that she is tired and hungry. Theo finds a chair to sit in and offers to get her some food. Theo tries to dash over to Hobie, but is interrupted by Platt, who asks if everything is ok between Theo and Kitsey.

Unexpectedly, Platt announces that Tom doesn't love Kitsey, and that Theo coming into her life was the best thing that could have happened to her. He adds that the reason why she didn't go to visit Mr. Barbour the weekend that he and Andy died was because she was with Tom. He adds that Tom “leech[e] money” from Kitsey and has affairs with other women. Theo comments that Kitsey is still passionately in love with Tom, and Platt observes that women fall in love with “assholes.” Theo tells Platt that Mrs. Barbour needs some food and a drink, and Platt hurries off.

Theo tries to get a moment alone with Hobie, but strangers keep approaching to congratulate him and make friendly comments. Finally pulling Hobie to one side, Theo asks if he knows Havistock Irving. Hobie says he doesn't exactly know him, but has interacted with him before. He explains that Havistock Irving is not his real name; Hobie doesn't know what it is, because he has changed his name multiple times. Hobie explains that Havistock and his partner, Lucius Race, would go and visit elderly women and men, then steal valuable items from them. They would pretend to be furniture appraisers or even family members in order to get access to their victims.

Hobie recalls that years ago, Havistock came into the shop with a bunch of silver and jewelry he wanted to sell, which he claimed he'd inherited from family members. Hobie and Welty realized that the items were stolen; they accepted them on consignment, then turned Havistock and “Lucius Race” into the police. Hobie thinks Lucius served prison time. Theo asks him to describe what Lucius looked like, which confirms that he is indeed Lucius Reeve. Hobie points out that these men are in no position to be trying to intimidate Theo, which Theo knows is not true. Hobie advises Theo to warn Mrs. Barbour not to let Havistock into her house.

Lucius Reeve and Havistock Irving are rather typical villains, sinister characters who—despite giving off a veneer of kindness and charm—in fact seem to serve no other function than to wreak havoc in Theo's life.



Here it becomes clear that Platt set Kitsey up with Theo not only because he personally hates Tom and disapproves of him as a partner for Kitsey, but also because he blames Tom as the reason why Andy and Mr. Barbour died. This is entirely irrational, of course, but as the book has shown, grief makes people think in irrational ways.



Considering that Irving and Reeve have spent so much time intimidating Theo for being engaged in immoral and illegal behavior, it is rather ironic that they themselves have a history of shady activity. This suggests that it sometimes takes someone engaged in shady dealings to point out the shady dealings of others.



*Now it becomes clear that Reeve was so desperate to implicate Hobie in Theo's fraud (and theft of *The Goldfinch*) because Reeve had a personal vendetta against Hobie as the person who sent him to prison. In a way, this is a relief for Theo, because Reeve has an obvious motivation for trying to bring Hobie down, which will discredit him. At the same time, of course, this does not provide any true relief.*



The next few hours are overwhelming; Theo is so busy talking to people that he doesn't have time to get himself a drink or any food. As the party clears out, he spies Boris in the distance with his arm around Pippa. Theo goes over to them, and Boris greets him warmly. Although he invited Boris, Theo never expected that he would actually come. Theo asks for a moment alone with Boris, and as they walk away Boris comments on how beautiful Pippa is. Theo explains that Pippa is not the woman he's marrying, and Boris observes that he's blushing. However, when Theo points out Kitsey in the crowd, Boris announces that she is the "Loveliest woman in the room! Divine! A goddess!"

Boris jokes that Kitsey is too good for Theo, and Theo replies that many people think this. He also indicates that Kitsey is the woman he mentioned who has been cheating on him. Boris then says that the two of them need to leave. He says Theo needs to get his passport and some cash, and to make arrangements to go away for a few days. A photographer keeps taking pictures of them as Theo tells Kitsey that he has to leave right away. Kitsey protests that Anne has a reservation at a restaurant, but Theo insists that she will have to make an excuse for him, for example by saying that he had to take Mrs. Barbour home. He notices that she's wearing Audrey's earrings, which don't suit her, and he suddenly feels moved.

Theo assures her he will be back soon, even though he's not sure of this at all. He tells her to make sure Mrs. Barbour stays away from Havistock, and Kitsey mentions that he's been calling on them incessantly lately. Theo then tells Hobie that he's leaving. Hobie seems worried about him. Theo finds Boris, who is drinking a glass of champagne. He wants to say goodbye to Pippa, but can't find her.

PART 5, CHAPTER 11: THE GENTLEMAN'S CANAL

Boris and Theo are picked up in a town car. The driver is not Gyuri but another man, who only speaks Russian. Boris explains that Gyuri is already in Antwerp, where Boris has an apartment and a car. Theo and Boris are flying to Amsterdam, and Gyuri will meet them there. They are on different flights; Boris is flying via Frankfurt, and Theo is going direct. He asks Theo about bringing cash again, then explains that he's going to pretend to buy the painting from the people who stole it, but won't pay the full amount. He plans to give them a phony bank draft, which he's not sure they will accept. He notes that these men are "inexperienced, and desperate."

Boris and Theo always had very different taste in women—this is evidently as true today as when they were teenagers. However, Boris' preference for Kitsey will likely only reinforce Theo's love for Pippa, considering he has admitted that one of the things he loves about Pippa is that she is not an obvious object of desire.



The conclusion of this chapter suggests that, for all their dysfunction, Theo and Kitsey may really work as a couple. Furthermore, just because their relationship is on some level for show doesn't mean that they don't actually love each other. Perhaps one version of love is simply choosing to make compromises and doing one's best to ensure the other person's happiness. In fact, this version of love seems rather noble.



Theo's decision to leave his own engagement party to go to an unknown destination with Boris shows how much he still trusts him, despite everything. Either that, or it conveys the crazed desperation Theo has to be reunited with the painting.



The whole situation seems sketchy to say the least—it is clear that what Boris is suggesting they do is highly dangerous. Yet Boris' bold, daring manner—as well as Theo's desperation—means that Theo is prepared to trust him regardless.



Theo dashes into the shop and takes all the cash there, which he thinks probably adds up to about \$16,000. He hastily packs a bag. He leaves a book for Pippa, inscribing the message: "Safe trip. I love you. No kidding." He then grabs an expensive eighteenth-century topaz necklace that he bought at an auction house and leaves that for her as well.

