

The Story of Tom Brennan



INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF J.C. BURKE

J.C. Burke was born and raised in Sydney, Australia. Both of her parents were journalists and she was the fourth of five children, all girls. When Burke was around ten years old her mother was diagnosed with cancer, and she died when Burke was nineteen. After the death of her mother, Burke trained as a nurse and worked in bone marrow transplant units in both Sydney and London. After taking a creative writing class in 2000, she published her first novel, *White Lies*, in 2002 with the help of an Australian Society of Authors mentorship. Her mentor was author Gary Crew. Several of her novels have earned awards from the Children's Book Council of Australia, including *The Story of Tom Brennan*, *Pig Boy*, and *White Lies*. She lives in Sydney with her husband.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Drunk driving is an issue that overwhelmingly affects teens, both in Australia and the U.S. In both countries, about a quarter of all motor vehicle deaths are related to alcohol—while in the U.S. specifically, drunk driving is the leading cause of death for people ages 15 to 20, and a teen dies approximately every hour because of drunk driving. Though the legal drinking age in Australia is lower than that in the U.S. (18 in Australia, 21 in the U.S.), so is the legal blood alcohol content (BAC) level. Australia considers someone too inebriated to drive at a BAC of .05 and in the U.S., the legal limit is .08. For comparison, when the police test Daniel in the novel, his BAC is .12.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

The Story of Tom Brennan can be considered an "issue novel," or a novel targeted at teens that deals with a particular issue, such as sexual violence, drugs, or in this case, alcohol abuse. Other teen novels that deal with alcohol specifically include Sarah Dessen's *Saint Anything* and *Other Broken Things* by C. Desir. Many of John Greene's novels are also considered to be issue novels, specifically [Looking for Alaska](#) and [Turtles All the Way Down](#). There are also a number of teen novels that, like *Tom Brennan*, deal with the intersections of growing up, friendship, and sports, including *Whale Talk* by Chris Crutcher and Jordan Sonnenblick's *Curveball: The Year I Lost My Grip*.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** The Story of Tom Brennan
- **When Written:** 2004

- **Where Written:** Sydney, Australia
- **When Published:** 2005
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary Young Adult Fiction
- **Genre:** Bildungsroman; Issue Novel
- **Setting:** Coghill, New South Wales, Australia
- **Climax:** Bennie's loses the rugby match against St. John's
- **Antagonist:** The antagonist is arguably Daniel Brennan, though in a more overarching way the antagonist can be read as alcohol, fear, and prejudice
- **Point of View:** First person, narrated by Tom

EXTRA CREDIT

Based on Real Life. In interviews, J.C. Burke has spoken at length about how Tom's experience of seeing the accident for the first time mirrors Burke's experience of learning her mother had cancer when she was a child. She insists that this wasn't intentional and, instead, sees it as proof that an author truly cannot separate her experiences from her writing.

Sons. *The Story of Tom Brennan* was inspired by a conversation J.C. Burke had with her mother-in-law about raising their sons and how parenting sons differs from parenting daughters.



PLOT SUMMARY

At 4:30 a.m. one January morning, seventeen-year-old Tom helps his family quietly leave their small town of Mumbilli, Australia. They have to move because of the town's anger towards Tom's older brother Daniel, who, while driving drunk, recently caused a car crash that killed two people and permanently paralyzed their cousin, Fin.

Daniel and Tom had once been an unstoppable pair on the rugby field and often led their school, St. John's, to victory. However, in the months before the accident, Daniel's mean streak and love of alcohol had begun to cause serious behavioral issues. Tensions rose further as Fin suddenly matured into a handsome young man and skilled rugby player himself. Daniel's girlfriend, Claire, grew to prefer Fin and be terrified of Daniel.

The night after a big match, the St. John's team held a party. There, an extremely drunk Daniel got angry after Claire broke up with him. He proceeded to start a fight with Fin, making Tom so angry that he chose to walk home by himself. Soon, though, Tom learned that Daniel had crashed his car while leaving the party. Daniel was fine, but two other students died. Arriving at the scene, Tom found Fin trapped in the car and comforted him all night.

Daniel pled guilty to all charges and was sentenced to five years in jail. People in Mumbilli began saying that no sentence would make up for the others' deaths, however, and spray painted cruel messages on the Brennans' house. One victim's parents wrote the Brennans a letter insisting that Daniel had long been an accident waiting to happen.

To escape the town's scrutiny and abuse, Tom's family moves to Coghill to stay with Gran—who is obsessed with Catholic saints and also a horrendous cook. Mum has become deeply depressed and now spends all of her time in bed, neglecting her other children as well as her personal hygiene. Tom, meanwhile, has no interest in joining his new school, St. Benedict's, rugby team: they're no good, and he's not excited to play without Daniel. Regardless, on Australia Day Dad convinces Tom to go to a touch rugby game after lunch. There, Tom feels free for the first time in months.

Tom and Kylie start school the next morning. Tom gets Michael Harvey, the rugby coach, for homeroom. Upon later going to check his email in his uncle Brendan's cabin, Tom sees that he has a message from his Mumbilli friend Matt. He tries to reply, but doing so only makes him think of Fin. Tom decides to try again later.

At dinner, Gran and Dad try to give Tom a pep talk about making friends and force him to go with Brendan to see Fin and his mother, Auntie Kath, the next day. Before Tom and Brendan leave the next morning, Brendan asks Tom to pick up a box from his coworker and boyfriend Jonny's house. Jonny's sister, Chrissy, answers the door and hands over the box, believing it is for Tom's granddad. Back in the car, Brendan explains that the woolen items in the box belonged to Chrissy's own father, who had died of pneumonia after a massive stroke.

The visit with Fin is difficult and exhausting. Afterwards, everyone pretends that Daniel and Fin are fine. Mum, who is up for once, invites Tom to lie with her for a few minutes; Tom is disgusted, as Mum smells like an old person. After leaving Mum, Tom learns that Kylie told her new friend Brianna about the accident, and he's angry that she's spilling family secrets.

At school, Tom starts to hang out with other rugby players. On the day that Harvey announces tryouts, Tom decides to join the others at the local **pool**. When the man at the gate tries to joke with Tom about being short on change, Tom is gripped with fear—he believes the man will punish him for his relationship to Daniel. Tom has a great time in the water nevertheless, until he talks to Chrissy and she asks about his (nonexistent) granddad.

The next Saturday, Tom calls Matt. They talk about rugby, but Tom ends the conversation early. After tryouts later that week, Dad is enthusiastic, but Tom is disenchanted. He's assigned half-back, his old position. The following weekend he goes with Brendan to see Daniel in prison, and is shocked to see his brother dressed as an inmate. As they discuss Daniel's potential move to a crisis center, Daniel breaks down and starts

frantically apologizing. Brendan comforts Daniel, who immediately asks Tom about rugby.

The next week, Daniel moves to the crisis center and Tom starts to run in the mornings with Brendan. They run up "the ascent," a steep mountain, and talk about Daniel. Tom starts to feel better until he returns to Gran's house one morning to find that Auntie Kath is visiting while Fin moves to rehab. Tom later finds Kath in the kitchen when he gets home from school, furiously cooking and upset that Mum isn't helping. The next day, Kath loses it with Mum and accuses her of neglecting Tom and Kylie in her grief. At church on Sunday, Tom is shocked to see Mum attend. He also thinks his rugby teammates aren't so bad and realizes he has a crush on Chrissy when he hears her sing.

Soon after, Tom decides to make a scrapbook for Daniel's birthday. When he starts to go through Gran's old albums, however, he finds one that begins with newspaper clippings about the accident. It takes Tom several days to pick his project up again.

During lunch one day at school, Tom has the feeling that people are whispering about him; after school, Rory and Jimmy tell him that Kylie gave a speech in class in which she told everyone about what happened in Mumbilli. Tom panics and runs home, calls Kylie names, and then finds Brendan. His uncle is sympathetic but tells Tom that nobody in Coghill really cares. Tom doesn't believe this until Saturday morning, when he sees no cruel graffiti in town as he and Dad drive to visit Daniel. His older brother is thrilled to receive the scrapbook and tells Tom and Dad about his new mentor, Jerry.

Fin decides he wants to have a birthday party at his rehab center. The night before, Kylie apologizes to Tom for the speech and tells him that she overheard Brendan saying that Chrissy thinks Tom is cute. The party the following day is awkward and difficult for Tom. Fin makes snide comments about rugby and about the birthday cards he received from Mumbilli residents. The next day, the Brennans receive word that Daniel's mental health has taken a turn for the worse.

One afternoon, Brendan tells Tom they're going out to dinner with Jonny and Chrissy; Tom will shower at Jonny's house. Much to Tom's embarrassment, he burns himself in Jonny's dangerously hot shower and in the ensuing chaos Chrissy sees him naked. He enjoys dinner regardless, as does Chrissy.

Footy camp is the next week. Tom feels like an outsider at camp and detests the teambuilding activities. He briefly discusses the upcoming match with St. John's with his teammates, but he mostly keeps to himself. On Wednesday, Dad finally pulls Tom aside and tells him that Bennie's is giving him a chance to use his talent. Dad also suggests that winning isn't the most important thing about rugby. Tom throws himself into practicing as he mulls over Dad's words.

After camp, Dad and Tom visit Daniel. Tom tells Daniel about Dad's pep talk, but Daniel isn't convinced that there's more to

rugby than winning. Tom knows this isn't true: rugby at St. John's wasn't fun because the team didn't actually act like one. Regardless, Daniel is doing better; he's helping Jerry mentor Theo, who's in jail with similar charges to his own. Mum seems to be getting better as well.

A few days later, Brendan asks Tom to think about climbing Mount Everest over Christmas. Tom is finally feeling good about life; he helps Bennie's win their match that day and, at dinner with Jonny, Chrissy, and Brendan that night, he agrees to Brendan's proposal. He comes home, however, to find Kylie hacking at her hair and crying. She tells him that she secretly helped Fin start seeing Claire right before the accident and therefore, blames herself. Tom comforts her and fixes her hair.

Tom tries to distract himself from the upcoming match with St. John's by visiting Brendan, but he discovers his uncle drunk and crying in his cabin. They don't mention it on their run the next day, but Brendan does encourage Tom to ask Chrissy out and leads him to a swimming spot on the river where he once brought Daniel and Fin. Tom then asks Brendan to help him build a chicken coop for Gran so she can have her beloved chickens again.

Over the next few days, Tom and Chrissy talk more about her dad and about Fin. Tom is anxious about the match with St. John's, but Bennie's does their best to support Tom. They play relatively well but in the last ten minutes, a few St. John's players shout "killer" at Tom. Bennie's loses, and Chrissy helps Tom escape. They kiss in her car out in the bush.

For the upcoming school holidays, Tom's family spends a week helping Aunty Kath furnish her new flat for Fin. Tom discovers that Dad is funding a lot of this in an attempt to repay Kath for what Daniel did. One afternoon, Tom and Fin go for a walk. Fin admits that he doesn't hate Daniel and he would like to see him soon. Tom, Chrissy, and Brendan build the chicken coop and a week later, Gran cries when Tom presents her with it.

Tom's visits Daniel the day before his birthday. He realizes that no matter what Daniel did, he still loves his brother and is glad he survived. Daniel has heard about Tom's exceptional rugby playing and compliments him. For Tom's birthday, Gran gives him the plane tickets for Nepal. The next weekend, Tom agrees to meet Chrissy at the river. They swim together and have sex and Tom feels truly whole again.

were such a pair, the newspaper began to follow them through the feature "**the legend of the Brennan brothers.**" In the months before the accident, Tom admits that his life was uncomplicated and focused mostly on rugby, though he also notes that he'd begun to understand that Daniel was out of control and hurting the team. Tom and his two best friends, Matt and Snorter, are the first ones at the accident, where Tom then spends the entire night comforting Fin. This is understandably traumatizing for Tom, as is the graffiti on the Brennan's home and the way that Mumbilli ostracizes his family in the aftermath. Because of this, Tom is initially angry, anxious, and secretive when his family moves to Coghill. As Tom begins to integrate in his new community, however, he starts to understand the importance of friendship. He maintains contact with Matt, but his new friends at Bennie's show themselves to be loyal and willing to stand up for Tom in tough situations. At footy camp, Tom also begins to see that winning isn't everything. Despite these leaps forward, however, Tom struggles throughout the novel with seeing the paralyzed Fin. He understands why Fin is angry yet also feels guilty for being glad that Daniel survived the accident and will be able to return to his life after jail. During long runs and talks with his uncle Brendan, Tom learns to frame his difficulties as challenges to be overcome, rather than death sentences. This is helped by his romantic relationship with Chrissy, who helps Tom rediscover who he is as an individual and encourages him to try to connect with Fin and Daniel.

Daniel Brennan – Daniel, Tom's older brother by a year and a half, is the drunk driver behind the car crash that kills two and leaves his cousin Fin paralyzed. Throughout his childhood, Daniel could seemingly do no wrong. A gifted rugby player, he and Tom spent hours practicing, and Daniel won a number of awards and titles in his youth. When Tom began high school, the two played on the St. John's team together, beginning a winning partnership that the local paper followed as "**the legend of the Brennan brothers.**" Yet Daniel also had a cruel streak and was quick to punish others when he felt they'd done him wrong, and as a young adult, he was known for his aggression, unwillingness to listen to anyone, and volatile anger. This, combined with excessive alcohol use and crushing insecurity about his relationship with Claire, led to Daniel's fateful decision to drive drunk after a party one night. Though Daniel appears remorseful following the accident, he also wallows in grief and self-pity almost until the end of the novel. He spends his time before going to jail crying and vomiting, and once in jail, becomes increasingly depressed. Daniel finally begins to turn his life around when he's transferred to the jail's crisis center and is enrolled in a mentoring program. As Daniel begins to improve through his work with his mentor, Jerry, he's given some of the responsibility of mentoring Theo, another teen in jail for a drunk driving charge similar to Daniel's. This helps Daniel to see that he can have a purpose in life and will be able to move forward by giving back.



CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Tom Brennan – Tom is the seventeen-year-old protagonist of the novel. Though Tom has spent most of his life overshadowed by his older brother, Daniel, the two have always been close. Both love rugby and, growing up, spent hours every day drilling skills. In the two years before the accident, Tom and Daniel played together on the St. John's rugby team in Mumbilli and

Dad – The father of Tom, Kylie, and Daniel. Prior to the accident, Dad repaired tractors and was the rugby coach at St. John's in Mumbilli. He was very involved in his son's rugby careers, and Tom thought Dad was an excellent coach—especially since he always got a professional coach to run practices during the team's preseason training camp. After the accident, however, Dad struggles to hold himself together. He effectively has to parent Tom and Kylie on his own, as Mum refuses to get out of bed most of the time. Tom is aware that Dad's emotional state is extremely fragile, yet he relies on his father keeping it together in order to maintain his own composure. As Dad works at the sheds with Brendan and becomes the assistant coach for the Bennie's rugby team in Coghill, he begins to see that the way he ran things at St. John's was fundamentally flawed. St. John's was focused only on winning, and because of this, they neglected friendship, camaraderie, and acting like a cohesive team. Harvey focuses much more on teambuilding exercises, and though Dad admits that the Bennie's players have a lot to learn technically, they do function well as a team. Tom understands that Dad was often afraid to punish or reprimand Daniel out of fear of Daniel's reaction, but Dad has always been willing to tell Tom hard truths. This leads to Dad's pep talk to Tom in which he tells his son to give Bennie's a chance. Even though Dad seems much improved by the end of the novel, he's still consumed with guilt after the accident. He pays for a lot of things when Aunty Kath and Fin move into their new apartment and insists that his own immediate family help with the move. He tells Tom that they'll never be able to repay their debt, but it's important that they try because Aunty Kath and Fin are family.