Theo and Boris' flights depart from different terminals, so they say goodbye inside the car. Before getting on the plane, Theo drinks a glass of vodka at the airport bar. He falls asleep on the plane, and wakes up while the flight attendants are serving breakfast. He meets Boris at baggage claim, and they go straight to meet Gyuri, who is already waiting outside for them. Theo is surprised to see Amsterdam totally lit up with Christmas decorations. Myriam has booked Theo a hotel. He goes in to drop his bags and lock his cash in the safe before rejoining Boris and Gyuri outside. They walk for a while, then go into a dark establishment that could be a café or a bar.

To Theo's surprise, Boris orders in Dutch. The waiter brings sausage, bread, potatoes, sauerkraut, and beer. While he eats, Boris observes that Horst should move to Amsterdam, as it is the perfect city for him. When Theo asks, Boris notes that Horst does not know they are here. He explains that he needs to sort the whole thing out himself because Sacha is Ulrika's brother. Theo suggests that if Boris knows who has **The Goldfinch**, they should just call the police and tip them off. He says the call could be anonymous, and he assures Boris that the art police do not have anything to do with the normal police. He emphasizes that this would be the best way to ensure that the painting is not damaged.

Gyuri notices that Theo is not eating and tells him to do so, but Boris says, "Let him starve if he wants." Boris then angrily tells Theo to forget all about the idea of phoning the art-crimes police. Boris says he does not know where the painting is exactly, but got a reliable tip off from a powerful man working in real estate who is a "father" to Boris' friend Cherry. Theo realizes that, considering he doesn't know anything about Sacha and that Cherry is only a nickname, he wouldn't personally be able to give the art-crimes police any real information.

Perhaps Theo thinks he may die on this trip, which is why he is choosing the risky move of expressing his love for Pippa while he still can.



There is something eerie about going to another country during Christmastime to commit a heist. However, it is also very fitting for Boris and Theo's friendship. Recall that many of the important scenes from their friendship have occurred on holidays, either Christmas or Thanksgiving. "Celebrating" holidays together (in all kinds of nontraditional manners) shows how they fill in for each other's families without acting like family members in any normal sense.



Although Theo is now suggesting that they call the art police, it is easy to believe that this suggestion might be disingenuous. Many years passed when Theo could have (anonymously) tipped off the art police and chose not to do so. It seems he is only suggesting it now because he knows that Boris will refuse.



As a member of the criminal underworld, it is hardly surprising that Boris doesn't want to involve the police in this affair. Indeed, Boris' network seems to make the police somewhat irrelevant anyway.



Boris explains that he originally planned to arrange a meeting at Theo's hotel. Theo would pretend to be a wealthy American "big shot" who wanted to buy the painting. However, this plan fell through because the people who have **The Goldfinch** are paranoid, and want to choose their own location for the transaction. Boris announces he's sleepy and needs a nap. He says he is staying at his girlfriend's place and that he doesn't know the address, but that if they need to meet he will just come to Theo's hotel. He promises to call Theo when he has more information, and tells him not to worry.

Theo gets lost while walking back to his hotel and wanders around for hours, taking in the sights of the city. He thinks about how much Hobie would love it there, and how the whole city has a "Hobie-like wholesomeness." Theo himself feels overwhelmed, and eventually resorts to asking strangers in order to find his way back to the hotel. After having a shower he gets a call from Boris, who announces he is coming up to Theo's room. Entering the room with Gyuri, Boris tells Theo to clean up, lamenting that Theo's suit looks slept in. Seeing Boris put together a pistol, Theo is horrified, but Boris assures him, "Is just for show!"

Boris says that he was worried Sacha would be at the meeting, but luckily Sacha doesn't want to be there in case it gets back to Horst. He explains that Theo will be performing the part of a rich man, while Boris and Gyuri will pretend to be his bodyguards. Alarmed, Theo tells Boris he can't go through with it. However, Boris refuses to accept this, reminding Theo that they are doing it in order to get **The Goldfinch** back. Boris hands Theo a diamond-studded Rolex to wear, and Gyuri gives him a diamond ring. After lamenting that Theo still does not look rich enough, Boris starts stacking the cash inside a leather bag.

Boris explains that unfortunately, getting to the location of the meeting will require driving out of the city and back in again. He asks for Theo's passport to store in the glovebox, explaining that it would be better not to have any ID on him if they get stopped by the police—even though it is illegal not to carry ID in Amsterdam. They drive to a parking garage, where they meet Cherry (who introduces himself with his real name, Victor) and a baby-faced, curly-haired young man nicknamed Shirley Temple. All five men get into a Range Rover and set off again. In the car, Boris, Victor, and Gyuri discuss Sacha's drug habit, pointing out that any money he gets he immediately blows on heroin.

Although the elaborate planning of the scheme creates increasing suspense, it doesn't seem as if Boris is truly worried. Indeed, Boris' total fearlessness in almost every situation is a hallmark of his character and part of what makes him so appealing. Growing up so neglected by both his parents seems to have endowed him with an inability to fear, even when it is for his own life.



There is stark contrast between the "Hobie-like wholesomeness" of Amsterdam as a city and the potentially violent heist that Theo and Boris are involving themselves in. Indeed, the juxtaposition of these two opposites has defined Theo's life ever since the terrorist attack at the Met. He is constantly caught between two worlds, always pulled from one to the other, never totally satisfied to remain in either.



In a sense, the whole situation strongly resembles a game Theo and Boris might have played when they were young. There is a strong quality of unreality the whole situation. The fact that Theo has become so accustomed to being in the elite world and selling fake antiques to clients hopefully indicates that he will be able to "sell" a fake rich version of himself to the gangsters they are meeting.



As Theo has learned many times in his life so far, a drug habit can make a person vulnerable, because it often robs one of the ability to make prudent, rational decisions. At the same time, in Theo's own case, his drug habit generally helped him to be higher functioning—so he can only hope that the same is not true of Sacha.



Victor says he is glad that the men they are meeting have changed the location so many times, because it gave him an excuse to tell them that Theo was tired of being messed around and was backing out of the deal. This caused the men to panic. Victor has also told them that Theo's plane back to Amsterdam leaves the next day, and has forewarned them that he will be paying with a bank draft. He says they are meeting the men at a "hippie" café called the Purple Cow, near the Red Light District. They chose it because it is a "quiet street in the evening," and that the café will be closed to the public.