Fin – Tom and Daniel's cousin, Fin is permanently paralyzed in the accident. Though Fin is only a week younger than Daniel, the latter overshadowed Fin in everything they did until weeks before the crash. In the weeks before the accident, tensions between Daniel and Fin reached a fever pitch: with Daniel spending so much time drinking, Fin's ability on the rugby field could finally take the limelight. He was also growing up and becoming handsomer and more mature. In addition, he had a crush on Daniel's girlfriend Claire, which made Daniel extremely jealous—especially when it became clear that Claire preferred Fin. On the night of the accident, Fin and Daniel fought over Claire. Yet because Fin is someone who has always felt a great deal of responsibility to care for others, he stayed with Daniel at the party. Daniel later insisted on driving home and crashed his car, paralyzing Fin's arms and legs. Tom notes that Fin had been a reserved and cautious person; trusting Daniel that night was the only risk Fin ever took. During Tom's few visits with Fin in the hospital and in rehab, he can tell that Fin is extremely angry about what happened, even if he doesn't say so outright. Tom notes that while Fin was initially dedicated to recovering, he slowly became more downtrodden. Aunty Kath, Fin's mother, is vocal about telling Tom's family that Fin is terrified of what his life will be like as a quadriplegic. He

remains in contact with Claire and with other people in Mumbilli, a fact that he occasionally deploys to make the Brennan family feel bad. Near the end of the novel, Fin admits that he doesn't actually hate Daniel and would actually like to visit him at some point. He and Aunty Kath don't return to Mumbilli; they move into a flat with a view of the **ocean** where Fin has hospitals and other facilities nearby.

Mum – Tom's mother. She and Daniel have always been close, though Tom hesitates to call it favoritism when he talks about their relationship. In the weeks and months before the accident, Tom begins to notice that both Mum and Dad were afraid of disciplining Daniel when he dipped into one of his moods and became violent. Because of this, the town of Mumbilli blames Mum and Dad partially for Daniel's actions, as they believe they should've done something to curb his wild behavior sooner. Mum attempts to look for anything that would make Daniel look better or shift the blame elsewhere in the weeks between the accident and Daniel's final conviction. She attempts to blame Fin in part and is vocal about her belief that the accident was Claire's fault. Following Daniel's sentencing, Mum refuses to get out of bed and starts to neglect her hygiene. This is extremely disturbing for Tom, as he thinks that Mum smells like an elderly person and is barely recognizable. He notes at several points that when she's in this state, she's nothing like the beautiful and vibrant person she was before the accident. In reality, Mum is simply too overcome with grief to engage in daily life—though she does perk up after visits with Daniel. Mum turns the corner and begins to do better after her sister, Aunty Kath, accuses her of neglecting Tom and Kylie. Mum begins attending church and spends more time up and about, though Gran still feels the need to tape a picture of St. Vitus, the patron saint of oversleeping, to the fridge in the hope of helping Mum stay up longer. Mum seems well on her way to recovery by the end of the novel. Though Chrissy remarks that Mum is skinny and pale, Tom assures Chrissy that Mum is much better than she used to be.

Gran – Gran is Tom's grandmother. She lives on acreage in Coghill that she calls Saint Marguerite Bourgeouy's, after her favorite saint. However, Gran's love for saints isn't limited to Saint Marguerite; she's a staunch Catholic and her house is filled with pictures of saints, placed strategically throughout so that a saint's specialty might help a certain person. She agrees to let Dad, Mum, Tom, and Kylie live with her when they decide to leave Mumbilli. The transition is difficult at first, as Gran is a very poor cook and insists on things being done her way at her home. Tom and Kylie secretly call her "The Grandmother" because of this. Gran takes special offense to Mum's inability to get out of bed, and Tom thinks that Gran is purposefully guilt-tripping his family when she talks about Fin. As time goes on, however, Gran becomes aware that Tom doesn't like her cooking and she dedicates herself to doing better. This coincides with Mum being able to get up for longer periods of

time and Tom also becoming more at home in Coghill. Tom decides to thank Gran for her help and her sacrifices for his family by building her a new chicken coop. She had chickens years ago, but was forced to get rid of them when Pa moved the tractor repair business to their property. As Tom undertakes this project, he comes to realize that Gran started to lean so heavily on religion because her marriage was extremely unhappy. The saints offered her a way to try to do something about Pa's gambling problems and offered her a sense of community she didn't have in her real life. At the end of the novel, she gives Tom plane tickets to Nepal for his birthday, thereby showing her impressive generosity.

Brendan – Brendan is Tom's uncle. He lives in a cabin on Gran's property and runs the tractor repair business at the sheds, which he inherited from Pa. He's gay and not secretive about it, though Tom does note that Gran has never been told outright. Brendan was an instrumental figure in getting the Brennans through the trauma of Daniel's trial: he helped to support Mum in her grief most of all. After the move to Coghill, Brendan becomes an important guiding force in Tom's life as well. He's able to convince Tom to start running with him in the mornings, which gives the two the opportunity to talk about Daniel. Brendan and Daniel had been close when Daniel was a kid; Brendan, Daniel, and Fin often went off and did things together and left Tom with Kylie. As Tom and Brendan become closer, Tom realizes that Daniel truly knew Brendan: he was surely more than marginally aware that Brendan is gay and likely saw Brendan as a full person, not just an uncle. Tom begins to make these shifts as well, especially when he catches Brendan experiencing moments of crushing grief. As Brendan and Tom continue to run, Brendan is eventually able to talk Tom into going to Nepal with him to hike to the Mount Everest base camp. This gives both of them something to work for and a way forward out of their grief. Near the end of the novel, Brendan admits that he and his boyfriend, Jonny, had planned to leave Coghill for Sydney, but decided to stay in the aftermath of the accident. This impresses upon Tom the importance of making sacrifices for one's family.

Aunty Kath – Aunty Kath is Fin's mother and Mum and Brendan's sister. Because her husband died about fifteen years ago, she's mostly on her own in taking care of Fin in the aftermath of the accident. Tom describes her as an exceptional cook, especially when it comes to birthday cakes: she always made Fin amazing cakes, which he believes she did because Fin's birthday was always overshadowed by Daniel's. This implies that Kath was aware of the dynamic between Fin and Daniel and attempted in small ways to fix it. In the present, Kath has become extremely strong and muscular from needing to lift and turn Fin. She spends most of her time with him at the hospital, caring for his every need. During a brief visit to Gran's house, she loses her composure when she discovers that Mum is spending all her time in bed and is neglecting Tom and Kylie,

to whom Kath is especially close. Her explosive anger is enough to encourage Mum to get out of bed more often and begin to recover. Kath does what she can to make things as normal as possible for Fin. She arranges a birthday party for him in his rehab facility and purchases a flat near the hospital and rehab center so that Fin will be able to move home. Despite everyone's relief that Fin will be able to do so, Kath is vocal about the fact that Fin is afraid. Dad implies that Kath is also afraid and overwhelmed by the task of needing to care for her adult son. She never sees Daniel in jail for the duration of the novel, but she and Fin do express interest in doing that at some point.

Kylie Brennan – Kylie is Tom's younger sister; she's about fifteen. For much of the novel, Kylie is closed off and volatily angry with Tom and her parents, though she does seek friendship and community at school when she makes friends with Brianna. She's far more trusting of others than Tom is, as she tells Brianna about what happened to the Brennans in Mumbilli. To cope with her grief and her fear, Kylie starts wearing dark makeup and uses an obscene amount of product in her hair, which Tom insists makes it smell bad and doesn't look good at all. After the Brennans have been in Coghill for a few months, Kylie gives a speech on terrorism in one of her classes. In it, she talks about the abuse that her family suffered after Daniel's sentencing hearing and effectively makes the family secret common knowledge. She later tells Tom that she did it thinking it would help her feel better but didn't think about how her actions would affect Tom. Tom finds Kylie's behavior as a whole perplexing until she admits to him that she has a secret: she actually fanned the flames of conflict between Fin and Daniel in the week before the accident. She was fed up with Daniel's behavior and thus turned her attention to helping Fin see Claire in secret. Because of this, she blames herself for the accident. To help make up for her role in the accident, Kylie throws herself into helping Fin when he moves home from rehab.

Claire – In Mumbilli, Claire was Daniel's girlfriend. Tom describes her as being different from Daniel's other girlfriends in important ways; namely, she didn't back down when Daniel got moody and sulky, and Daniel loved her a lot more than he loved other girls. This made Daniel very possessive of her, which backfired spectacularly: Claire was terrified of Daniel and had a not-so-secret crush on Fin, whom she began to see the week before the accident with Kylie's help. Claire broke up with Daniel at the party, which set the stage for the fight between Daniel and Fin and ultimately, culminated in the accident. Mum and Kylie blame Claire for what happened, at least in part, but Daniel, Tom, and Dad insist that it wasn't Claire's fault. Though she visits Daniel for a while after the accident, she leaves Mumbilli before finishing her final exams at school. Her parents find her a job as a nanny overseas, and she sends a number of postcards to Fin over the course of the

novel. Tom sees Claire's departure as another loss for Mumbilli as a result of the accident.

Chrissy Tulake – Chrissy is Jonny's sister and Tom's love interest. When Tom first meets her, she's dating a former Bennie's rugby player, Davin. Tom is initially attracted to her because Chrissy is extremely beautiful; he ignores the fact that she's also genuinely interested in him and his emotional wellbeing. She checks and makes sure he's okay after Kylie gives her speech about what happened in Mumbilli, for example, and she also checks in on Tom's (nonexistent) granddad after she gives him a box of sheepskin things that are unbeknownst to her, actually for Fin. Chrissy and Tom finally connect when she shares that her father died a few years ago after a massive stroke. They talk about how difficult it was for her to visit him and how difficult Tom finds it to visit Fin in the hospital. Their physical relationship begins when Chrissy helps Tom escape after the rugby match with St. John's, and they finally have sex for the first time at the end of the novel. Tom credits Chrissy with helping him rediscover himself after the accident and reframe his experiences in terms of their relationship milestones, not in terms of negative and accident-related instances.

Jonny Tulake – Jonny is Brendan's boyfriend and a former rugby player. He's very tall, extremely handsome, and makes sure to treat Tom very kindly, especially right after Tom moves to Coghill. Jonny works in the sheds with Brendan, so Tom sees him fairly often and becomes aware that he stays the night with Brendan regularly. Later, Brendan explains that Jonny is somewhat paranoid about Tom knowing that Jonny is dating Brendan, so Brendan sits Tom down to openly discuss their relationship and their sexuality. Jonny is also deathly afraid of flying, which is why he never travels anywhere with Brendan. Tom eventually learns that prior to the accident Jonny and Brendan had planned to move to Sydney, but they chose to stay in Coghill so that Brendan could take care of his family.

Matt – Matt was Tom's best friend in Mumbilli before the accident. Their friendship continues after Tom moves, but Tom feels unable and unwilling to truly connect with Matt given their history. They played together on the St. John's rugby team and Matt was instrumental in getting help for Daniel, Fin, Luke, and Nicole after the accident. He's the only friend who tries to remain close with Tom and the Brennan family as a whole in the aftermath. After Tom moves to Coghill Matt emails him regularly, even when Tom doesn't reply. Tom calls Matt twice; the first time he's unable to bring himself to truly open up to Matt, while the second time, it's implied that they actually begin to repair their relationship. Matt is distraught when one of his teammates yells "killer" at Tom during the match between St. John's and Bennie's.

Rory – Rory is one of Tom's first friends in Coghill; they meet at the touch game on Australia Day. Rory plays five-eight—Daniel's old position, which means he has large shoes to

fill. For a long time, Tom is somewhat derisive of Rory; he insists that Rory can't kick with both feet and has poor ball-handling skills. Despite this, Rory does his best to be a good friend to Tom by inviting him out to social events, warning him about Brianna, and not saying anything about the accident. Later, he's the first friend in Coghill who comes over to see Tom at Gran's house. By the end of the novel, Tom is willing to concede that Rory is a decent player and, more importantly, an excellent teammate and friend.

Pa – Tom, Daniel, and Kylie's grandfather; he died years before the start of the novel. He ran a tractor repair business in town but moved it to his and Gran's home after he supposedly lost the business site in town betting on it. He had a gambling problem that Gran attempted to mitigate by hanging a picture of Saint Bernadine, who was supposed to protect gamblers, in their bedroom. Pa also loved cars, which helped him bond with Daniel more than any of his children or other grandchildren. Though Tom doesn't offer specifics, he implies that Pa and Gran's marriage was very unhappy.

Michael Harvey – Harvey is the rugby coach at Bennie's; Dad is his assistant coach. Tom also has Harvey for homeroom. Tom finds Harvey nice enough but perplexingly invested in creating a sense of camaraderie and team spirit, despite the fact that the Bennie's team isn't that good. He's not at all concerned with winning most of the time. After Dad gives Tom a pep talk and suggests that winning isn't everything, Tom begins to come around to Harvey's way of thinking and begins to realize that he has it right: rugby is much better when a team loves the game and loves each other.

Luke – Luke was the captain of the St. John's rugby team and one of Daniel's best friends. He dies when Daniel chooses to drive drunk after a party and crashes his car into a tree. Tom realizes months later that despite being the captain of the team, Luke, like Daniel, had checked out for most of their last season. He spent his evenings drinking and driving around with Daniel and Owen, another teammate, and often played hungover. After his death, Luke's father insists that Daniel should be locked up for good.

Nicole – Nicole was one of the two St. John's students who died when Daniel crashed his car. She was a year younger than Tom and was active in musical theater. Though it's never confirmed, Tom hears a rumor that Nicole kissed Daniel after Claire broke up with him on the night of the accident. Her family sends a letter to the Brennan family in response to Daniel's apology letter, insisting that Daniel was an accident waiting to happen and that no sentence will be long enough to make up for Nicole's death.

Theo – Theo is an inmate and one of Daniel's peers at the Westleigh Detention Center. He's in jail on drunk driving charges similar to Daniel's and is intensely guilty about it. Jerry is Theo's official mentor but as Daniel starts to improve, he takes on a mentoring role with Theo as well. Daniel is able to

pull himself together in part because he takes his role as a mentor so seriously—he believes he needs to be strong for Theo's sake.

Brad Wiseman – Brad is one of Tom's rugby teammates at Bennie's. He's very tall, large, and known for his epic belly flops in the Coghill pool. Brad also has a habit of hungrily checking out girls, though the other guys often joke about Brad's inability to get a girlfriend. He's one of Tom's loudest supporters during the rugby match with St. John's.

Chris Davin – Davin is a former Bennie's student and rugby player. He also dates Chrissy for much of the novel. According to the rest of the team, Chris is the kind of guy who can have any girl he wants and cycles through girlfriends often. At footy camp the year before, he supposedly had sex with a number of the nursing students at the university.

Owen – Owen was one of Tom and Daniel's rugby teammates in Mumbilli and also one of Daniel's best friends. He, Luke, and Daniel spent much of their free time drinking, which made all three of them play poorly. He remains in contact with Daniel after Daniel goes to jail, and in the month before the one-year anniversary of the accident, he visits.

Brianna – Brianna becomes Kylie's best friend in Coghill. Tom never speaks to her directly, but Rory and Jimmy explain that Brianna and her group of friends are troublemakers and should be treated with caution. Brianna helps Kylie prepare for her speech in which she tells her entire class about what happened to the Brennans in Mumbilli.

Jimmy – Jimmy is one of Tom's closer friends on the Bennie's rugby team. Though Jimmy doesn't say anything until after Kylie's speech, he then reveals that he has long known about what happened with Daniel and the Brennan family in Mumbilli, but saw no reason to torment Tom by bringing it up.

Theo – Theo is an inmate and one of Daniel's peers at the Westleigh Detention Center. He's in jail on drunk driving charges similar to Daniel's and is intensely guilty about it. Jerry is Theo's official mentor but as Daniel starts to improve, he takes on a mentoring role with Theo as well. Daniel is able to pull himself together in part because he takes his role as a mentor so seriously—he believes he needs to be strong and look forward for Theo's sake.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Snorter – Snorter was one of Tom's best friends in Mumbilli. He was obsessed with his trail bike and video games and was less involved in rugby. The accident had a profound effect on him, which resulted in him becoming very distant from Tom in the months after.

Judge Williams – Judge Williams is the judge for Daniel's sentencing trial. He's known for being a relatively harsh judge. He points out that, as a team player, Daniel should've known

better than to drive in his condition.

Dennis Talbot – Talbot is Daniel's solicitor (lawyer) during his trial in Mumbilli. Kind and patient, he explains exactly how and why legal things happen the way they do.

Tonelli – Tonelli is the Bennie's rugby team captain. Before the match with St. John's, he rallies the team and tells them they need to do well to support Tom.

Marcus – Marcus is one of Tom's rugby teammates at Bennie's. Rory tells Tom that Marcus is a bit of a jerk, but Marcus turns out to be a fine player and supportive of Tom.

Shorty – Shorty's real name is Peter McGregor; he plays touch rugby on Australia day with Tom, Jonny, and Brendan. He recognizes Tom as a star youth rugby player.

Jerry – Jerry is Daniel's mentor at the crisis center. He also mentors Theo.

Soupe – One of Tom's rugby teammates at Bennie's.

Father Vincent Gran's priest in Coghill. He's a redhead with a large beard and is often awkward.



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.



FAMILY

The Story of Tom Brennan is, at its heart, a study of family dynamics in times of crisis. When seventeen-year-old Tom's older brother Daniel chooses to drive drunk and gets in a car accident, killing two classmates and permanently paralyzing his cousin Fin, the Brennans struggle to deal with the fallout both within their hometown of Mumbilli and within the family itself. As time passes and the Brennans begin to put their lives back together, the novel pays particular attention to the ways in which various family members experience betrayal and look to unexpected sources for help. In this way, *The Story of Tom Brennan* presents a portrait of family life that insists that even though members cannot always be relied on to act in conventional ways, there's always room for individuals to do better—and there are always other family members to call on.

Prior to the start of the novel, Tom's nuclear family had been close-knit and very involved in life in Mumbilli: Dad was one of the rugby coaches and Mum worked in the school cafeteria, while they both hosted lunches and get-togethers on weekend and holidays. On the other hand, the nuclear family's relationships with extended family members was, in some

cases, contentious: Tom, Daniel, and their younger sister Kylie had an uncomfortable and awkward relationship with Gran in particular, who lives six hours away in Coghill.

Following the accident, however, all of these relationships begin to break down and the entire family finds itself ostracized by Mumbilli. Mum takes to her bed, overcome with grief, and except for Daniel, who is in jail, the nuclear Brennan family moves in with Gran and Mum's younger brother, Brendan, in Coghill. The Brennans must, in turn, renegotiate and reimagine their relationships with each other, given how much their circumstances change in the months after the accident. Mum, for instance, has to deal with the pain of seeing her sister, Auntie Kath—that is, Fin's mother. This means that the two women must learn to relate to each other with the painful knowledge that Mum's son changed Fin and Kath's lives forever.

For Tom, one of the worst parts of the accident's aftermath is Mum's dive into a depressive episode. He notes a number of times when she's in this state that she neglects her personal hygiene to the point where she's nearly unrecognizable as his mother. Staying in bed all the time also means that she's not available to care for Tom or express interest in his life as one might typically expect from a maternal figure. Though Tom makes it clear that Mum and Daniel were especially close, the sense of betrayal he feels when Mum effectively disappears from his own life indicates that he relied on his mother more than he may have thought—though it also makes Tom realize that if he wants the kind of support he used to get from Mum, he'll now have to look for it elsewhere. During the time that Mum is ill, Brendan takes Tom under his wing and helps him do the work of grieving and starting to move on with his life. Because of the relationship that Tom and Brendan form, Tom begins to understand that he truly does have many more people around to care for him than he originally thought.

Tom's realization that he has a much larger familial support network than he realized eventually comes to encompass his relationship with Gran as well. When Tom's family first moves in with her, he and Kylie refer to her in private as "The Grandmother" and make fun of her house, which is dark, has a funny name, and is decorated only with paintings of patron saints. Tom also struggles to see her as a helpful and important figure in his life because of her inability to cook unappetizing meals and her insistence that Tom say grace and include prayers for Daniel when he does so, something that Tom finds wildly inappropriate at first.

Yet as Tom adjusts to life in Coghill, he's eventually able to see that what he initially read as tone-deaf eccentricities are actually Gran's ways of trying to help. For example, when Mum first begins getting out of bed, Gran tapes a picture of Saint Vitus, the patron saint of oversleeping, to the fridge in the hope that the saint may be able to keep Mum "vertical for longer periods." During this same conversation, Gran tells Tom that she'd like him to tell her if he doesn't like a certain dish so that

she can better feed him. The combination of Tom recognizing Gran's attempts to help for what they are (and even finding them privately funny), and Gran recognizing that some things will need to change to accommodate her grandson show that the Brennan family is beginning to break free of the roles they occupied in years past and figure out what their relationships look like going forward. Most importantly, however, both Tom and Gran realize in this situation that the other is their own person.

This realization that the various Brennan family members are individuals with their own thoughts, feelings, and desires—not just an uncle, or a grandmother, or a son playing a prescribed role—is what finally allows the Brennans to begin the healing process and move forward in their new lives. Tom takes the final step towards recognizing the individuality of his family members when he asks Brendan to help him build a chicken coop for Gran for her birthday, as he remembers how much she loved the chickens she had years ago and wants her to have that happiness again. In this way, the novel illustrates ultimately that it's possible to find the find of familial support that Tom craves from more than just the usual suspects—and that being able to lean on more family members grants Tom a richer support network than he ever thought possible.



FRIENDSHIP AND TEAMWORK

When Tom and his family first move from Mumbilli to Coghill, Tom's initial goal is to remain as anonymous as possible and avoid making too many connections. He's unsure if he even wants to keep playing rugby now that Daniel is in jail, as he's convinced that playing won't be the same without his older brother beside him. As Tom begins to integrate in his new home, however, and chooses to be involved with the rugby team at Bennie's, his new school, he begins to discover that there's actually a lot to gain from allowing himself to form connections with other young men in Coghill. By showing how Tom's evolving understanding of friendship and what it means to be a part of a team intersect with and inform each other, the novel ultimately suggests that it's impossible to be a true team without trust, caring, and most importantly, genuine understanding.

Tom is very clear about the fact that when he attended Saint John's in Mumbilli, the rugby team was obsessed only with winning—something they did regularly. However, as he spends more time in Coghill in a very different environment, he also begins to recognize that the tenor of the team and the relationships between teammates in Mumbilli was fundamentally flawed in a number of ways. First, Tom begins to understand that the environment fostered by the team's focus on winning above all else corrupted his and others' love of the game, as well as their friendships with each other. He notes at one point that when Saint John's did lose games, the younger players in particular were terrified of the abuse they knew

they'd suffer as a result. Tom sees this as proof that the team stopped caring about each other's wellbeing—in other words, the teammates weren't actually friends anymore. He also sees this happen when the only other teammate who will continue spending time with him after the accident is his best friend, Matt.

This ruthless, selfish attitude no doubt influenced and was influenced by the fact that some players at St. John's also stopped genuinely caring about the game itself. At one point, Tom tells Kylie that Daniel and two other players, Owen and Luke, were spending so much time drinking and then playing hung over that the team was playing with only twelve engaged players, not the full fifteen actually on the field. As a result, St. John's began losing—underscoring the importance of friendship and mutual dedication to a well-functioning team.

Coming from the environment at St. John's, Tom at first finds the boys at Bennie's to be a sorry excuse for a team. The St. John's team used to joke that Bennie's was so bad, they "couldn't even catch a cold," and Tom is initially derisive when he observes that despite the Bennie's team's poor playing, they do genuinely enjoy rugby and are actually friends with each other. Tom's attitude doesn't change until the Bennie's team goes to "footie" camp, which is a week away to both train and participate in team-building exercises.

Tom begins the week unengaged and believing that the camp won't do any good for the team, but after Dad pulls him aside and suggests that maybe Bennie's has it right in its prioritization of teamwork and the love of the game, Tom begins to shift his thinking. When Tom finally lets his guard down and begins making friends with the other players, he finds that the team also begins to play better—again bolstering the notion that mutual care and understanding are essential components of successful teamwork. Tom discovers that the Bennie's boys do actually want to learn what he has to teach them about the sport and are happy to accept his leadership; in return, they offer him friendship and support that he hadn't experienced before, either in a rugby setting or elsewhere.

Though his feelings begin to shift at camp, Tom doesn't truly make the leap to prioritizing friendship and teamwork over winning until Bennie's plays St. John's in July. Bennie's loses narrowly, but when an unknown St. John's player yells "killer" at Tom (in reference to Daniel's accident), the Bennie's team throws themselves into the game to support him. This moment reinforces for Tom that while he enjoyed winning when he played for St. John's, the camaraderie was never actually there—and further, it never could be in the absence of meaningful relationships among the players.

Time and again Tom's new friends in Coghill show care for him and his wellbeing in ways that he never imagined possible in Mumbilli, where many of his teammates abandoned him after the accident. This happens off the field as well; Rory and the other guys, for instance, warn Tom after Kylie gives a speech

spilling his family's secret in front of her entire class, and Tom is shocked to realize that several of his teammates knew about the accident and simply saw no reason to say anything that would have made Tom uncomfortable. In this way, the camaraderie and trust that he experiences at Bennie's not only remind Tom of his love of rugby, but also that the game isn't worth playing without the friendship of his teammates.



IDENTITY AND INDEPENDENCE

For most of Tom's life, he lived in the shadow of his older brother Daniel. Despite being only a year and a half apart in age, Daniel overshadowed his little brother in everything—in flashbacks, Tom describes Daniel as bigger, handsomer, and more attractive to girls. However, in the aftermath of the accident, Tom is forced to look closely at his relationship with his brother and the way in which Daniel's supposed superiority caused Tom to suppress his own desires and cater to Daniel's every whim. While all the characters in the novel must redefine their identities in the aftermath of the accident, Tom in particular finds that he can only truly come into his own when he discovers who he is as an individual, rather than someone who only exists in relation to his brother.

Though Daniel did overshadow Tom before the accident, the brothers were nonetheless extremely close. They spent hours every day working on their ball handling skills and while there are moments that point to the fact that Daniel has a mean streak that didn't spare his brother, Daniel also dedicated a great deal of time to both Tom and to rugby. In fact, the two spent so much time playing rugby together that the local Mumbilli paper followed Tom and Daniel's sports career through "**The Legend of the Brennan Brothers**," an ongoing feature that reinforced for everyone—Tom, Daniel, and the rest of the town—that the two could and should only be considered as a unit rather than as individuals. In some ways, this habit of others grouping the Brennans together as a single entity extended even beyond Tom and Daniel to Mum and Dad as well, given how entrenched both of them were in social life and sports in Mumbilli.

On a darker note, denying the individuality of the Brennan family also contributes to every member being ostracized following the trial in which the judge sentences Daniel to five years in prison. Their home becomes a target for offensive graffiti, which causes Dad to decide that the best thing to do is move his family six hours away to the much larger city of Coghill—where, he believes, the Brennans will be able to live in relative anonymity and escape the abuse. Yet the violent tenor of the abuse is why, even after the move to Coghill, Tom is anxious about others finding out about what happened in Mumbilli: because he's never been given the space to think of who he is as an individual, he's afraid that his new peers will shun him after they find out what Daniel did. In other words, Tom continues to think of his identity as being intrinsically and

irreversibly linked to Daniel's, even as he recognizes that this is no longer a good thing.

This fear seeps into everything Tom does and, for much of the novel, keeps him from recognizing that for most people in Coghill, Tom does actually exist separately from his older brother. Most people simply know Tom as a star rugby player, and though some are aware that he and Daniel were once an unstoppable team (or even mistake Tom for Daniel), most in Coghill are simply thrilled to have Tom in town to play for them. This doesn't become clear to Tom, however, until after Kylie gives a poorly-thought-out speech in one of her classes, in which she shares the story of what happened in Mumbilli. Tom is understandably terrified that this will mean that his entire family is going to once again become the target of abuse because of Daniel's actions. But when nothing particularly bad happens following Kylie's speech, Tom is forced to accept that Coghill actually will offer him the opportunity to extricate himself from Daniel and go on to figure out who he is as a person in his own right.

Once Tom realizes that he doesn't need to fear punishment for being Daniel's brother anymore, he is able to let go of some of his anxiety, throw himself into his new life in Coghill, and create a new identity for himself completely separate from the identity he once shared with Daniel. It is worth keeping in mind that the success of this is, to a degree, dependent on where Tom is and who he's with—during the rugby match with St. John's, a former teammate does yell "killer" at Tom in reference to Daniel's actions, for instance, which indicates that this process of discovering his own identity isn't necessarily a clean and linear process by any means. However, the fact that Tom ends the novel feeling whole for the first time and happy with the person he's become suggests that for him, his ability to come of age was linked entirely to his ability to engage with himself as an individual and to discover a sense of independence from Daniel and the rest of his family.



DEBT AND REDEMPTION

Even as life begins to move on in the months after the accident, the Brennan family continues to feel bogged down by the massive debts they feel they owe everyone around them—from Luke and Nicole's grieving parents, to Aunty Kath and Fin. Through the healing process and in particular through Daniel's journey, the novel sharply interrogates what redemption means for someone who, like Daniel, has taken lives because of his own carelessness, as well as what redemption looks like for those who love him in spite of his actions. By exploring the ways in which Daniel and his immediate family are both successful and unsuccessful in figuring out how to move forward in the world with the massive debt they feel obligated to carry, *The Story of Tom Brennan* suggests that one of the most effective ways to redeem oneself is to help others and give back wherever possible.

Within weeks of the accident, Daniel begins court-mandated counseling. He receives general counseling as well as counseling specifically intended to address his alcoholism, which was the one of the major issues that caused the accident in the first place. At the suggestion of his lawyer, he also writes apology letters to Nicole and Luke's families. The letters in particular are supposed to help create the image that Daniel recognizes the impact of his actions and is attempting to do better as he moves forward with his life. While Daniel's intense grief, anxiety, and remorse during those first few months suggest that he does recognize that what he did was wrong and is something he'll have to do his best to atone for, the letter that Nicole's family sends the Brennans in return makes it clear that this process isn't going to be an easy one. They write that it will be impossible for them to ever forgive Daniel for what he did, as they'll never have their daughter back—while Daniel will eventually be able to move on from the event and with his life.

This letter does several things. First, it implicates the entire Brennan family in Daniel's actions, as it's addressed to all of them. It notes (and others note several times) that Daniel was "an accident waiting to happen," which shifts the blame from Daniel alone to blame Mum and Dad as well—they're the ones who, in the eyes of the Mumbilli residents, allowed this to happen by not properly reining in their son. This letter, then, is a poignant reminder that redemption and forgiveness are things that people actually have to *earn* as opposed to something they can simply *ask* for. This is reinforced later at Daniel's sentencing hearing, when the judge echoes some of the same sentiments of the letter and suggests that Daniel needs a longer sentence in order to properly atone for his choices and the damage they caused.

Daniel spends his first several months in prison becoming increasingly depressed and struggles immensely with intense feelings of guilt and remorse. After Fin's birthday, Daniel becomes suicidal and is transferred to a crisis center, which is set up more like a mental hospital or a rehab center than a jail. There, Daniel is not only assigned a mentor, counselor, and a social worker, he's also assigned someone to mentor himself. Daniel's mentee, Theo, was convicted for drunk driving charges as well. Having the responsibility of mentoring Theo allows Daniel to develop a more nuanced understanding of what happened and also allows him to begin believing that there is indeed a way forward. Notably, Daniel is able to come to this realization because mentoring, unlike simply writing a letter to Nicole and Luke's families, allows Daniel to actually give back to his community and help someone else in a similar situation. In other words, while he's not able to specifically help Mumbilli heal by mentoring Theo, he's able to help Theo and Theo's hometown through this role, just as Daniel's mentor helps Mumbilli heal by mentoring Daniel.

This idea of finding a sense of redemption through giving back touches others in the Brennan family as well, Kylie in particular.