Victor says he has told the men that Theo is a wealthy art dealer who was arrested for forgery, and now runs a scheme similar to Horst's, but one that is far more profitable. He advises Theo not to say much. Boris hands Theo the bank draft and deposit slip, which are under the name of Farruco Frantisek. Theo is horrified at the ridiculousness of the name, but Boris said he had no choice in picking it. As they drive down the street that the Purple Cow is on, Theo sees that all the other businesses are shut except for a lone Indonesian restaurant.

As Theo peers through the glass window of the Purple Cow and sees the menu, he realizes that the last proper meal he ate was takeout curry in Kitsey's apartment two days ago. Seeing Theo stare, Boris assures him that after the deal, they will go out for a "really good dinner." A scrawny man comes to the door and looks at them, seemingly unsure whether to let them in. A younger, very tall man with a face tattoo joins him. The older man takes a phone call, then lets them in. Theo feels grateful that he has bought enough drugs in sketchy situations to know what to do: act "relaxed and disengaged," say nothing unless absolutely necessary, and trust that it will soon be over.

Boris explains that the reason why the men are being so shifty is that one of their associates has not yet shown up, and they want to wait for him. The older man indicates that he wants to see the contents of the leather bag, and Gyuri shows him. Theo introduces himself by his fake first name, having forgotten the surname. After seeing a gesture from Cherry, Theo reaches for the papers, ready to hand them over. However, just at this moment Cherry whacks the older man with the butt of his gun, knocking him out. Meanwhile, Boris and Gyuri pull their guns on the other man. Theo sees a figure who looks like a young Asian boy dart through the kitchen in the back of the café and alert the others.

The fact that no one seems concerned over the fact that Theo has no experience of involvement with these kinds of dealings is perhaps worrying. On the other hand, it could all be part of the role that Theo is trying to play, of a rich man who doesn't have to do things himself because he employs other people to do them for him.



Again, the backstory of Theo's invented art dealer character serves as a reminder of the proximity between the official, above-board art world and the underground "art world." Both of these spheres deal with extremely expensive goods, extremely rich clients, and the often shady consequences of the combination of the two—the fact that one is officially legal and one isn't seems almost immaterial.



Boris' intuitive knowledge of what Theo is thinking shows how close they are after all these years. (It seems particularly significant that Boris was able to tell Theo was hungry and dreaming of his next meal, and this was the state in which he and Theo spent most of their time in their youth.) Boris' words of reassurance show how much love and care he has for Theo still today.



Although Boris and his crew appear to have control over the situation, the diversion from the plan is obviously worrying. The crew were planning to steal from the men selling the painting anyway by failing to pay the full amount, but having seen that they are a man down, they choose to take advantage and not pay them anything at all.



Victor has the older man in a chokehold, while the younger man says they will regret this. Still pointing his gun at him, Boris tells the younger man to get on the floor. Obeying this command, the younger man says that he knows Boris' identity, saying he is "Horst's mate," "Borya the Polack." Victor comes out from the back carrying a package that looks like **The Goldfinch**, and ties the younger man's wrists into plastic flexcuffs. Boris tells Theo to get back in the car, which he does, scrambling as fast as he can. While Gyuri keeps watch, Boris and Victor dash into the car as well. They drive away.

Once they are off, everyone in the car starts laughing in relief, although Theo is still so scared he can hardly breathe. Boris explains that what just happened was "improvised." The fact that the third man didn't show gave them the opportunity to take the painting without paying anything, and they decided to seize it. Joyfully, they joke about how angry Sacha is going to be when he finds out and how grateful they are to the man who didn't show. Theo asks about the young person in the kitchen, who evidently fled after seeing what was going on, but the other men do not seem bothered. Victor says he found a shotgun back there, indicating that the third man was supposed to come in through the back and potentially shoot all of them.

Victor passes the package back to the Theo, and Boris starts to hum, "We wish you a merry Christmas." Boris tells Theo that he is giving the cash to Gyuri and Shirley Temple to thank them for their help. He assures Victor that his debt is now paid, although Victor replies, "I can never repay what I owe you, Borya." Meanwhile, Theo opens the package and is astonished to find that it really is **The Goldfinch**. He is so overwhelmed that even after Boris tells him to say something, he can't do it. Boris teases Theo, asking if he still wants to call the art police.

Back in the parking garage, the men split up, promising to meet at a restaurant called Blake's in an hour. As Boris and Theo are left alone, Boris asks to see **The Goldfinch**. He remarks that it was a lot of trouble to get it back, but that it was worth it, and Theo agrees. Boris reminds Theo that if he ever wants to sell the painting, he can arrange it. When Theo shakes his head, Boris assures him that he was just joking. Boris suggests that Theo keep it for a while before returning it to the "museum people." Theo doesn't say anything.

The abrupt end to the heist is an uncertain triumph. The men get away with the painting without paying, but the threat of the man who says he knows Boris' identity suggests that there may be more trouble waiting in the future.



The fact that the other men do not seem bothered by the young person in the kitchen should come as a relief—after all, as professional criminals, they know more than Theo. At the same time, maybe their adrenaline and their desire to feel triumph are clouding their judgment. The "high" of success, like the high of drugs, can lead to irrational thinking.



Now that the drama of the heist has subsided, the emotional weight of what Boris has done for Theo comes into focus. Of course, some would argue that giving back something he originally stole hardly makes Boris a hero. Yet his determination to retrieve the painting shows how much Boris truly cares about Theo and regrets betraying him. He has righted his wrong.



Considering that the reader knows Boris doesn't particularly care about art, when he says it was "worth" the effort it took to get the painting back, he evidently means it was worth it in the context of his and Theo's restored friendship and making Theo happy.



Just as Boris and Theo are about to get in the car, an American voice behind them says, “Merry Christmas.” Turning around, Theo sees two-middle aged men and the young Asian boy from the Purple Cow’s kitchen. Theo looks at Boris, who has turned totally white. Boris greets the American, whose name is Martin, while the other man, Frits, approaches Boris and removes the gun from his waistband. Martin then points a gun at Boris, telling him to hand over *The Goldfinch*. When Boris refuses, Theo tells him to do it. Frits pulls Boris by the hair and points a gun to his forehead. Boris gives Theo a look which means *Run*. After Theo again tells Boris to hand over the painting, Boris does so.