On the night of the accident, a drunk and violent fight between Fin and Daniel over Daniel's girlfriend, Claire, set the stage for the tragedy less than an hour later. Unbeknownst to most, however, the conflict wasn't entirely unfounded: Claire *did* like Fin and wanted to leave Daniel, and Kylie sneakily helped Claire start to see Fin in the week before the accident. Because Kylie feels responsible for fanning the flames of conflict between Fin and Daniel, she throws herself into helping Fin and Aunty Kath move into their apartment after Fin is released from his rehab facility.

Tom, on the other hand, "gives back" most notably in the immediate aftermath of the accident itself. Because he feels responsible for not trying to stop Daniel from driving drunk, when he, Matt, and Snorter return to the accident site, Tom feels obligated to stay by Fin's side until the paramedics are able to remove Fin from the car and transfer him to a hospital.

Taken together, the various instances in which the Brennans are relatively successful in repaying their debts suggests that it's not enough for someone to simply *be* sorry; rather, one must actually take action to show that one wants to make things better. However, it's also worth keeping in mind that as far as the reader knows, Mumbilli as a whole never forgives the Brennan family, and Daniel and Fin never see each other to begin repairing their relationship. These loose ends make it clear that redemption and forgiveness aren't things that simply happen once—they're things that all the Brennans will have to continue to negotiate, renegotiate, and work towards for years to come.



SYMBOLS

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



WATER

Throughout the novel, water in various forms functions as a symbol for freedom or improvement.

Tom notably begins to connect with his new rugby teammates in Coghill when he decides to join them at the local swimming pool, while Aunty Kath and Fin move to an apartment where the latter can see the ocean—moving home is, for Fin, a massive improvement over living in the hospital or in rehab, as he did for almost a year after the accident. The ocean also figures heavily into Tom's happy memories of times long past, with one notable exception: the time when Daniel held Tom underwater in retaliation. With that particular memory, water comes to symbolize the future in general. While for many, the ocean, swimming pool, or river help them recognize that there's a brighter future ahead, that moment is suggestive of Daniel's streak of cruelty that ultimately foreshadows his behavior in the lead up to the accident.



"THE LEGEND OF THE BRENNAN BROTHERS"

Back in Mumbilli, the local paper followed Tom and Daniel's rugby career closely, often referring to the two as "The Legend of the Brennan Brothers." Though Tom used to believe that the paper's interest was emblematic of his future rugby success (and of Daniel's as well), after the accident and the move to Coghill, reminders of the paper's interest help to trap Tom in thinking only about the past. The feature then comes to symbolize Tom's past and his fixation on linking rugby with Daniel, a habit that keeps Tom from recognizing his own potential and the fact that he's a valuable player in his own right. When Tom later makes the scrapbook for Daniel and includes newspaper clippings about "The Legend," Tom is symbolically able to give away the burden of the legend, which in turn allows him to focus on his future as an individual. In this way, when Tom is finally able to recognize his value as a player separate from his brother—and by extension, separate from "The Legend of the Brennan Brothers"—it symbolizes Tom's final coming of age and understanding of himself as an individual.



QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Random House edition of *The Story of Tom Brennan* published in 2005.

Chapter Three Quotes

☝ I wandered down the hall in case Mum was awake. The door to her room was open. I stood there. Maybe Dad was telling the truth, maybe she had just gone to bed and was waiting to hear how my first day went. I stepped into the doorway. A thickness in the air hung still and stale.

She didn't see me. How could she under all those covers?
"Yeah, thanks Mum," I whispered. "School went okay."

Related Characters: Tom Brennan (speaker), Dad, Mum

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 49

Explanation and Analysis

The afternoon after Tom's first day at school, he declines Dad's invitation to go the pool and instead checks to see if Mum is available to talk about his first day. Tom's whispered response to Mum's lack of acknowledgement makes it clear that one of the most pressing things affecting him right now

is her absence. Because she's too depressed to think about anyone else, she neglects both Tom and Kylie and is only able to pull herself out of bed for Daniel. This only reinforces Tom's suspicion that Daniel was truly the favorite child of the family.

Tom's desire to talk to someone further shows that more than anything, he desperately craves contact and emotional intimacy with other people. Going forward, this makes it clear that Tom is distancing himself from his peers because he's afraid of retaliation, not because he doesn't want to feel a sense of connection at all.

Chapter Four Quotes

☝☝ Suddenly I was sucked deeper into that long black tunnel, the memories of Fin and Daniel and how we once were, and the worst thing, the knowing. Knowing more than anything I'd ever know that things would never be the same.

Related Characters: Tom Brennan (speaker), Daniel Brennan, Fin

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 51

Explanation and Analysis

As Tom walks down to the sheds to talk to Brendan, his thoughts about Daniel and Fin suck him into a moment of depression and nearly paralyze him. This happens fairly regularly to Tom in the first half of the novel, which illustrates the way in which Tom tries and fails to cope with the trauma of the accident. This is partially because of the way in which Tom views his identity as being entirely bound up with his older brothers; he very much sees them as inherently linked. This, in turn, means that when it comes to the aftermath of the accident, Tom struggles greatly to remind himself that he didn't actually do anything wrong—Daniel was the one who chose to drive drunk, and it's Daniel's fault that Fin is paralyzed.

Chapter Six Quotes

☝☝ Somewhere in the bush, hard to say how far away, I could hear the painful sound of groaning, retching sobs. It was Daniel but I couldn't go to him. Part of me wanted to, the other part didn't. I knew I had to stay with Fin, stay with the mess Daniel had made. Yet a voice inside of me was screaming, "He's alive, he's alive. Daniel's alive."

Related Characters: Tom Brennan (speaker), Nicole, Luke, Snorter, Matt, Fin, Daniel Brennan

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 81

Explanation and Analysis

Tom recounts the experience of staying with Fin after he, Matt, and Snorter returned to the accident site. Tom's desire to go to Daniel shows again how connected the two once were to each other, and how close Tom still felt they were despite Daniel's months of bad behavior at this point. This is further reinforced by the voice in Tom's head celebrating that Daniel lived through the accident. In turn, his reaction reinforces the novel's overall assertion that blood is thicker than water, while this also suggests that brothers are naturally closer to each other than cousins. This is something that Tom struggles with later and though at the time he doesn't come to any conclusion, his reaction here suggests that there is a correct answer.

When Tom understands that he has to stay with Fin and "the mess Daniel had made," the novel begins to show how the rest of the Brennan family implicates themselves in Daniel's crime and feels responsible to make up for some of the damage.

☝☝ Brendan didn't want to say how bad Fin really was because it'd upset Dad and it wasn't his fault. But then Dad couldn't tell Brendan, or probably anyone for that matter, what state Daniel was in because the general consensus was that Daniel deserved what he got.

Related Characters: Tom Brennan (speaker), Dad, Brendan, Daniel Brennan

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 83

Explanation and Analysis

After Tom's family spends the weekend split up to visit either Fin or Daniel, Tom notices that no one is willing to tell the truth about how either boy is doing. This starts to suggest that one of the worst consequences of the accident is the silence it causes in the Brennan family as a whole. It's also important to keep in mind that, however ultimately ineffective, this silence is also one of the ways that the family is trying its hardest to protect its members from pain and further heartbreak. Tom himself turns to silence in

order to protect himself from being vulnerable with others, even when actually talking about what happened has the potential to make him feel better. In the end, such silence only serves to perpetuate the family's pain, while communication pushes family members toward healing.

Chapter Seven Quotes

☝☝ The thought of Dad hurting and the possibility that he could drop his bundle at any moment was too much for me to swallow.

Related Characters: Tom Brennan (speaker), Kylie Brennan, Mum, Daniel Brennan, Dad

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 103

Explanation and Analysis

Tom watches Dad struggle to maintain his composure as he attempts to explain to Kylie what it means that Daniel has to enter a plea in court. Tom's fear that Dad will "drop his bundle" implies that what Tom truly wants in this situation is a parental figure to maintain their composure and provide the assurance that everything is actually going to be okay. Though Mum hasn't taken to her bed yet at this point, she spends most of her time with Daniel and is inconsolable when she's not with him—either way, she's certainly not spending time with Tom and comforting him. This means that the responsibility for keeping the family together and functioning falls to Dad, and the possibility that he could stumble is too much for Tom in this moment to bear.

☝☝ Wasn't his life worth more? But that's exactly why he was here, because a life was worth something, and Daniel took two away. Whichever way I turned, my questions only found another one, always worse than the last.

Related Characters: Tom Brennan (speaker), Fin, Nicole, Luke, Daniel Brennan

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 109

Explanation and Analysis

Tom, shocked that Daniel's trial only lasts twenty minutes, goes on to contemplate the value of a life. It's worth noting

that in asking these questions, Tom tries to assign logical value and meaning to a situation that's extremely emotional and complex. While this is what the courts endeavor to do every day, Tom's inability to make sense of the situation suggests that the courts themselves are a somewhat ineffective way to answer questions regarding the value of life, or to dole out justice. This is reinforced by Tom's admission here that the two lives Daniel took were certainly worth more than twenty minutes in court, which suggests that the simple act of seeking redemption through the legal system isn't enough to actually grant Daniel any redemption.

Chapter Nine Quotes

☝☝ There were so many times when I just couldn't believe this'd happened, happened to me, to my family. This sort of thing happened to other people, not the Brennans.

Related Characters: Tom Brennan (speaker), Daniel Brennan, Snorter, Matt

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 120

Explanation and Analysis

When Tom returns to school after the accident, he feels as though it shouldn't have happened to his family. Tom's belief is clearly naïve and youthful—which, in turn, shows that Tom has a long way to go as he moves towards maturity. This viewpoint also begins to point out how caught up Tom is in Daniel, St. John's rugby, and the ethos of that team at this point. He doesn't yet realize how the accident built up in the months before, indicating that Tom isn't yet fully aware of how dysfunctional his life and the rugby team was. Later, he will reflect on the many different factors that contributed to the accident, and develop a much more nuanced understanding of the nature of tragedy, blame, and responsibility.

☝☝ "But remember your fellow man, Daniel, because life is more than just a one-man show. Everything we do in this life affects others. Did you think of that the night you got behind the wheel, your trusting passengers the loved ones of others? We think probably not."

Related Characters: Gran (speaker), Kylie Brennan, Nicole,

Dad, Mum, Tom Brennan, Daniel Brennan

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 123

Explanation and Analysis

Not long before Daniel's sentencing trial, Gran reads a letter from Nicole's family out loud to the family. Though Daniel doesn't seem to truly understand what her parents are getting at, even by the end of the novel, what they point to here is the fact that Daniel is a part of a team, and his actions do not affect him alone. They want him to understand that he needs to think about others in his life, just as he'd think about other players on the rugby field. What Nicole's parents don't understand here—or at least don't say outright—is that Daniel wasn't really thinking about his teammates at all at this point in his life. Tom later explains that Daniel was shirking all his responsibilities in favor of getting drunk, and the team suffered because he left them hanging. This reinforces that Daniel's primary journey throughout the novel is to discover that teamwork is important, and to accept responsibility for the fact that an individual's actions affect others.

☝ "Being a team player, you should have known better."

Related Characters: Judge Williams (speaker), Nicole, Luke, Daniel Brennan

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 128

Explanation and Analysis

When Judge Williams sentences Daniel, he insists that he can't be lenient because Daniel should've been more responsible, given his involvement in a team sport. With this, the novel reinforces the importance of teamwork, while also showing that one can be technically part of a team without truly participating. Daniel didn't actually behave like a team player in the months before the accident; that's exactly why he behaved the way he did and got in the accident in the first place. Taken together, this suggests that acting as a selfish individual and removing oneself from a team has disastrous consequences for everyone involved.

Chapter Ten Quotes

☝ "It gets him out of the mainstream for a while, gives him a bit of breathing space," explained Brendan. "He finds the visiting hard. I mean, it's his lifeline, but the guilt resurfaces every time. That's what strangles him."

Related Characters: Brendan (speaker), Daniel Brennan, Tom Brennan

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 144

Explanation and Analysis

On one of their morning runs, Brendan tells Tom about Daniel's impending move to the crisis center at the jail. At the crisis center, Daniel will have more staff support and most importantly, will have access to a mentor and the ability to mentor someone himself. Brendan's support for this move suggests that he understands that in order to begin to heal, Daniel will need to be able to feel like a part of a team again. He'll be able to do this by participating in the mentorship program. In addition, by giving back to others through mentoring, Daniel will be able to relieve some of his personal guilt, tell his family that he's doing good things when he visits, and ultimately, find some semblance of redemption.

Chapter Eleven Quotes

☝ "I mean, it was bad—it was all bad—but even after the worst visits, there was still hope when you left him, some hope in the realization that one day Daniel'd be getting out of there, a free man."

But Fin would never be free, and that was too enormous to swallow.

Related Characters: Tom Brennan (speaker), Aunty Kath, Fin, Daniel Brennan

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 150

Explanation and Analysis

After Aunty Kath tells Tom about Fin's desire for a birthday party, Tom spirals inward and fixates on the fact that Fin is very hard to be around still. While Tom's thoughts are understandable, it's important to keep in mind that one of the reasons Tom feels so terribly about Fin is because of the

way he sees himself as being connected to Daniel. This means that Tom feels somehow responsible for what happened to Fin, even though he later admits that he's not sure there's anything he could've done to prevent the accident.

This also points to the fact that even though Daniel is in jail serving his time, Fin is the one who is truly paying the price for Daniel's actions because he, unlike Daniel, is physically marred for life. It shows ultimately that what happened simply wasn't fair, and that no matter what Daniel does, he'll never be able to make things right for Fin.

☝ Us Brennans had a lot to ask for and not much reason to give thanks. But I was thankful. Mum was up.

Related Characters: Tom Brennan (speaker), Gran, Auntie Kath, Mum

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 157

Explanation and Analysis

Soon after Auntie Kath scolds Mum for neglecting Tom and Kylie in her grief, Mum agrees to get up and attend church with the rest of the family on Sunday. Tom is extremely thankful that she's awake. This moment represents a turning point in the family's healing process. Mum's decision to get up shows that she's beginning to understand that she will need to resume caring for the rest of her family and can no longer wallow in her own pain. This moment also suggests that Mum is finding some solace by imitating Gran in her love of religion. For Gran, Catholicism and the saints in particular allow her to feel supported and in control of her life. While Tom offers no insight into whether or not Mum feels the same way, it's very possible she does, simply given that the first time she gets up is to attend church, not a community event or a family gathering.

Chapter Twelve Quotes

☝ Once, probably not that long ago, I'm not sure I could've gone back at all. But here I was sliding the drawer open.

Related Characters: Tom Brennan (speaker), Daniel Brennan, Gran

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 165

Explanation and Analysis

While trying to make a present for Daniel's birthday, Tom had discovered a scrapbook page of Gran's that included a newspaper article about Daniel's accident. He'd had to stop his project in that moment, but a few days later finds that he's able to go back to the scrapbook. That Tom recognizes that he's improving and is better able to face his fears is indicative of the positive effect of his budding friendships with the Bennie's rugby team, as well as the fact that his family is starting to heal in general. This all works together to show that when Tom feels supported in his life and doesn't feel so compelled to act as an individual, he's able to conquer his fears, do tough things, and move forward.

☝ "You could have told me. Do you think I couldn't see you fading away those first few weeks? Living on cereal, my goodness, you silly thing."

Related Characters: Gran (speaker), Tom Brennan

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 167

Explanation and Analysis

One morning, Gran calls Tom out for not liking her cooking and insists he should've said something about it sooner. This is one of the most tangible moments in which Gran recognizes that Tom is a person in his own right and agrees to meet him in the middle rather than insist that Tom cave to her desires (and meals). Her newfound sense of humor and her desire to care for her grandson suggests that Gran sees that Tom is in a place now where he's ready to be helped. This is supported by the fact that Tom is also able to see Gran's attempt to help for what it is, and not view it as something that she's trying to do to him just to gain control over his life. This shows that both Tom and Gran are beginning to see each other as independent, full people who are more than the familial roles they play, a realization that is a major aspect of Tom's coming of age in general.

☝ My breath panted at the back of my throat. He knew? Jimmy knew?

"We're your mates, Tom," Rory started. "We're part of a..."