Holding **The Goldfinch**, Martin tells Frits to take Boris and Theo over to a shadowy corner of the garage. As Frits turns to Theo, pointing the gun at him and gesturing to move toward the corner, Boris manages to stab Frits in the neck with his cigarette. Suddenly, the sound of four gunshots echoes around the garage, and Theo sees a spray of blood. Both Frits and Boris are on the floor. Theo runs to help Boris, then sees Martin scrambling to grab his gun. Without comprehending what he is doing, Theo grabs a gun from the floor and shoots Martin, hitting him in the shoulder. Theo doubles over and starts retching. Boris runs toward him, saying “he’s gone, I couldn’t catch him, he got away.” The young boy has escaped with *The Goldfinch*.

Boris pulls Theo up, saying it’s all over and telling him, “You saved us.” Boris drags them into a grimy bathroom, taking off Theo’s coat and shirt, which are splattered with blood. Boris laments that when Theo told him about the person in the kitchen, he didn’t listen. He explains that the young boy is Sacha’s boyfriend. Boris pushes Theo’s head under the faucet, and Theo balks at the freezing cold water. Boris continues to explain that both Martin and Frits were high, which made them clumsy and slow. They were lucky because of this, and because Martin did not expect Boris to be carrying two guns.

Having washed off the blood, Boris and Theo stumble back to the car and get in. Boris says they better not be pulled over because he is not allowed to drive after a drunk-driving conviction. As they drive back through Amsterdam, Boris nervously mentions that police there are often in unmarked vehicles. He explains that both Frits and Martin work for Horst. Boris has a major wound on his arm, but he dismisses it as “just a graze.” He says he needs to warn the others, and hopes they have gone straight to Blake’s. Boris continues chattering away, wondering aloud if Horst knew all along that Sacha had taken the painting. Theo asks what they are going to do, and at first Boris thinks he’s just talking about driving directions.

*In this dramatic twist, Boris further proves his love for Theo by initially refusing to give up the painting. While this could be read as simply evidence of his foolish recklessness, it could also be seen as proof that Boris would risk death in order to make Theo happy and honor his promise of getting *The Goldfinch* back to him.*



The lack of clarity over what happens between Boris stabbing Frits with his cigarette and Theo shooting Martin vividly recreates Theo’s own confusion and panic. This helps to realistically convey why Theo would be inclined to shoot Martin, something that would otherwise likely have been very difficult or impossible for him to do. Thinking fast, Theo acted on his instincts, thereby saving his and Boris’ lives.



*Boris and Theo’s miraculous escape is obviously tainted by the loss of *The Goldfinch*, but this moment is still mostly defined by the “high” of relief. Again, once the adrenaline rush gives way, it is likely that—like a real drug high—the feeling may give way to despair.*



Although Boris is concerned with whether Horst set them up and how the other members of the crew are doing, he does not seem particularly bothered by the fact that he and Theo have just killed two people. Theo, meanwhile, is coming to terms with the fact that he has committed murder. Again, this is likely not helped by the disappearance of his adrenaline and the high of relief at being alive himself.



Realizing that Theo is referring to the shootout, Boris assures him that they will be fine. No one will be able to trace it back to them, and it was lucky that they were there together, because they trust each other completely. He adds that they don't have to worry about Sacha's boyfriend handing them into the police, because he is an illegal immigrant. Theo points out that the boy has **The Goldfinch**, and with great sadness Boris concedes that the painting is probably now gone forever. They get stuck behind a van, and Boris eventually tells Theo to get out and walk to his hotel, as they are nearby. He adds that it is probably better for them to split up anyway.

When Theo hesitates, Boris impatiently tells him to get out. He advises Theo not to call him, but to trust that he will be in touch soon. He hands Theo a small glassine envelope, saying "Not too much, it is very pure." As Theo gets out of the car, Boris starts speaking in quick Ukrainian on the phone to Cherry. Meanwhile, Theo spends an hour in the cold trying to find his hotel. He has taken off his glasses because he knows these are what people usually remember him by. When Theo eventually finds his hotel, he notices the receptionist staring at the stain on his suit, and says that he spilled chocolate sauce on himself. As the receptionist offers to have the shirt laundered, Theo feels sure that he reeks of blood.

Inside his room, Theo removes his bloody clothes and puts them in the bath, soaking them in hot water. He tries scrubbing out the stains with soap, then uses toothpaste, which works fairly well but still does not get the blood out properly. After scrubbing his clothes, Theo gets in the shower himself, with the water turned up to an uncomfortably hot temperature. He falls asleep and wakes up to the sound of the doorbell. It is a woman in uniform, who says that the front desk told her that Theo requested laundry service. Forced to make a quick decision, Theo decides to hand over the clothes, reasoning that the blood is mostly out. However, as soon as he does so he regrets it. He calls the front desk and asks if the laundry has already gone out; he is told it has.

Theo takes a tiny amount of the heroin Boris gave him and instantly feels blissful. When the doorbell rings, he answers it dreamily. The woman returns his laundry, apologizing that it is later than promised. Theo can barely comprehend what she is saying, and accepts the laundry without tipping her, realizing that he would not be capable of handling money. He thinks about how silly it is to worry about anything. He orders room service and vomits up the meal almost as soon as he eats it, but even this is fun and pleasant. He can tell that he is sick with fever, but this doesn't trouble him either. He goes to sleep, and has a surreal, vivid dream about Andy.

While on the surface everything seems alright, Boris' assurances ring somewhat hollow—particularly due to the fact that he already claimed everything was fine after the first incident at the Purple Cow, only to have them almost be killed again. Of course, Theo has little choice but to trust whatever Boris says—he is completely dependent on him.



Although Theo is trying to help cover his tracks, in reality his erratic behavior and foolish choices (such as taking off his glasses) end up working against him. It is unclear whether Theo's conviction that he smells of blood is real, or if this is simply his paranoia. Either way, it is obvious that the more time Theo spends alone, the more paranoid and irrational he is getting.



Again, the decisions Theo makes here are patently unwise. Either choosing to give over his laundry or keeping it for himself would be far wiser than trying to go back on the choice he made. Without Boris' guidance, Theo's ability to make prudent decisions has fallen apart. In a sense, Theo is sinking into his worst nightmare, a repeat of what happened on the night after the terrorist attack: being left totally alone in the aftermath of a traumatic incident.



While the heroin temporarily provides Theo with a profound sense of peace and security, this is another example of the false hope provided by drugs, which will inevitably give way to despair that is even worse than the despair experienced before. Of course, by this point the reader is familiar with the pattern, and thus it is extra painful to witness Theo about to fall into it once again.