Related Characters: Rory, Tom Brennan (speaker), Kylie Brennan, Jimmy

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 173

Explanation and Analysis

Rory and Jimmy take Tom to Burger King after school to warn him that Kylie gave a speech talking about what happened in Mumbilli. Here, Rory and Jimmy try to calm Tom's fears. It's especially telling that Rory tries to assure Tom that they're part of a team and means that as something comforting. This shows that Rory believes that teamwork is valuable, and that camaraderie is extremely important. Tom, on the other hand, runs from this encounter, which suggests that he's not yet willing to accept his new teammates as true friends. This is understandable given the situation he left at St. John's, where winning was considered far more important than friendship or simply looking out for one another. This situation shows that while Tom is certainly improving, he still has a long way to go as he learns to accept the friendship and support of his new teammates.

Chapter Fourteen Quotes

☝☝ Bennie's just wasn't the same. Everyone got along, and there was no one person you'd call an asshole, and they had team unity—you couldn't deny them that. But what they didn't have was technique, and that's what put them on the outer next to teams like St. John's that could play the game in their sleep.

Related Characters: Tom Brennan (speaker), Dad

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 206

Explanation and Analysis

At the beginning of footy camp, Tom decides that he's going to check out and do the bare minimum, since Bennie's doesn't have the skills to actually win. Tom's assessment of Bennie's versus St. John's shows that despite Tom's major leaps forward in terms of understanding the importance of friendship, he's not yet there in recognizing that friendship should also transfer over to teamwork. He still thinks that rugby is primarily about winning, and that it's not worth playing otherwise. Even more importantly, he doesn't recognize that St. John's did at one point have team unity as

well as technique, which is what allowed them to do so well; when that unity faltered, in turn, so did the team's winning streak. This suggests that even if the Bennie's players learned just a little bit about technique, they'd have the potential to do even better than St. John's, given how robust their sense of unity is.

☝☝ "But we can't undo what's done. Bennie's is giving you a chance and, as pathetic as it may seem to you, it's still a chance." Again I heard his swallow, loud and dry. "No one's above anyone, surely you know that by now."

Related Characters: Dad (speaker), Daniel Brennan, Tom Brennan

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 210

Explanation and Analysis

Midway through footy camp, Dad gives Tom a pep talk and insists that he needs to take camp and rugby seriously, as Bennie's is giving him a second chance to succeed. When Dad does this, he also admits that St. John's was wrong to prioritize winning above all else. He implies here that the team unity that Bennie's experiences has the potential to help Tom far more than St. John's focus on winning ever did. Dad also calls Tom out on his sense of superiority, which Tom clings to in order to protect himself from having to be vulnerable. The fact that Tom does ultimately do as Dad asks and tries hard to connect with the team after this reinforces that this is a defining moment in Tom's coming of age journey, as this is the moment when he truly decides to lean on his friends.

Chapter Fifteen Quotes

☝☝ Since Dad's rave I'd been giving it all a fair bit of thought, but I couldn't exactly put my finger on it.

"You know, Dan, they really enjoy playing. It's not just about winning."

"Can't see the point," Dan frowned. "I mean, it's all about winning. Isn't it?"

Related Characters: Daniel Brennan, Tom Brennan (speaker), Dad

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 213

Explanation and Analysis

When Tom visits Daniel right after footy camp, he tries to tell him about how Bennie's is different from St. John's, but that this isn't a bad thing. Dan's confusion and insistence that rugby is, in fact, all about winning contrasts with Dad's earlier advice and continues to make the case that Dan was an accident waiting to happen, as Mumbilli suggested he was. His belief in winning and his decision to prioritize that over team unity or friendship led to the destructive path that finally culminated in the accident.

This shows too that while Daniel's time in jail may be a generally good thing—he is improving in many ways—it's not necessarily teaching him the importance of teamwork or friendship. It's possible that this could change after the novel ends, given Daniel's enjoyment of the mentorship program, but this moment suggests that it'll take a lot of work before Daniel understands that teamwork is truly more important than winning.

☞ "The best thing about playing in the firsts at St. John's was playing with you, Dan." As I said it I realized that towards the end it had become the worst thing too—trying to carry him as his game slipped and he stopped caring about us, the Brennan brothers.

Related Characters: Tom Brennan (speaker), Daniel Brennan

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 214

Explanation and Analysis

During Tom's visit with Daniel, Tom realizes that his relationship with his brother was both his favorite and his least favorite part of playing rugby. This shows that when Tom and Daniel were acting as a team, they were truly unstoppable, as the newspaper reported in "The Legend of the Brennan Brothers." However, as soon as Daniel stopped acting like they were a part of a team—playing hungover, for instance—Tom was left to carry all the weight and effectively became a team of one. This shows too how Tom and other family members were forced, and are still forced,

to pick up the slack for Daniel. This is evidenced later by Dad's insistence on paying for Auntie Kath's moving expenses, as he believes it's his responsibility to do whatever he can to atone for Daniel's actions.

Chapter Sixteen Quotes

☞ "We were fighting all the time. The new young players were shit-scared. If you had a bad game you were dead meat. It wasn't about us, it was all about the Wattle Shield. We stopped looking out for each other."

Related Characters: Tom Brennan (speaker), Fin, Daniel Brennan, Kylie Brennan

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 229

Explanation and Analysis

After Kylie admits to fanning the flames between Fin and Daniel prior to the accident, Tom tells her about how horrible things with the St. John's rugby team got in the last few weeks before the crash. Tom's main point to all of the things he lists is that the team wasn't truly a team anymore—there was no team unity like he experiences now at Bennie's, and players didn't look out for one another. Because of this, Daniel felt entitled to continue to slack off and let his teammates down by drinking.

It's also important to note that when Tom mentions the fear of the younger players, he feels a lot like this in his real life in the first half of the novel. He fears that everyone is out to get him and is unwilling to trust anyone. That he picks up on the fact that the younger St. John's players felt the same way suggests he developed this outlook because of his involvement with the team, while Kylie has shown herself willing to ask for help much earlier exactly because she wasn't exposed to the same kind of toxic environment.

☞ "They couldn't control Dan. They were scared of him. Well, scared of the consequences if they tried to pull him into line [...] Maybe Daniel was always going to do something like this. Maybe he had to fall this far."

Related Characters: Tom Brennan (speaker), Claire, Fin, Dad, Mum, Daniel Brennan, Kylie Brennan

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 230

Explanation and Analysis

During Tom and Kylie's conversation about her secret regarding Fin and Claire, Tom explains that Mum and Dad were afraid to discipline Daniel because of the potential consequences. In revealing this, especially in such a level tone, Tom indicates that his entire family is somewhat to blame for the accident and Daniel's actions. This reinforces the novel's assertion that one's actions don't exist in a vacuum and in particular, one's actions affect one's family first and foremost. When Tom suggests that Daniel needed to fall this far, it shows that Tom now believes that Daniel is getting what he deserves, at least to a degree. This suggests that the only way for someone like Daniel to learn the true importance of friendship and teamwork is to lose it all.

☝ Before, Brendan had been someone who was just always around. Someone I never really thought about. Mum's little brother. My uncle, that was about as far as it went. But that's when life was simpler.

Now Brendan wanted me to see him. See who he really was. This was probably the way Daniel saw him and now I did too.

Related Characters: Tom Brennan (speaker), Gran, Jonny Tulake, Mum, Daniel Brennan, Brendan

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 234

Explanation and Analysis

After Brendan tells Tom explicitly that he's gay and in a relationship with Jonny, Tom begins to see Brendan as more than just an uncle. This brings one of the major elements of Tom's coming of age journey to the forefront, as he has the experience of seeing family members this way with Gran and Mum as well—that is, as full, complicated human beings who are more than whatever familial label they happen to occupy. It's especially important that Tom also recognizes that Daniel sees Brendan this way, as Tom holds Daniel up as the pinnacle of adulthood. Stepping up to the same level as Daniel, then, shows Tom that, as far as he's concerned, he's becoming just as much an adult as Daniel is. As Tom makes these realizations, he's also better able to connect with his family, especially since this reinforces for him that Brendan is one of his best allies as he heals from the trauma of the accident.

Chapter Seventeen Quotes

☝ I hadn't enjoyed the last season at St. John's, that I knew now. It hadn't mattered how good my game was, the pressure, the disgruntlement, the unpredictability of Daniel just didn't add up to good footy. It added up to frustration and division.

Now I knew differently. Bennie's first fifteen had taught me plenty. When I'd needed it most, Bennie's had reminded me that the game was better when a team was united and loving it.

Related Characters: Tom Brennan (speaker), Michael Harvey, Dad, Daniel Brennan

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 245

Explanation and Analysis

After Harvey admits that he remembers seeing Tom playing the previous season but thought that Tom didn't seem to enjoy it, Tom realizes that Harvey is absolutely right—wasn't having fun playing rugby. This allows Tom to crystallize his new ideas about teamwork and friendship, understanding the necessity of both if one wants to play rugby well. It's telling that Tom attributes so much of his discontent to Daniel in particular, as that suggests that his habit of associating himself with Daniel did in some ways keep him from forming relationships with the team at St. John's as well as at Bennie's. The fact that Tom knows better now after spending time with the Bennie's team indicates that Tom has truly come into his own and no longer thinks of himself as linked so tightly with Daniel; now, his identity is his own.

Chapter Eighteen Quotes

☝ We were. The three of us, like brothers.

Now it was hard to believe that. Blood's thicker than water, so what's the difference between your brother and your cousin? I didn't know. I'd never know.

Related Characters: Tom Brennan (speaker), Fin, Daniel Brennan

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 261

Explanation and Analysis

When Fin and Tom go for a walk during Tom's final visit of the novel, Tom considers what the real difference is between his relationships with Fin and Daniel after Fin

notes that he, Tom, and Daniel used to be like brothers. At this point in the novel, Daniel and Fin haven't seen each other for a year, while Tom only visits the other two every couple of weeks—a sharp contrast to how things were in Mumbilli, when the three spent most of their time together. Now, Tom recognizes that family is family, regardless of what a family member's particular relationship might be to someone else. In this way, this question (and the implied understanding that the difference between brothers and

cousins isn't all that much) mirrors Tom's newfound understanding of his other family members—particularly Brendan, who he realizes is a complicated individual, not simply his uncle. Taken together, Tom's ability to make these distinctions indicates that he's coming of age and beginning to see that his family is nuanced, varied, and complicated—yet will always be able to support him in the future.



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.

PROLOGUE

It's 4:30 a.m. on the 23rd of January. Quietly, Tom and his family—Dad, Mum, and Kylie—load the last of their bags and suitcases into their car. Tom waits for Dad's signal and then pushes the car out onto the street and past "the ugly words that told us we were no longer wanted." When they reach the top of the hill they call "Daniel's Whine," after Tom's brother Daniel, Tom jumps in the car. They glide down the hill silently. Tom thinks that when everyone in town wakes up, they won't be forced to remember what Tom's family means to them now.

The prologue sets up several important things for the rest of the novel. First, Daniel isn't mentioned as being with the rest of the family. It's also curious as to why the family is sneaking out. It's clear that something has happened to provoke the anger of the town, which suggests that the Brennan family as a whole is paying for something by leaving.



CHAPTER ONE

At dinner, Gran asks who's going to say grace. Tom notes that this isn't truly a question, as she's staring at him. He begins, but Gran stops him to ask where Mum is. Kylie looks as though Gran is crazy, as Mum hasn't eaten at the table since Daniel left. Gran calls for Mum and Mum, too tired to fight, shuffles to the table. Tom resumes the prayer, repeating the words that Gran mouths to him—he thanks God for the food and for Australia (it's Australia Day), but he struggles to repeat her final prayer for Daniel. Tom keeps his eyes closed so he doesn't have to look at Mum and Dad struggling to maintain composure as Gran loudly asks God to forgive Daniel.

From Tom's observations, things are definitely out of whack with the Brennan family. Gran's insistence that Mum eat with them suggests that she's attempting to take control and create some sense of normalcy, though Mum's shuffling and the implication that her presence at dinner is a big deal implies that this may be a questionable endeavor. When Gran asks God to forgive Daniel, it indicates that Daniel has done something bad—and that likely accounts for his absence.



Tom thinks of how Australia Day used to go down at his parents' place. They'd have a barbeque and Tom, Daniel, Kylie, and their cousin Fin would start a game of cricket while Dad grilled. In the afternoon, Matt, Snorter, Luke, and other friends would show up and the cricket game would become the loud event that made Australia Day at the Brennans' special. Tom thinks that all of that is in the past now; today, his family is at Gran's while all of her paintings of saints watch over them.

Tom's flashback to what Australia Day used to be like, and especially his assertion that it's all in the past now, suggests that something profound has changed in the last year. It suggests primarily that the Brennans are no longer an integral part of their old home, though they don't yet seem to be integrated in their new home either.



Uncle Brendan attempts to carve the roast pork. The pork is so overcooked that he can barely get through it. Finally, at Gran's direction, Brendan passes the knife to Dad. Tom wonders how Brendan can stand living on the same property as Gran and wonders how hot it is. He's sweating enough to stick to his seat. Tom thinks that despite the horror of this Australia Day, Daniel would still give anything to be here.

The belief that Daniel would rather be here than wherever he is implies that wherever Daniel is, it's not good—though it's also worth keeping in mind that while this celebration certainly isn't fun, overcooked pork isn't exactly the end of the world. This suggests that Tom is especially emotional about whatever is going on.



A man's voice interrupts Tom's reverie, and Father Vincent walks into the dining room at Gran's invitation. Tom thinks that he's obviously only come for a meal and to stare at them, as he's sure Gran has told everyone about Daniel. Father Vincent introduces himself to Mum, who refuses to look at him, and then Gran invites him to eat with the family. He sits down next to Tom and attempts to engage Tom in conversation. Gran makes sure to note that Tom is repeating Year Eleven, while Kylie managed to keep up with her schoolwork. Gran also insists that Tom will absolutely join the Saint Benedict's rugby team and points out that Dad will be assistant coaching. She declares it'll be a fresh start for everyone.

Father Vincent asks Tom if he was the one responsible for leading his old school, St. John's, to the last three Wattle Shields. Dad hurriedly corrects him that they only won two, as they "missed out" last year. Father Vincent stammers and then shifts the conversation to St. Benedict's rugby in general. He mentions the coach, Michael Harvey, and lists several skilled players. Tom says nothing but thinks that the Bennie's team "couldn't catch a cold." When Father Vincent mentions a game that took place last July, Tom thinks that he can barely remember last July. He thinks that he hasn't yet decided if he wants to play rugby this year, as it won't be the same without Daniel.

Uncle Brendan reminds Tom that there's a game of touch rugby in the afternoon, which will give Tom a chance to meet his classmates before he starts school the next day. Tom agrees to go, though he regrets it almost immediately when Dad and Gran decide to watch and decide that Kylie has to go too. Gran turns to Mum and asks if she's coming, insisting that her silence isn't helping. Mum looks briefly at Tom with dull eyes and then leaves the room without touching any of her food. Brendan helps her out and tells Gran to leave her alone, though Gran continues to mutter.

Gran exclaims that she prays to Saint Jude every day to make Mum's life more tolerable and then rants about Daniel. Finally, she gets up and begins snatching plates off the table. Kylie and Dad rush to pick up the dropped silverware. When Father Vincent gets up and offers to help Gran, Gran snaps at him that he can help her by praying for Mum, Dad, and especially Daniel. She storms out of the room, leaving everyone else in an awkward silence.

From what Tom has said thus far, it's clear that whatever happened at the Brennan's old home affected every member of the family, not just Daniel. This begins to show that, per the logic of the novel, families are a cohesive unit that experience failure and success together, not as individuals. Tom's belief that Father Vincent is staring at them shows that Tom is carrying a fair amount of guilt and is self-conscious about whatever happened, given that there's no indication that Father Vincent is actually staring.



Pay attention to Tom's derision when he talks about the Bennie's team in general. At this point, it shows that Tom has a warped sense of what team sports in general are about: winning, and winning only. His indecision about playing rugby because of Daniel's absence reinforces how close Tom is with his family and Daniel in particular. It suggests too that the brothers were bound together even more tightly by being part of a team with a common goal.



The decision to attend the touch game suggests that Tom is willing to look for community in his new home, while his immediate regret indicates that he'd ideally like to do this separate from his family. Mum's silence and choice to leave the table like this shows that she in particular is suffering with whatever's going on—and she's not being a supportive parent as a result.



Gran's exclamations show that she leans heavily on religion to help her through these difficult times, a tendency that the rest of her family doesn't appear to share. This means that Gran is able to find relief and a sense of peace somewhere, while the rest of the family will need to look elsewhere in order to heal.



CHAPTER TWO

Tom decides that if forced to say something nice, he'd be able to say that the touch game will be good to get him running, which he hasn't done for a while. He goes downstairs to his room, which used to be Uncle Brendan's. It's dark and brown, so Tom nicknamed it "the cave" when he arrived. Because the only place for Tom to plug in his game console is the lounge room, where Gran hosts prayer groups, there's nothing for Tom to do except lie on his bed and stare at the painting of Saint Cecelia that Gran hung for him. Gran's house is covered in paintings of saints—Kylie's room has Saint Rose, while Mum and Dad have Saint Jane.

Kylie pokes her head into Tom's room to tell him it's time to get ready. She insists that the game will be fine for Tom since he gets to play, but she'll have to sit with "The Grandmother" and talk. Kylie spits that Mum isn't coming and suggests that maybe she should do what Mum does and refuse to come out of her room. She continues to moan about how awful lunch was and doesn't want to hear it when Tom suggests that Daniel might feel more stuck than they do. Kylie huffs out of the room and Tom plays with his socks. The socks have Daniel's name stitched into them, and Tom feels like there's no hope.

Uncle Brendan sticks his head in to check on Tom. Tom brushes off Brendan's attempts to make sure he's okay. More than anything, Tom is afraid that at the game, he's going to meet people who likely know more about him than he knows about them, and he's afraid that things won't be any different in Coghill than they were in Mumbilli. He passes Mum's room on the way out and sees her in bed, looking like nothing more than a lump under sheets. Tom tells her he's going out, but she doesn't answer.

In the truck on the way to the game, Kylie sits between Gran and Tom in the back. Tom can tell she's extremely angry. Dad and Brendan discuss a tractor they have to fix tomorrow. Tom explains that Dad used to work as a mechanic and a rugby coach in Mumbilli, while Mum helped run the cafeteria—the Brennan family nearly ran the entire town. He looks out the window at the main drag in Coghill, which is lined with fast food restaurants. He thinks that while Mumbilli only had a Kentucky Fried, it was one of the nice ones.

Though Tom doesn't see it this way yet, it's possible to read Gran's saints as her own personal support team in much the same way that Tom goes on to rely on his rugby teammates. Again, this shows that Gran already understands the power of friendship and teamwork to help get her through difficult times, while Tom's disparaging comments about the Bennie's rugby team suggests that at this point, he cares more about winning than being a part of a supportive community.



Giving Gran this nickname combined with the tone that the text implies shows that Kylie and Tom don't think highly of Gran at all—in fact, it seems as though they hardly see her as a legitimate part of the family. The fact that Tom is hanging on to Daniel's old socks suggests that he still feels connected to Daniel, even if Daniel isn't there—something that seems to make Tom feel even more alone.



Tom's fear makes it clear again that he's going through life right now as though he's a team of one: he's not willing to trust Brendan; Mum is uninvolved; and Kylie seems a poor ally. However, note that Tom is doing this because of a fear of whatever happened in Mumbilli. This suggests that what happened showed Tom that he couldn't rely on others to care about him.



The many fast food restaurants imply that Coghill is much larger than Mumbilli was (later, Brendan says that Coghill has 30,000 more people than Mumbilli). This suggests that Tom's fear has to do with the small-town environment in Mumbilli, something that he also seems to think is superior given his assessment of differences in fast food options.



Brendan calls out the window to Shorty, a tall man meticulously picking lettuce off of his burger. Brendan introduces Shorty to Dad as Peter McGregor. Shorty greets Gran and then turns to Tom, whom he recognizes as a rugby player. Tom corrects Shorty that he played half-back, not five-eight, in the Wattle Shield premiership two years ago. Shorty is somewhat confused; he's convinced that Tom played five-eight. Tom is terrified. He knows that Shorty will certainly put two and two together and realize what happened in Mumbilli. Instead, Shorty just grins at Brendan and accuses him of keeping his talented nephew hidden.

Going back in time, Tom explains that Saturday, August 27th had been "sudden death" for the St. John's rugby team. Winning that sudden death match meant that they'd be in the running to win the Wattle Shield for the third year in a row. Luke, the captain, paced, and Dad gave a surprisingly calm pep talk. He gave special instructions to Luke, Daniel, and Fin. St. John's won narrowly thanks to Fin. They were somewhat surprised to win, as they hadn't been playing well all season. Because they figured this game would be their last for the season, they'd booked the scout hall for a party that night. It did turn out to be the last game for some of them.

Tom hasn't touched a ball since that game five months ago. He's shocked that everything at the Coghill field feels so familiar and grudgingly lets Brendan take him around and introduce him to the other guys. Tom feels like an outsider and makes no effort to remember names. Suddenly, he hears the others chanting "Jonny, Jonny!" Jonny is huge and extremely handsome. He introduces himself to Tom and asks after Mum. Tom excuses himself and goes to find Dad. Dad introduces Tom to Michael Harvey, the rugby coach at Bennie's. He shakes Tom's hand enthusiastically and Tom feels exhausted already. Tom watches Gran boss a young man around as he sets up her chair while Kylie pretends not to see.

Harvey calls everyone to the center of the field. He reminds them of the rules and then instructs everyone to split up based on who lives north or south of the river. Harvey calls out a young man named Marcus for taking the wrong side, but Marcus insists he just moved and his heart is still on the other side of the river. Marcus points to Tom and suggests that Tom could switch, but a guy named Rory stands up for Tom. Marcus angrily switches sides and Rory whispers to Tom that Marcus is a jerk, but harmless.

Later, Tom will share that Daniel played five-eight; Shorty is getting Tom and Daniel mixed up here. Notice, however, that Shorty doesn't realize this and further, doesn't seem to care much. This suggests that many of Tom's fears are possibly unfounded and a result of his small-town upbringing in Mumbilli, where whatever happened appears to have been major news.



Notice that the St. John's team effectively signaled that they were giving up by booking the scout hall for an end-of-season party. This shows that they truly were playing poorly, despite Fin's heroics. This all begins to suggest that the St. John's team wasn't necessarily playing well together and had even given up on winning because of that. This starts to indicate that winning, good teamwork, and camaraderie are linked, regardless of what Tom says on the matter.



The strange and uncomfortable sense of familiarity that Tom feels indicates that he does in some ways believe that what he's experiencing was—or, in his mind, should have been—unique to rugby games in Mumbilli. Again, this begins to suggest that Tom feels extremely superior to the players here in Coghill and still very much groups himself with the Mumbilli players, even if those people turned out to not be true friends.



When Rory takes it upon himself to stand up for Tom and tell him about Marcus, it suggests that Rory understands that this is one of the best ways to make an outsider like Tom feel welcome and at home in this foreign environment. On the other hand, Marcus's suggestion that Tom switch reinforces that Tom is very much an outsider.



When the game begins, Tom finds that running and playing feels natural. For the first time in months, he feels free. He handily evades Marcus and between him, Jonny, and Rory, their team wins easily. Tom participates in the celebrating afterwards, but he notes that the empty feeling is returning. Rory tells Tom he'll see him tomorrow, and Tom unwillingly remembers that life will indeed continue to go on, regardless of how he feels about it.

Tom's feeling that rugby feels normal and natural indicates that, regardless of his feelings on the matter, the game itself will be a major help in how Tom heals from trauma, adjusts to his new home, and moves towards adulthood. Being the one thing that makes him feel okay, it'll help him feel okay in other parts of his life.



CHAPTER THREE

The next morning is tense; it's Kylie and Tom's first day of school in Coghill. Tom kicks a ball around outside while Kylie spends hours on her hair. In the car, Tom pretends he's choking on the fumes from the product in her hair, which makes Kylie very angry. Tom doesn't stop until Kylie attracts Dad's ire by cursing. Dad has a thing about girls swearing, which is why he liked Daniel's girlfriend Claire so much—she never swore.

Teasing Kylie is pretty standard sibling fare, which shows that there are still ways in which the Brennan family is normal and untouched by the trauma. However, Tom's mention of Claire in relation to this suggests that he still views these normal things as being colored by whatever happened to Daniel in Mumbilli.



Dad pulls up at the side entrance of St. Benedict's and tries to give Kylie and Tom a pep talk, but his suggestion that this is a challenge from God makes Kylie even angrier. She throws herself out of the car. Tom follows her and looks back to see Dad leaning over the wheel, his head in his hands. He wishes he hadn't looked back as he follows signs to the office and steps in behind Kylie. As Kylie leaves the office, Tom notices that her bag hitched up her skirt, revealing her underwear. He tries to get her attention and when he finally does, he sees that she's crying. Tom lets her go, understanding that it's easier to keep it together when you don't have to talk about it.

When Dad invokes God, it shows that he's trying to take Gran's methods of handling stress and use it himself. Kylie's reaction to this suggests that she's not yet ready to embrace these changes to her family yet. Then, when Tom regrets looking at Dad and seeing him so upset, it suggests that much of Tom's fear is likely rooted in effectively losing both parents, given that Mum spends so much of her time in bed, not parenting.



Tom is assigned Michael Harvey for homeroom. Tom is somewhat uncomfortable that Harvey apparently knows what happened with Daniel. Fortunately, Harvey introduces Tom quickly to the class and then tells him to sit next to Rory. Rory greets Tom and Tom thinks of the promise he made himself: that he'd only stay in Coghill until he finishes Year Twelve. He's not sure what he'll do next, but he knows he can't go back to Mumbilli for a while. Tom hopes that after Daniel's done his time, maybe they can go back.

Tom's phrasing about Daniel doing his time implies that Daniel is in jail. This introduces the idea that Daniel is trying to redeem himself for whatever crime he committed and make up for it, and Tom's sense of guilt and anguish suggests that he too is trying to make up for what happened, whatever that is.



The bus home is crowded with kids from four schools. Tom is able to slip into a seat and check out girls. He notices several sexy girls and thinks that before, Daniel would've been able to get whichever girl he wanted. The only girl Daniel ever messed up with was Claire. Tom explains that in the lead up to the accident, Daniel had been having a rough time and unlike girls before her, Claire put up with it. Daniel would rage and then sulk, and Tom wondered if Mum and Dad were scared of him since they never tried to do anything about it.

The possibility that Mum and Dad were scared of Daniel and thus neglected to discipline him places some of the responsibility for whatever happened on their shoulders, not just on Daniel's. This shows that one's actions don't take place in a vacuum; whatever Daniel did is clearly affecting the rest of his family in profound ways, and it may not have just been his fault alone.



Tom also knew that Daniel liked Claire more than he'd liked any other girls, which made him extremely possessive. This was the case in particular with their cousin Fin. Tom wonders if Daniel was so awful because he could see that Claire also liked Fin, not just the other way around. In the weeks before the accident, Fin had started to grow up and become more confident. His skills on the field began to make him look better than Daniel and Tom, and he looked even better since Daniel was often playing hungover.

Tom notes that he's spent hours dissecting the changes that took place before the accident, trying to figure out what exactly changed. Specifically, he wonders if things started to change before the party or during the party. Daniel had gotten too drunk and aggressive and in the days that followed, Mumbilli had started to whisper that Daniel was an accident waiting to happen.

Because Gran's house is so far out of town, Tom and Kylie are the last off the bus and then have to walk ten minutes. Tom tries to ask Kylie about her day, but she won't engage with him. She says that he doesn't want to talk about what she wants to talk about (the accident) and asks Tom what teacher he got for homeroom. When Tom says he got Harvey, Kylie begins to cry and shouts that rugby has always saved him and Daniel. Tom explodes in anger, yelling that he's stuck in Coghill just like she is, and points out that rugby didn't save Daniel from jail. Kylie runs home, and Tom sits on the side of the road. Tom thinks there's no point in trying to talk about anything.

The night of the accident, Tom arrived at the scout hall late, as he had to convince Matt and Snorter that they should actually go. When they arrived, Daniel and Luke were already drunk, though Daniel was still happy. Tom went outside, where Snorter was telling everyone about his trail bike and two girls, including Nicole, were singing show tunes. Matt pointed to Claire, who was walking out of the hall looking like she was crying. Tom approached her and though Claire initially tried to brush him off, she told him that she broke up with Daniel. She rambled on, almost to herself, that she should've waited to break up with him, as he scares her when he's so drunk.

Tom watched Fin walk into the hall and Claire said that when Daniel doesn't get his way, he snaps. Tom assured Claire he wasn't mad at her, and Claire told Tom that Daniel said he was going to kill "him." From the hall, Tom heard shouting and Matt yelling for him. Tom and Claire ran into the hall to see a circle of people chanting, "fight," with Fin and Daniel in the middle. Daniel called Fin a weasel and yelled at Tom to not get involved. Finally, Daniel pushed Fin and shoved his way out of the circle.

The mention that Daniel was playing hungover, especially when combined with his possessiveness, suggests that Daniel was dealing with some major problems in Mumbilli that affected both the St. John's rugby team and the Brennan family as a whole, given Fin's involvement. Again, this reinforces that actions don't happen in a vacuum, especially in a small town.



The whispers in Mumbilli suggest that things did start to change before the party; Tom may just not have been able to see it given his proximity to Daniel and their relationship as brothers. This suggests that Tom's identity is very much wrapped up in Daniel's, and that robs Tom of perspective.



The decision not to talk to anyone about anything shows Tom attempting to wall himself off. At this point, this is a protective measure given that Tom doesn't trust anyone, and especially not his family. This reinforces the novel's assertion that for Tom, family isn't safe right now. This also implies that Tom may feel betrayed by Daniel in particular, given how close they were and how angry and upset Tom is about all of this now.



Claire's fear of Daniel casts an sinister light on whatever happened, as it begins to show that it wasn't just a benign accident. The fact that she's willing to talk to Tom and trust him with this information shows that, despite his closeness with his brother, Tom is likely someone trustworthy and also not angry, scary, or vindictive like Daniel. This starts to show the reader that Tom has an identity separate from Daniel, even if Tom might not see it that way.



This fight between Fin and Daniel reinforces for the reader and the bystanders that any team unity there might've been is no longer there. Though this isn't as important to Tom right now, this is important to keep in mind as Tom begins to play rugby at Bennie's, given that he continues to lean on nonexistent team camaraderie at St. John's.



Tom followed Daniel outside, yelling that Daniel did this to himself by treating Claire horribly. Daniel slammed Tom against a pole as Fin and Luke tried to talk Daniel down. When Daniel finally let Tom go, Tom walked away towards home, yelling that Daniel deserves everything he gets and is going down. The party started to break up and a line of cars started down the dirt track, most of them stopping to heckle Tom on the way. When Claire passed Tom, she yelled that Fin was with Daniel. A minute later, Snorter and Matt pulled over next to Tom. They said that Fin, the only sober one, would likely take Daniel and Luke home. Snorter remembered he left his jacket at the hall, so he and Matt turned around and promised to pick Tom up on their way back through.

Tom's decision to stand up to Daniel and try to make him take responsibility for the fight shows that even though Tom may be somewhat afraid of Daniel and understand that Daniel isn't rational right now, Tom feels he has some power and sway to make his brother see sense. Claire, Matt, and Snorter's words to Tom about how everyone will get home safely shows that there is a larger sense of community in Mumbilli; the teens do care for each other's safety, regardless of Daniel's anger.



Tom enters Gran's house and thinks it's dark and creepy. Dad is in the kitchen and cheerily invites Tom to come with him and Kylie to the **pool**. Dad says that Mum is "having a lie down," which Tom knows means that she's been in bed all day. Dad convinces Tom to go down to the sheds and talk to Brendan and then heads outside. Tom wanders down the hall and stands in Mum's bedroom door. The air is stale and Mum is nothing more than a pile of blankets. Tom whispers that school went okay.