Theo wakes up feeling terrified, nauseated, and extremely ill. He throws up again, then removes his laundry from the bag. He tries to see if there are any stains on the clothes, but his “eyes still [aren’t] working quite right.” He feels like he is still half-dreaming, but his dream is about the abject horror of the world and the pointless misery of human existence. He thinks about Larry, whose gambling habit made him obsessed with finding the hidden pattern in things. However, Theo concludes that there is never really a pattern, only “emptiness.”

Recall that when Theo took acid in Las Vegas, he felt a profound sense of connection, which could be compared to the “pattern” Larry was seeking to find while gambling. In this sense, addictive behaviors are just intense ways of trying to find meaning and rhythm in life. The comedown from a high, therefore, feels like proof that there is no meaning.



PART 5, CHAPTER 12: THE RENDEZVOUS POINT

As Christmas approaches, Theo loses track of time, thanks to his solitude and his illness. He watches local news even though he can’t understand what it says, and also reads the hotel’s copies of Dutch newspapers. At one point while watching TV he saw Larry at 25, in a non-speaking role in a cop show. His only interactions with other people occur when he orders room service, but even this he limits to the early hours of the morning. The sun doesn’t rise until 9am, and sets at 5pm. At one point Theo runs to a store to buy essentials, including cleaning products for the stains that remain on his clothing. He recalls Boris saying they would only be gone for “a little while.”

Theo’s strange habits and waking hours are obviously making his feelings of paranoia and illness worse, but there is understandably little he can do. In trying to follow Boris’ advice, he has ended up a prisoner trapped in a cell. He is completely vulnerable, dependent on someone who has disappeared—the exact same thing that happened when Audrey died.



Theo has come to process Martin’s death as “a social and moral lesson.” Yet he remains tormented by the fact that **The Goldfinch** is gone. A number of days pass before Theo can even bring himself to open the blackout shade in his room. When he does so, he sees a TV crew filming something about Christmas tourists below, and he closes it quickly again. He won’t even order coffee from room service, because earlier he saw an article in one of the Dutch newspapers with a picture of the parking garage with police tape across it. He pores over the article, but can’t really understand it. Over the next few days, the papers feature more articles, this time accompanied by a photo of Frits. Theo is desperate to see Boris.

The contrast between the Christmas festivities outside and the hell in which Theo is trapped is disturbing and surreal. It is as if Theo no longer really exists, trapped in a state of unreality in which he is not real to the rest of the world, and the rest of the world is not real to him.



After resisting contacting Boris for days, Theo sends him a text saying, “Where are you?” However, soon after his phone dies, and even after borrowing a charger from the front desk he can’t make it work again. Theo tells himself he could take a cab to the airport and pay for a flight home with his credit card. He thinks about Mrs. Barbour’s assistant, who would be able to do something like get a flight on Christmas Eve at the last minute, and feels comforted. While Theo doesn’t want to leave Amsterdam without knowing that Boris is alright, he is also desperate to get back to the US. However, just as he is imagining the relief of arriving home, he remembers that he left his passport in the glovebox of Gyuri’s car.

This passage serves as a reminder that Theo is even more dependent on Boris than he initially imagined. The only thing he has to keep him going during this time is his trust that Boris will come back for him. However, this provides little comfort in the face of his illness, paranoia, and guilt.



Theo recalls that there is no border control within the European Union, and reasons that he could get the train to somewhere like Paris and apply for a new passport at the American consulate there. The next day, Christmas Eve, he forces himself to eat a huge breakfast, then throws away all the newspapers from the past few days. Leaving the hotel, he throws away the shirt covered in bleach stains, then catches a taxi to the main train station. At the ticket office, he asks to buy a ticket on the latest train to Paris that evening. However, clerk then asks to see his passport, pointing out that he needs it to travel.

Theo tries to persuade the clerk to let him buy the ticket using his New York state ID without success. Using a payphone, Theo calls the American consulate in Amsterdam. Theo says his passport has been stolen, and the woman on the other end of the line notes that he has to file a police report. When he says it is actually probably just lost, she says a police report is still necessary. Theo tries to say that he needs to be in Paris today, but the woman points out that the consulate is only open for another 45 minutes and will then be closed for a few days for Christmas. She adds that even after Theo files a completed application for a new passport, it would still be about ten working days before it arrives.

Theo's fever is always at its worst at night, triggering surreal dreams. By the time he gets home from the train station, he is shaking. He mixes himself gin and hot water from the minibar. Despairing, suicidal thoughts rush over him. Theo has tried to kill himself before, using "whatever booze and pills [he] happened to have on hand," but it has never worked. He considers calling back the American consulate and turning himself in for murder. However, with a sudden burst of resolve he decides to kill himself. Finishing his gin, he opens a bottle of white wine, suddenly feeling calm and happy.

Theo retrieves pieces of hotel stationery in order to write four letters: one each for Hobie, Mrs. Barbour, Kitsey, and Pippa. Writing Kitsey's letter, Theo is shocked by the formal tone he takes. He tells her that his suicide is not her fault, that his problems started way before they got together. He advises her never to let Havistock Irving into her house, and concludes by saying how beautiful she looked in Audrey's earrings at their engagement party. In his letter to Hobie, Theo mentions the bad antiques he sold, though he adds that these aren't the reason why he is killing himself. At this point, his fever is so intense that he is struggling to see properly.

Theo's desperate attempts to get out of Amsterdam recall his departure from Las Vegas in the surreal hours after Larry's death. In both cases, Theo is stopped by what seem like arbitrary rules. Yet whereas at 15 he was able to escape by breaking the rules, in this moment in life he is even more vulnerable and lost than he was back then.



This passage highlights the isolation that comes with guilt over breaking the law, something that Theo has been haunted by his whole life (although it is of course reaching a moment of particular intensity right now). The fact that Theo spent most of his life harboring (or thinking he was harboring) a stolen painting has always kept him somewhat cut off from the world—an effect dramatically compounded by the fact that he just murdered someone.



This passage provides another example of the way in which Theo is an unreliable narrator. While of course he has not reported every aspect of his life, leaving out the multiple times wherein he attempted suicide is significant. The fact that Boris has linked Theo's suicidal ideation to losing his memory from drinking suggests that Theo himself might not even know how many times he has tried to kill himself.