When Tom again stands in Mum's bedroom door and only whispers, it shows that he desperately craves her love and attention. Her inability or unwillingness to give him any implies that her identity as a mother is likely compromised by whatever happened to Daniel, and her family is consequentially at risk of fracturing as well.



CHAPTER FOUR

Gran and Pa's property is called "Saint Marguerite Bourgeoy's" after Saint Marguerite, one of Gran's favorite saints. Daniel used to call it "Saint Marge's Boogie." Pa left his onsite tractor repair business to Brendan after he died, and now Jonny works there too. The sheds where they work stand where Gran's beloved chicken coop once was, and Mum believes Gran never got over having to get rid of the chickens. According to Daniel, the business moved from town because Pa lost the town property betting on racehorses. Tom thinks that Pa only took Daniel to the races, even though Fin was the one who truly loved horses. Thinking about it and the fact that things will never be the same again, Tom feels as though he's being sucked into a black tunnel.

It's worth considering that if Gran truly loved the chickens as much as Mum suggests she did, it was a major sacrifice for her to give up her coop for the sake of her husband's business. This suggests that in Gran's eyes, sacrificing for family members is something that makes family meaningful in the first place. Despite this, Tom's discussion of Pa's obvious favoritism suggests that not all of the family's relationships are without dysfunction; Fin clearly got the short end of the stick here.



The night of the accident, Tom looked at the sky as he walked home. He heard a car coming, blaring the horn. He figured it was Daniel, but it was Snorter and Matt. Matt was yelling for Tom to come; Daniel crashed the car. In the present, Tom tries to clear his head of the thoughts as he walks out to the sheds. He sees Jonny's boots poking out from under a tractor, and Jonny sends Tom into Brendan's house to check email.

Again, when Tom focuses on the memories of Snorter and Matt coming to get him so they could help at the scene of the accident, it shows that at least in terms of the greater Mumbilli community, Tom did have friends and people to look out for him and was involved in looking out for others as well.



Tom hears the shower going so he lets himself in. Brendan's house isn't what Tom remembers; there are empty bottles and cans everywhere and the place is a mess. Tom thinks that despite the fact that he spent so much time here as a kid, he doesn't know much about Brendan save for the fact that he's gay. He remembers one Christmas that Brendan brought a girl for lunch and overhearing Mum and Auntie Kath giggling about whether Gran prays to a patron saint of gay sons.

Tom thinks Daniel truly knew Brendan; the two spent a lot of time together. He notices a photo on Brendan's desk of Mum, Brendan, and Auntie Kath fishing as kids. He then notices another frame turned over; it holds a photo of Daniel and Mum one Christmas. Tom thinks of how close Mum and Daniel were as Brendan comes out of the bathroom, wrapped in a towel. He mentions that the photo of Mum and Daniel is one of his favorites, and he and Tom painfully discuss how that Christmas was great.

Brendan tries to talk to Tom about school and give him the "time is a healer" talk, but Tom cuts him off and asks to check his email. Tom thinks that he only found out a week ago that his family was leaving Mumbilli. He'd been so numb that he hadn't thought much of Dad packing boxes, but figured the need to go was obvious after someone left graffiti on their garage for the third time. Tom had spent much of his time at Matt's house. Then, Dad came home one night and told Tom and Kylie that they needed to pack and not tell anyone they're leaving.

Tom had mailed Matt a letter the night before he left, telling him what happened. They never got to say goodbye. This bothers Tom, as Matt was the only one who stood by him after the accident. Snorter had shut down and wouldn't talk about anything. When Tom logs into his email, he's relieved to find an email from Matt. Matt writes that he's not sure what he's going to do with himself on Australia Day, but he understands why the Brennans left. He asks Tom to say hi to Fin for him and mentions that Mumbilli is teeming with rumors.

Tom soaks up the words and then starts a reply. He writes that he has to repeat Year Eleven and that he's going to St. Benedict's in Coghill. He realizes the phone is ringing but lets it go to voicemail. It's Auntie Kath, updating Brendan on Fin and asking about the plan for the weekend. This makes Tom think of Fin. He stares at his email, feeling ashamed, and deletes it. He thinks he hasn't seen Fin in about a month, as seeing him is very difficult. Fin seems to get thinner and bitterer every time.

The empty bottles imply that Brendan is suffering as a result of the accident, just like the rest of the family. It also suggests that Daniel wasn't the only family member with an affinity for alcohol, which again reinforces that family dynamics and events are important factors in contributing to how someone moves through the world.



Despite Tom's descriptions of Daniel as angry, scary, and out of control in a rugby team setting, it's clear that Daniel was a valued part of the extended family. This elicits sympathy for Daniel and implies that one's relationship with their family, at times, might not have any bearing on how they interact with others.



The mention of graffiti on the Brennans' garage in Mumbilli shows that after the accident, the town truly turned against them and left the family friendless and unsupported. The fact that Mum and Dad chose to turn to family reinforces the idea that blood is thicker than water, and that family is more reliable than friends, even in a close-knit small town like Mumbilli.



The fact that Matt continues to email Tom after the Brennans leave town begins to show that Matt is truly a good friend—he doesn't seem to hold the sudden and unexplained move against Tom, which offers some hope that the two will be able to continue their friendship going forward.



The word choice that Tom "soaks up" Matt's email indicates that Tom craves friendship and this kind of a relationship. This offers more support for the suspicion that Tom is attempting to isolate himself to protect himself from potential hurt or betrayal, given that he absolutely wants to be surrounded by people who care about him.



The last time that Tom saw Fin, the hospital air conditioning was broken. Fin lay in bed with no sheet over him, so Tom could see his skinny, wasted legs. They'd talked about what was going on in Mumbilli, and Tom mentioned that Snorter wrecked his trail bike again. When Fin said that Snorter's wreck could've been worse, Tom thought that every topic of conversation seems to lead back to the spinal unit, which is filled with daredevils like Snorter who take risks and get in accidents. Fin wasn't a daredevil; he just made the one bad decision to trust Daniel.

Later, Gran cooks lamb fry, which smells awful. Tom decides to eat cereal. When Dad notices Tom looking for cereal, he winks and says it's all gone. Tom mutters and asks where Kylie is. Dad says she's out with a new friend, Brianna Henderson. Gran whispers that Brianna's family is Anglican, but they seem nice. She and Dad try to give Tom a pep talk about making friends, and Gran specifically suggests that Tom make friends with Simon Whelan. Tom thinks that Simon is disgusting; he creepily watches younger girls and doesn't seem nice at all.

Gran asks Dad about his plans to take Mum and see Daniel the next day. She suggests that Tom go with Brendan to see Fin and Auntie Kath, and then mentions that Fin will move to a rehab facility soon. She says that there's some movement in his shoulder but he's still very depressed. Tom thinks that Gran must enjoy guilt-tripping his family and clears the plates to get away from her.

CHAPTER FIVE

On Saturday, Mum and Dad drive to see Daniel while Brendan and Tom visit Fin. As Tom and Brendan head out of Coghill, Brendan stops at Jonny's house and asks Tom to run in to pick things up for Fin. A girl Tom's age answers the door. Tom laughs at her Bart Simpson slippers and the girl introduces herself as Chrissy, Jonny's sister. She invites him in while she finds the box "for his granddad."

When Tom returns to the car with the box, he remarks to Brendan that Chrissy thinks the box is for their granddad. Brendan explains that Chrissy and Jonny's mother is a bit complicated, but the sheepskin items in the box belonged to their dad. He had a stroke and died one winter of pneumonia. Tom understands that the sheepskin items are to keep Fin warm during his first winter. Brendan sighs and explains that Jonny's mother is as religious as Gran and thinks alcohol is evil, so he didn't want her knowing the truth.

Later, Tom explains that the accident paralyzed Fin's arms and legs; this is why his legs are skinny and wasted. This also shows that Daniel didn't kill Fin over Claire, but he did doom him to a horrific fate and took Fin's life as he knew it away. This is made even worse by the fact that Fin and Daniel are cousins; in turn, this shows that families have the power to hurt as much as help each other.



The humorous nature of Gran's comment about Brianna's religion aside, her willingness to accept that Brianna is nice and could be a good friend regardless of religion shows that Gran recognizes the importance of friendship as Tom and Kylie settle in. Her suggestion that Tom befriend Simon, however, shows that she's out of touch and not the best resource for friends themselves.



Again, Tom's language is telling: saying "his family" pushes Gran outside of the family umbrella, which suggests that right now, Tom desperately wants his nuclear family to be whole again and sees extended family as meddling and unnecessary.



Chrissy's apparent belief that the box is for a grandparent, not Fin, only contributes to Tom's belief that whatever happened is shameful and should be kept hidden. In turn, this keeps Tom from making meaningful connections with anyone, as he feels compelled to lie to keep this secret.



Brendan's discussion of Jonny and Chrissy's mother's relationship to religion shows that Gran's relatively positive relationship with religion certainly isn't the only one available. Just as Gran is able to use religion as a tool to connect with others, this woman uses it as a tool to ostracize those she deems unworthy.



After a few minutes of silence, Brendan says that Daniel isn't doing well. Tom grouses that nobody tells him anything, and Brendan says that they don't actually know much—that's why Mum and Dad went alone today. Tom turns on the radio to end the conversation. He thinks that in an hour he'll be able to smell the salty **water** of the ocean. That smell used to be one that brought excitement. Brendan notices Tom smiling, and they reminisce about how Pa would take them all to the beach, but only after he'd spent time betting in town first. Tom says that once, Daniel left the car and was gone a long time. He and Kylie ran inside to tell Pa, and Pa punished Daniel. Later, Daniel punished Tom for telling: he held Tom underwater and promised to kill him.

Tom walks into the hospital and greets Fin, stopping himself from slapping Fin's hand like he used to. He tells Fin that he's here with Brendan and notices that the sign on Fin's bed reads "C5 incomplete injury"; Tom doesn't know why the sign doesn't just say "quadriplegic." Next to it is a picture of a saint. Fin introduces Tom to "Gran's boyfriend," Saint Osmond. They laugh until Fin says that Saint Osmond is the patron saint of paralysis.

Fin curls his lip and asks about Tom being a "Coghill boy" now, but then apologizes for sounding harsh. Fin softly admits that he spends his nights thinking about the accident, and it scares him. Tom whispers that he thinks about it too, and Fin says that he's starting to remember things. Tom wonders how much Fin actually knows or remembers; he suffered a lot of memory loss. Fin says he remembers Daniel swaying and yelling and being very angry, looking for Claire. He remembers Daniel shoving Tom up against a pole, and Tom says that Daniel called him a "groveling little prick." Fin doesn't remember that.

Brendan and Aunty Kath walk into Fin's room. Aunty Kath's big sunglasses can't hide that she's been crying. As she hugs Tom, Tom notices that her arms are huge and strong from rolling and lifting Fin. Brendan and Aunty Kath launch into a loud discussion of Gran's recent cooking disasters as a patient is wheeled into the room. The man starts to yell for the orderlies to leave him alone. Tom wants to be anywhere but here. Fin suggests that Tom has had enough, but Tom insists he's fine and excuses himself to the bathroom. He thinks that the night of the accident should've been happy and celebratory.

That night, Tom felt like himself until Snorter steered the car around the last bend. When Tom saw Daniel's car on its side against a tree, he felt like everything changed forever. Tom jumped out and ran towards the car, noticing Daniel stumbling away.

Through Tom's memories of Pa throughout the novel, it becomes increasingly clear that Pa wasn't a great person. He played favorites with his grandchildren, had a betting problem, and it's implied he never thought much of Brendan. However, these facts don't stop Tom and Brendan from enjoying the time they did spend with their grandfather. All of this works together to give Tom a model for how he can eventually learn to see Daniel as a complex person, not just as his brother or just as someone who drove drunk.



Saint Osmond is a way for Gran to feel like she's doing something important and tangible to help Fin. In some ways, she is: he provides Fin and Tom a way to connect with each other and start to rebuild their relationship, even though this start is rocky.



It's worth noting here that Tom and Fin are able to talk about the accident with each other in a way that Tom isn't able to with others. This speaks to the strength of Tom and Fin's relationship. However, the fact that Fin doesn't remember everything allows Tom to control where this conversation goes to a degree, as he doesn't have to fully acknowledge some things, given that Fin doesn't remember them.



The seemingly solid relationship between Brendan, Aunty Kath, and Tom indicates that the accident didn't fully break the family apart. Kath's tears and Tom excusing himself, on the other hand, suggest that they're all still trying their best to adapt to the new shape of their family and find ways to support each other now that things have changed.



This moment can be read as one of two coming of age moments for Tom in the novel. Here, he's thrust into adulthood via trauma; recovering from that trauma will bring about his next coming of age moment.



CHAPTER SIX

When Tom and Brendan leave the hospital, they're too exhausted to swim in the **ocean** so they begin the long drive home. Brendan asks Tom's opinion on how Fin is. Tom mentions that Fin is starting to remember things from before, but privately, Tom thinks it'd be better for him to not remember. Brendan asks if Fin was conscious the entire time and tells Tom that Fin was lucky to have him there. Tom thinks of the lady who counseled him, Matt, and Snorter. She said to let the memories in and then move on. Tom doesn't want to remember the fear he saw in Fin's eyes, or Luke and Nicole dead in the car.

The night of the accident, Tom yelled for Daniel as Daniel ran away from the car. Matt redirected Tom to the others in the car as Snorter drove away to find cell service and call an ambulance. Tom and Matt circled the car, trying to see in, and Tom heard muffled crying from inside. Matt started to curse and scream "no," and he and Tom held each other and cried: Luke and Nicole were dead. Tom and Matt returned to searching the car and found Fin, fortunately in a place where he couldn't see Luke and Nicole. Tom crouched down next to him and touched his bloody head, trying to comfort him. Fin kept saying that he couldn't feel anything. Tom stayed with Fin until the ambulance arrived, though he wanted desperately to go to Daniel.

It took until morning for the paramedics to cut Fin out of the car. Tom sat with him the entire time, thankful that Fin didn't see Nicole and Luke's bodies taken away. Dad and policemen coaxed Daniel out of the woods and they left, and someone came to take Matt and Snorter as well. Tom kept telling Fin that it would be okay.

Back at Gran's house, the sound of her complaining about the price of lamb is a welcome distraction from everyone else's gloom. Brendan insists that Fin is doing well, but Tom knows that Brendan just doesn't want to upset Dad. He also knows that Dad won't tell anyone how Daniel's doing, because most everyone believes Daniel got what he deserved. Tom heads down the hallway and sees Mum sitting on her bed. He notes that she usually is better for a day or two after seeing Daniel, and then she goes back to spending all her time asleep. Tom misses her and feels like it's torture seeing her like this.

Remember that water acts as a symbol for growth and happiness throughout the novel. By choosing to not swim after this visit with Fin, Tom and Brendan symbolically reject the opportunity to grow after this visit. This is evidenced further by the fact that Tom's narration leads right into telling the reader about the accident itself—he goes backwards, not forwards towards healing.



Tom's desire to go to Daniel and see for himself that Daniel was alright reinforces the brothers' bond. Though Tom will later question it, this does suggest that Tom's relationship with Daniel is stronger than his relationship with Fin. Matt's levelheadedness in this situation shows that he understands that being a good friend and community member means doing what he can to make sure that his friends get the help they need and not fixating on his own emotions.



By staying with Fin, Tom inadvertently starts to atone for Daniel's actions. This continues to show that Tom is far more engaged with his friends and his community than Daniel is.



Admitting that Tom misses Mum shows that as painful as everything else is in his life right now, effectively losing her as a parent is one of the most profound losses brought on by the accident. The adults' unwillingness to tell the truth about how Fin and Daniel are doing is actually a way that they're trying to care for each other, but Tom's understanding of the situation suggests that it would possibly be better to be truthful about things so that everyone could move forward.