While it seems as if, in this moment, Theo is deciding to finally tell the full truth to everyone, the fact that he is delirious with fever suggests that this may not actually be what's happening in reality. At the same time, it is clear that moments of his genuine love for Kitsey and Hobie are managing to shine through in his despairing, delirious state.



In the letter to Hobie, Theo recalls a time when he and Audrey rescued a sick puppy who, despite their efforts, ended up dying. However, having poured out his thoughts with so much conviction, Theo suddenly pulls back and realizes that what he's written is messy and incoherent. Feeling awful, Theo takes some aspirin. He recalls hearing that only 2% of suicides by overdose are successful, and then thinks about famous suicide notes—ones that are succinct, poignant, even funny. Theo doesn't want to look too “seedy” when his body is found, so he decides to shower and put on his suit. However, he is then suddenly overcome with a wave of nausea, and violently throws up into the wastepaper basket. After this he passes out.

Ever since Audrey's death, Theo has repeatedly dreamed that he briefly sees her in a crowd, or that she's living across town and that he has failed to call her. In the dreams he is always desperately trying to get to her, but unable to do so. However, on this night Theo finally “find[s] her.” In the dream, Theo is in a bigger and more “eternal-seeming version” of Hobie's shop. Audrey is there, though Theo can only see her through the reflection of a mirror, and somehow knows he cannot turn around to look at her directly. Despite this, her presence feels very real. She is smiling, as if she knows a wonderful secret. Just as she starts to speak, Theo wakes up.

It is morning, and Theo is lying under the bedcovers with all the lights on. He still feels Audrey's presence all around him. Having momentarily forgotten that it was Christmas Day, Theo walks over to the window and gazes outside. He has resolved to tell the Dutch police everything he knows, not only about Martin's death but also Sacha, Horst, and **The Goldfinch**. He is determined not to be like Larry, “dodging an scheming up until the very [last] moment.” He flushes the heroin Boris gave him down the toilet. Theo sees the suicide notes he wrote last night and cringes. However, he also realizes that he will need to write Hobie a letter explaining things to do with the business.

Theo then decides that he might as well admit to the antiques fraud he committed as well. He then thinks of Pippa and Mrs. Barbour. When Pippa left New York after her first visit with Everett, Theo had attempted suicide and left her a note that simply read, “Leaving for a while.” However, after the attempt Theo woke up in a pool of vomit. He leaves his hotel room, and notices a little bag of candies hanging from the doorknob with the words, “Merry Christmas!” He suddenly feels very hungry, and thinks about the convention of condemned men having their last meals. Going back into his room, he orders the “Festive Champagne Breakfast” from room service.

Theo is reaching the lowest point of abjection he has ever been at in his life, with his inner turmoil reflected in his physical condition of total incapacitation. His story about the puppy he and Audrey adopted is obviously supposed to be a metaphor for himself and the way that Hobie cared for him but couldn't save him. He doesn't want Hobie to feel guilty or believe that he was to blame for not doing enough to save Theo from suicide.



Many people in states of deep delirium or those who are nearing death end up seeing heavenly scenes in which they are reunited with their loved ones. Of course, it is not totally clear whether this is what's happening to Theo, or whether it is just an ordinary dream that happens to be particularly peaceful and encouraging. It does seem as if in some way Audrey is communicating him, telling him not to lose hope.



This passage makes explicitly clear how similarly Theo has been behaving to Larry, running from responsibility and sinking into a deep delirium of misery. Yet just at the final hour, Larry's influence is swapped for Audrey's, and this allows Theo to remember his values. In this sense, being able to take responsibility for one's actions is presented as something that gives Theo the courage to keep living.



Although Theo is no longer suicidal, he is still having suicidal thoughts—imagining himself as a condemned man on death row. Of course, if he truly does turn himself in then he will likely face a lengthy prison sentence (if not quite death). Yet it is almost as if framing it as a kind of suicide gives Theo's decision a more noble, romantic feel.



Just after Theo's breakfast arrives, he gets a call from the front desk saying that someone is coming up to see him in his room. The receptionist apologizes, saying they tried to stop him but couldn't. Theo opens the door of his room to reveal Boris, "Rumpled, red-eyed, battered-looking." Boris observes that Theo looks unwell, and asks why he hasn't been answering his calls. Helping himself to some of Theo's breakfast, Boris complains that he's been driving all night. He observes that Theo, meanwhile, seems to have been "Living it up." Theo tries to hand Boris Gyuri's watch and ring, but Boris says that Theo can return them to Gyuri himself.

Boris suggests that they order more champagne and coffee and invite Gyuri to join them. Theo tries to tell him that a lot has happened to him, but Boris replies, "What has happened to me is at least five thousand times more." Boris' phone rings, and while he answers it, speaking in Ukrainian, Theo walks to the door. Boris hangs up and tells Theo that he is acting like a "zombie." Boris tells a story about when he came to Amsterdam as a teenager and couldn't handle the strength of the weed, leading him to vomit in the Van Gough museum. He gives a Christmas toast, then enthusiastically starts eating.

Boris says that he and Gyuri have been in Frankfurt, and Theo asks if he has his passport, which Boris says he does. When Theo refuses to join in with his toasts, Boris accuses him of having "no sense of gratitude or beauty." Boris tries to reminisce about the Christmas they spent with Larry and Xandra in Las Vegas, but Theo does not respond. Boris gestures toward the bag lying by his feet, telling Theo to open it. Theo picks it up and heads for the door. On Boris' insistence, Theo opens the bag, and finds stacks of \$100 bills. Boris says that this is only a "fraction of." He says that Theo has a lot more money coming.

Theo tells Boris he doesn't want the money. He shouts that he doesn't care about the money, and only wants the painting. Furiously, he tells Boris that he doesn't want to even look at him. Boris replies that if Theo tried to hand himself in to the police for killing Martin, the police would give him a "medal," because Martin was an evil man. Boris explains that the cash is the reward money for the safe return of **The Goldfinch**. In fact, the money didn't even come from returning the picture, only providing information that could lead to its recovery. Boris says a SWAT team was dispatched to retrieve the painting, and that he wishes he could have witnessed the rescue operation happen.

Boris' slightly confused but overall businesslike demeanor is a rather comic contrast to Theo's dramatic thoughts about suicide and self-sacrifice. It also darkly amusing that Boris assumes Theo has been "living it up." Indeed, this shows how far apart the two men are in terms of their moral compass. While Theo has been consumed by guilt over murdering Martin, Boris seems completely unbothered by it.



Theo's statement that a lot has happened to him is both true and not. In one sense, almost nothing has happened to him: he has simply locked himself in his room, barely moving. Of course, he has been through profound psychological and moral torment. It is difficult for him to return from this state and even be able to talk to Boris properly.



Boris' recollection of the Christmas that they spent with Larry and Xandra highlights his relentless willingness to see the best in everything. Perhaps because Boris never had anything to begin with—unlike Theo, he never had an Edenic state from which he fell—he is always able to appreciate moments of joy even in the most dire of circumstances.



While Theo had been imagining that the act of killing Martin was an indisputable evil that would effectively ruin his life, Boris suggests that the opposite is in fact the case. Through their actions, The Goldfinch was rescued, and both of the men have even received a reward.



Boris explains that he suspected **The Goldfinch** was being held in an apartment belonging to an old girlfriend of Sacha's in Frankfurt. He couldn't remember the address, so he had to go the city himself and find it by memory. Once Boris found it, he had his associate's son Anton, a fluent Dutch speaker, phone the police and provide the tip, making up a story that he had heard two drunk Germans arguing at the bar where he worked. According to this story, the Germans left behind a folder linking Sacha's name and address to the painting—a folder that Boris and his crew had actually drawn up themselves. Boris explains that Sacha is now in jail.

Boris explains that **The Goldfinch** wasn't the only stolen artwork at Sacha's apartment. There were many others there, all with their own rewards attached. Boris hopes that Theo can forgive him, because it is said to be "one of great art recoveries of history." Added together, the reward money came to so much that Boris was able to give generous cuts to the various people involved in the whole scheme. Theo asks about the other artworks that were recovered, but Boris impatiently notes that he doesn't see why they are so valuable himself, particularly the contemporary pieces—"Ugly Blob." "Black Stick with Tangles." Boris notes that Sacha's young boyfriend escaped, but that he will likely disappear forever in order to protect himself.

Boris says he's still not totally sure how Horst fits into all this, and that he doesn't trust Horst as much as before. He is still amazed by the fact that all this time, legitimate reward money from the government had been lying right in front of him. Anton is getting a lot of media attention and praise for his role in the recovery, but Boris says that this praise is really for Theo. Theo tries to give Boris half of the money, but Boris assures him that he's already set himself up. Boris recalls when Larry gave him \$500, and how much that meant to him. Becoming tearful, he laments that Theo was always so generous with him, sharing everything he had, and Boris repaid him by stealing his most treasured possession.

Boris observes that Theo always had a rather black-and-white view of morality, but that this is actually not how the world truly is. Boris points out that good deeds can have bad outcomes, while bad deeds can have good outcomes, and that it is impossible to know what the ultimate consequences of one's actions will be. Boris has come to believe that "As long as I am acting out of love, I feel I am doing the best I know how." Boris reiterates that if Theo had never stolen **The Goldfinch**, the other recovered artworks would still be underground, hidden from view. Theo says he thinks that this is simply an example of "irony" rather than some kind of redemptive fate. Boris suggests that the truth is that it is in fact both.

Boris' determination and ingenuity meant that no matter how many times he failed to get the painting back, he kept going, and was eventually successful. Indeed, although Boris initially made fun of Theo for suggesting that they report the painting to the art crimes police, it turns out that this was actually the wisest and most lucrative thing for them to do (and perhaps even what they should have done all along).



Boris' comic lack of appreciation for the discovery of these stolen artworks makes this triumphant, redemptive moment even more euphoric via humor. There is something deliciously ironic about the fact that Boris, who has no interest in (and even considerable disdain for) art ended up triggering one of the most important art recoveries in history.



If the reader chooses to interpret everything that happens in the novel as governed by fate, then the happy ending of the art being discovered is why Theo was drawn to Welty in the first place, why Theo took the painting, why he hid it so long, why Boris stole it, and so on. Of course, it is equally possible to interpret all of this as simply a strange, happy accident.



Boris' view of morality is the one the book ultimately espouses, too. It matters less what the consequences of an action are than what the intentions behind it were. (Of course, whether an action is illegal hardly matters at all!) Although Boris might have seemed like a bad influence at earlier stages of Theo's life, in reality he not only loves Theo but taught him a profound moral lesson.



Boris asks why Theo is in such a big hurry, and invites him to Antwerp to hang out with his friends before he returns to the US. When Theo asks Boris to take him to the airport, Boris replies that he doesn't think Theo will be allowed on the plane, because he looks like he has "bird flu or SARS." He is happy to see that Theo is already packed, and advises him to throw his coat into the canal. However, he then thinks it's perhaps better not to do this in "broad daylight," and suggests they dump it in Antwerp instead.

Two days later, Theo flies home from Antwerp. When he gets back to the shop, Hobie greets him coldly. When Theo asks what's wrong, Hobie tells him it was "inappropriate" to give Pippa the topaz necklace. He then says that two days before Christmas, Lucius Reeve came to the shop. Exasperated, Hobie says he now knows that Theo lied to him about the full extent of the scheme he was running, and about why Reeve was bothering them. Theo concedes that what he did was deeply wrong, but adds that he now has the money to make it right. Hobie asks where Theo had been, and then admits that he presumed Theo was never coming back.

Hobie says that he and Pippa were terrified when Theo suddenly disappeared from his engagement party. Things only got worse when Reeve showed up and told them about Theo stealing **The Goldfinch**. Hobie is horrified, and asks Theo to tell him if he really stole it. Theo asks him to sit down, explaining that it's a long story, but that he'll try to make it as concise as possible. Theo tells him everything, only leaving out the deaths of Martin and Frits. When he finally finishes the story, Hobie comments, "It does all swing around strangely sometimes, doesn't it?" Theo offers to write Hobie a check to cover all the bad furniture he sold and then leave for good.

Refusing this offer, Hobie retrieves a photo album, and shows Theo a photo of Welty as a child, standing in front of two reproductions: one a Manet painting, the other **The Goldfinch**. Hobie explains that Welty took Pippa to **the Met** especially to see *The Goldfinch*. Hobie asks how Theo stored the painting, and Hobie is horrified, particularly when he hears that Theo put the painting in his checked luggage when he flew to **Las Vegas**. Hobie tells Theo that he should have told him and that he would have "figured out something." At the same time, Hobie recalls how his friends argued that it was too much for him to become Theo's guardian.

Again, it is rather comic how unaware Boris is of Theo's absolutely desperate, abject state. For Boris, everything has turned out perfectly—even better than expected. It seems as if Theo may be able to agree with that eventually, but again, it is too much emotional whiplash for him to be able to process it right now.



It is interesting that after everything Theo has done to let Hobie down, the thing that appears to annoy Hobie the most is Theo giving Pippa the necklace. It seems as if Hobie believes that Theo's interest in Pippa is selfish, as Theo is not taking into account Pippa's own feelings (or significant fragility). However, as will soon become clear, this is only one of a multitude of sins for which Theo must now atone.



In a sense, both Hobie and Pippa are too morally innocent and pure to truly understand what Theo has gone through. While they've both experienced tragedy, they have not known the darkness that has followed Theo ever since Audrey's death. However, this doesn't mean that without a proper explanation, Hobie wouldn't be able to empathize. There is a small glimmer of hope at the end of this passage that he may be able to forgive Theo.



*This passage provides further evidence that Theo's sighting with Welty and Pippa and his encounter with Welty while he was dying were all fated. Who knows—perhaps if Theo hadn't taken *The Goldfinch* out of the museum something else might have happened to it. Even if this is not the case, all the other art wouldn't have been recovered.*



Hobie notes that devoting oneself to objects isn't the most noble or admirable way of life, although Theo interjects to disagree. Hobie goes on to reflect that people often claim that the value of art lies in its universal appeal, but that he believes art is truly meaningful when it speaks directly and individually to a person, almost like a secret. Hobie then reflects on fate in a way that reminds Theo of Larry. Hobie notes that in this sense, gamblers perhaps understand the world better than anyone.

Theo is reminded of one of Larry's catchphrases: "Sometimes you have to lose to win." A year has passed since he returned from Antwerp, and it is Christmas time again. Theo has spent almost the whole year traveling, buying back the bad antiques he sold, which has required going all over the country and beyond. He feels "almost as if I've died [...] I feel different, I am different." He feels convinced that everything that means a lot to him is an "illusion," but that this doesn't matter—in fact, this is why he cares about it in the first place. Theo has come to accept that no one gets to choose who they are, despite cultural messages to the contrary.

People are constantly told, "Be yourself," but this advice could actually end up leading them astray. Theo thinks about Kitsey, whose deepest self leads her astray, but who chooses to overpower this with decisions that she thinks will be better for her. His and Kitsey's engagement hasn't "officially" been called off, but neither is it exactly on. He is still treated as a member of the Barbour family. Pippa, meanwhile, took the book Theo gave her but left the necklace, along with a letter thanking him for the gift but saying she couldn't accept it because it was "too much." She wrote that she and Theo were too similar, and that their shared trauma meant that they would never work as a couple.

In Antwerp, Boris told Theo that despite everything—abandoning the engagement party, Everett—Theo could "have" either Kitsey or Pippa if he actually wanted to be with them. In a way, Theo can see that Boris is right. Theo has written this story based on notebooks and letters he started writing from the age of 13. He considers the idea that people are defined by the secrets they keep. If this is true, then *The Goldfinch* was what allowed him to realize who he truly was. He wonders what Fabritius painted the little bird in the first place. Is the painting a kind of self-portrait, and if so, what does that say about how Fabritius saw himself?

The end of the novel is very philosophical, with the characters explicitly reflecting on the main themes that have emerged in the narrative. This passage, for example, emphasizes the idea that loving a beautiful object is about having a unique, almost magical connection to it that helps make a person who they are.



One of the most important ideas that emerges at the end of the novel is the possibility of redemption. No matter how deeply a person sinks into immorality, no matter how much they lose sight of themselves and their values, there is always hope for redemption. Indeed, Theo saying that it feels like he's "died" evokes the Christian idea of moral purification through death and resurrection.



Although many of the philosophical platitudes conveyed at the end of the novel may seem obvious, a lot of them are in fact quite counterintuitive. This includes the idea that you should perhaps not "be yourself" but rather resist yourself if resisting will take you down a better road. Theo implies that there is nothing inherently noble or morally valuable about a person's deepest self.



At this final point in the novel strangely misogynistic ideas creep in again, in which Kitsey and Pippa are framed as possessions that Theo can seize for himself if he wants. Of course, the novel is not necessarily espousing this view, but it is intriguing that Theo believes that Boris is correct.



For art historians, the importance of **The Goldfinch** lies in its technical innovations and unique influence on other artworks. But to Theo, this doesn't matter. The painting speaks to him in a direct, almost secretive way, just like Hobie observed. Theo has come to realize that the fundamental facts that matter to him are the ones he can't truly understand or explain. He will never be able to believe that "life is some awesome, rewarding treat." In reality, life is defined by chaos, suffering, and tragedy. Yet there is also hope to be found in the fact that despite all this, it is somehow possible to experience joy.

When they were in Antwerp, Boris and Theo discussed substance abuse. Boris admitted that he knew he was an alcoholic and that drinking will be what kills him. He told Theo that he started doing heroin when his girlfriend left him and he wanted to be "self-destructive." When Theo asked why he didn't try to stop, Boris asked replied, "Why should I?" Theo confesses that he understands Boris' logic. People can't choose their desires, just like they can't choose who they are.

Through **The Goldfinch**, Theo learned that "we can speak to each other across time." Life may be short and filled with suffering, but that doesn't mean that people have to be its victims. People might even resent having to live, but they have the duty to "immerse" themselves in life regardless. Artworks like *The Goldfinch* are immortal, and through interacting with them humans get a brief taste of immortality. It is via such interactions that individual people join a community across time of people who "loved beautiful things" and tried to save them from the ravages of time, thereby handing them down to future generations.

The rather simple conclusion of the novel's exploration of hope and despair is that despair is more inevitable than hope, but that the prevalence of despair means that the few moments of hope one does experience in life are akin to miracles, and they make everything worth it.



In the same counterintuitive vein as Theo saying that being true to yourself is not necessarily a good thing, Boris claims that being self-destructive is not necessarily a bad thing. Indeed, it is easy to see how these two thoughts function in tandem.



Some readers might feel critical of the slightly philosophically heavy-handed way in which the novel ends, with Theo explicitly telling the reader what the narrative's main message is. At the same time, by explicitly laying out the philosophical ideas undergirding the story, Tartt prompts the reader to leave the story not only thinking about the characters, but about the implications of their stories for the reader's own life.





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