Mum notices Tom and invites him in. She mentions that she's hardly seen him, and Tom wants to be close to her so badly he doesn't mention that this is her own fault. Tom lies down next to Mum and thinks that she smells like an old person. Mum says that Daniel is feeling very down and that they're thinking of moving him to a different wing of the jail. Tom knows there's more to this. Mum asks what she did wrong with Daniel and whispers that Daniel had no right to drive that night. Tom takes her hand and assures her it was an accident, but he knows Mum is right. He chokes out a question of why Daniel had to ruin everything, but Mum firmly tells him to stop.

Tom goes to Kylie's room, where he finds her blasting music and sitting in front of her mirror. She insists she hates her hair; Tom retorts that he hates his life. Kylie turns off the music and lights a cigarette out the window. Kylie says that she called her best friend from Mumbilli from Brianna's house and admits that she told Brianna everything about what happened. Tom curses and yells that Brianna might not be trustworthy, and Kylie shouts back that everyone is going to find out at some point anyway. She orders him out of her room.

At school, the other boys talk only about rugby. Tom thinks it's weird that it feels so familiar before reflecting that rugby tryouts are also taking place next week at St. John's. Matt has continued to email Tom, even though Tom hasn't replied. Rory and Tom discuss tryouts one afternoon, and Rory notes that Kylie and Brianna are friends now. He tells Tom to warn Kylie about her, as Brianna and her friends are troublemakers.

In homeroom, Harvey announces the upcoming rugby tryouts and gives a general breakdown of when games will be. He releases the class, but Tom remains seated, trying not to get sucked into the black tunnel. Rory tries to engage Tom, but he finally leaves Tom alone. Tom finally realizes that he and Harvey are the only ones left in the classroom. Harvey tries to talk to Tom about the move and mentions that if Tom needs to talk, he's around. He mentions that Rory plays five-eight, and Tom's mind starts to spin—that was Daniel's position. Tom checks out until Harvey finally says that he's glad Tom is meeting "them." Tom is confused but realizes that Rory had invited him to meet the guys at the pool later.

When Mum tells Tom to stop, it suggests that she's struggling even more than Tom is: as far as Tom is concerned, Daniel did ruin everything, but that also doesn't mean that what happened wasn't an accident. This begins to create some nuance that will eventually start to help Tom grow up and become more mature—as well as help pull Mum out of her funk and return her to a functional parent again.



The cigarettes and Kylie's hair signal that Kylie is struggling more than she's letting on, which begins to show that different family members will grieve and heal at different rates. Tom's fear and anger that she told Brianna about the accident again shows that Tom has totally given up on friendship at this point and trusts no one. This is also one of the reasons he refuses to trust Kylie here.



The fact that Matt continues to email Tom even without replies shows that Matt is truly a good and loyal friend to Tom, while also reinforcing that friendship doesn't always mean that both parties give to the relationship equally. Rory's warning suggests that if Tom were to look, he would discover friends in Coghill—he's just too afraid to do that right now.



When the announcement about rugby tryouts sends Tom into his dark tunnel, it shows that Tom still links rugby and Daniel to each other and is unable to look at either individually. This is one of the ways that the novel insists that Tom ties up his identity with Daniel's and is, at this point, unable to see himself as a unique individual. This is reinforced when Tom simply checks out when discussing Rory; Tom simply can't fathom this change to his rugby identity.



Tom isn't sure he wants to swim, but he decides the **pool** is better than being home for Gran's prayer group. The man at the gate played at the Australia Day touch game and recognizes Tom as Brendan's nephew. Tom counts out his change, admits that he's from Mumbilli, and realizes he's 20 cents short. The man looks Tom in the eye and asks if he should still let Tom in. Tom's eyes widen in fear, but the man insists he's joking, waves Tom in, and cautions him to not open his eyes on account of the chlorine.

Tom tries to tell himself to relax as he kicks off his shoes. He leaps into the cold **water** several times. Tom feels free and light as Rory, Jimmy, and Soupe, two other rugby players, join him. Brad Wiseman, a tall and heavy rugby player, belly flops into the pool to cheers from everyone. Tom feels as though his eyes are on fire from the chlorine and joins Rory in line for the shower. Tom watches as the girl in front of him squeezes water out of her ponytail, which runs down her back into her bottoms. He feels the start of an erection and is totally caught off guard when she turns around—it's Chrissy. She asks after Tom's granddad, and Tom feels the black tunnel engulfing him.

CHAPTER SEVEN

On Saturday, Tom has the house to himself. He can't find anything that holds his interest and he spends most of the day picking up and putting down the phone. Finally, Tom makes himself dial Matt's number. Matt's mum picks up and her voice makes Tom want to cry. She greets him happily, gives him a quick rundown of what's going on in her life, and then hands the phone to Matt.

Matt asks if Tom has read his emails, and Tom pretends that he does. Tom turns the conversation to rugby tryouts. Matt lists who at St. Johns are taking Tom and Daniel's positions, and says that Luke's dad is going to coach. Tom flashes on him sobbing in the courtroom when the judge sentenced Daniel. Dad had cried too. Matt mentions that Mumbilli is holding another fundraiser for Fin, and he says that the paper ran an article last week that said the Brennans moved. At this, Tom lies that Gran is waiting for a call and ends the call. Tom curls into a ball and lets the darkness overtake him.

Tom wakes up hours later to the sound of the screen door. Dad flips on the living room light and explains he brought home steaks, but Tom excuses himself to go to bed. He thinks of how Daniel used to hate just Sunday nights, as it meant the end of the weekend. Now, Tom finds the entire weekend depressing.

Tom's choice to swim instead of going home shows that he is starting to become ready to heal by opening himself up to new relationships. The fear he feels at the gate reminds him and the reader that the choice to start the healing process isn't going to be easy, but the fact that Tom persists suggests that, at the very least, he's tired of wallowing.



As with the gate attendant's joke, being afraid and regressing into the black tunnel at the reminder of Tom's real life shows that the healing process isn't linear. More poignantly, it shows that Tom is living in crushing fear that his secret will be found out. By placing the fun time with rugby friends next to this fear, the novel suggests that these new friends will be instrumental in helping Tom face his fears and come to a better place.



The fact that Matt's mum's voice makes Tom cry indicates again that one of things that Tom truly misses is his mother. This again illustrates how Daniel's actions damaged all of the Brennan family and others have to make sacrifices because of what he did.



Again, upon hearing anything about rugby leaves Tom experiencing flashbacks to the accident and the aftermath. This suggests that at this point, both rugby and the accident are, like Daniel, tied up in Tom's conception of himself. It's telling that Tom ends the call after a mention of the Mumbilli paper; this suggests that the paper itself was likely one of the key methods that the town used to harass the Brennans before they moved.



On the weekends, Tom has no way to ignore that his family has changed significantly since the accident. This in turn begins to suggest that the weekdays—and by extension, school and friends—will help Tom regain a sense of normalcy.



Sunday, the 28th of August was the first day of Tom's new life. Brendan arrived and took Mum to the police station. Kylie and Tom sat at home, and Tom could still smell Fin's blood. Matt came over for a while after giving his statement to the police. Tom felt panicky at the thought of having to say what happened, and Matt explained that the police seemed to already know about the fight. Tom asked about Luke and Nicole, and Matt started to cry and said that he saw Luke's dad at the station. Matt cried uncontrollably as he said that Luke's body had to stay until the coroner could finish his report, and Luke's dad said that Daniel should be locked up for good.

Daniel was allowed to go home, but he had a curfew. The police advised him to only leave the house to visit them at appointed times and to go to the courthouse on September 13 to enter a plea. Dad had struggled to explain to Kylie that "entering a plea" meant that Daniel would have to say if he's guilty or not. When Tom closed his eyes that night, he could only see Luke, Nicole, and the terror in Fin's eyes. Fin was in critical condition, though Dad didn't tell Tom at the time that the doctors didn't expect Fin to live.

Early on Monday morning, Brendan left to be with Aunty Kath and Fin. Tom and Kylie didn't go to school, and Daniel's solicitor, Dennis Talbot, came to visit for the first time. Late in the afternoon, Mum drove Tom to the station to give his statement. He was terrified and asked Mum what was going to happen. She didn't know. Afterwards, Mum drove to the industrial district and made Tom go over what happened again. She desperately wanted to find a hole in the story that would make Daniel look better, but Tom insisted there wasn't one: Daniel started the fight, he drove, and Fin wasn't drunk or on drugs.

For the next week, the Brennan house was chaotic. Mum was angry with everyone, while Daniel cried and threw up. They only ate because Matt's mother kept bringing over casseroles. Dad and Brendan attended Nicole and Luke's funerals. The day before Daniel's court appearance, Talbot said the only thing they had going for them was the guilty plea. Mum pointed out that he had good character references, but Talbot warned that while the Brennan family was respected, people were grieving and angry.

Luke's dad's words begin to show how anger, grief, and fear can turn an entire town against Daniel and his family. In turn, this will destroy the Brennan family's friendships with everyone in Mumbilli. This also offers some indication that whatever sentence Daniel is given, it likely won't be enough for Luke and Nicole's families, which suggests that Daniel may not ever be able to find forgiveness or redemption for what he did.



It's worth keeping in mind that the court system as a whole is supposed to offer individuals like Daniel a formal system through which to earn redemption for their crimes, assuming Daniel will take responsibility for what happened. It is, however, a comparatively unemotional system for this, which suggests it might not be a truly effective way to redeem oneself.



Mum's crushing desire to find a hole in Tom's story shows the extent to which parental love will go to protect a child—even though it's clear that Daniel is in the wrong, she still wants to find some way to protect him. This in turn suggests that Mum is so depressed in the present because she was unsuccessful in doing so. This shows that a failure to parent one's child can have disastrous effects for both parents and children.



The casseroles from Matt's mother show the reader, at least, that the Brennans did still have friends who were willing to stand by them and make sure they kept moving forward. Talbot alludes here to the ineffectiveness of the justice system to satisfactorily offer redemption when people are emotional, again implying that Daniel won't find redemption any time soon.



Talbot told Tom that the guilty plea was good because it showed that Daniel accepted responsibility. This might mean his sentence would be shorter. Mum asked about the judges; Talbot said for the hundredth time that there were two possible judges. One was usually more lenient, while the other, Judge Williams, was known to be difficult. Suddenly, Kylie burst into the kitchen. She panted that everyone in town had been saying bad things, like that Daniel was going down and deserved whatever he got. She said that people were spreading rumors that Daniel tried to beat Claire. Kylie collapsed crying, while Daniel sat still.

The appearance at court took 20 minutes. Daniel pled guilty to one charge of driving dangerously and causing bodily harm and two charges of driving dangerously and causing death. Tom knew that Nicole and Luke's families were there, but he didn't look around. The magistrate declared that Daniel's sentencing trial would take place within 72 days.

This information from Kylie illustrates the very real power of heightened emotion to stir up hate and distrust, even against people who were once respected and good friends of the other Mumbilli residents. This then represents the turning point in which the Brennans are no longer truly at home in their town and must instead begin to consider the need to leave in order to heal.



Daniel's decision to plead guilty shows that he's beginning to take responsibility for his actions, thereby beginning his journey towards redemption. Tom's unwillingness to look around implies that he believes that while Daniel is the one on trial, the whole family is implicated and Mumbilli is no longer safe for them.



CHAPTER EIGHT

On the day of rugby tryouts, Brendan drives Tom and Kylie to school. He teases Kylie as she puts black eyeliner on and then turns to Tom and suggests that he join him on morning runs. Tom is noncommittal, especially when Brendan says he runs up "the ascent." Tom explains that this is a steep mountain about a kilometer away from Gran's place. They used to go up in the truck for picnics as kids, and the truck would inevitably die before reaching the top. Daniel, who hated hills, would whine the entire way. This is also why the hill in Mumbilli was known as "Daniel's Whine"; Daniel would refuse to walk up after school and instead, Mum would pick him up at the bottom.

On the way home from tryouts, Dad tries to talk positively and enthusiastically about the players. Tom believes Dad is faking it; the players are awful. He thinks that in Coghill, rugby will fill the time but do nothing else for him. Dad says that Rory, who plays five-eight, will be a great partner for Tom (their positions rely on each other). Tom says that he'd like to see Daniel this weekend, and Dad agrees.

Once again, Tom is unable to separate his past from a possible future. He does this in part because he is still extremely loyal to Daniel and the close relationship they shared—agreeing to run with Brendan would signal that Tom is willing to form his own opinion about hills, not just rely on Daniel's opinions.



It's worth remembering that while rugby is a team sport, Tom's position is one that links two halves of the team together and works very closely with Rory's position. This suggests that the team will suffer until Tom can come around and effectively do his job of being a true team player.



Tom is exhausted. Gran bustles around the kitchen as Tom rubs his calves, thinking he really is unfit. Gran calls for dinner and nobody comes. She goes down the hall to investigate and returns, saying that Dad will eat later with Mum and that Kylie is out with Brianna. She serves up soggy meatloaf and Tom stirs it around, thinking that Kylie is certainly up to something. Gran sits down and lets out a little cough. Tom decides that stirring his meatloaf was rude, but reasons that at least he's at the table. As he lifts the fork, Gran asks if he forgot something. Tom mumbles an apology and, in a whisper, Gran asks if he'd say grace.

As noncommittal as Tom seems about religion as a whole, it's worth keeping in mind that Gran's insistence on saying grace is one way for her to attempt to create a routine and dependability in Tom's life, something that he hasn't had for the last few months. This shows another aspect of Gran's attempts to care for her family and help them towards healing, while also showing that Tom simply isn't ready to accept the help yet.



CHAPTER NINE

At lunch the next Tuesday, Harvey pins up the results from tryouts. Tom waits until the crowd disperses to inspect it. He's unsurprised to see that he got half-back. Tom feels like he has his year mapped out for him as he heads up to the library. He's angry, as he's still not even sure he wants to play—but he knows he can't let Dad down. He finds a book, sits down in a quiet corner, and pretends to read. In actuality, he thinks about how he and Daniel used to drill ball-handling skills every day after school at home. That led to the beginning of “**the legend of the Brennan brothers.**”

The legend of the Brennan brothers came about because most of Tom and Daniel's relationship was rooted in their shared love of rugby. This suggests that some other important aspects of their relationship may have been neglected in favor of rugby, something that's evidenced by the way that Tom and Daniel spoke to each other on the night of the accident.



After the accident, it was several weeks before Tom and Kylie went back to school. Matt and Snorter stuck close to Tom and Tom couldn't shake the belief that this sort of thing wasn't supposed to happen to his family. Tom saw counselor after counselor but felt checked out as Daniel's court date for sentencing, November 19, got closer. Though Mum and Dad did what they could to keep Daniel out of jail, Talbot made it clear that they'd be unsuccessful. Instead, the fight changed to trying to get his sentence shortened—he hoped to no more than three years.

Tom's belief that accidents like this weren't supposed to happen to the Brennans suggests that he views his entire family in much the same way that he views the legend of the Brennan brothers: as something that's exceptional and above normal laws that govern chance.



Daniel wrote letters to Luke and Nicole's families and seemed truly sorry: he barely ate and spent most of his time crying. Then, one night when Gran and Brendan were visiting, Gran heard something at the door. Dad found a letter addressed to “the Brennans” from Nicole's family. Daniel asked him to read it out loud. Gran bravely took the letter and did as Daniel asked. Nicole's parents thanked Daniel but wrote that Daniel's words wouldn't bring Nicole back. They said that Nicole was lost to them forever and told Daniel to “remember his fellow man.” They closed with the assertion that Daniel was an accident waiting to happen, said that no sentence will be long enough, and sent regards to Kath and Fin.

This letter, and particularly the assertion that no sentence will be long enough to properly punish Daniel, is a poignant reminder that redemption isn't going to come easily to Daniel, given that his carelessness killed two people. The fact that the letter is addressed to the entire Brennan family also implicates everyone in the events of that night and underhandedly blames Mum and Dad for not doing more to discipline Daniel's behavior in the weeks before the accident.



After the first hearing, almost everyone stopped visiting the Brennans. Tom spent a lot of his time at Matt's but avoided seeing Snorter, as Snorter was still struggling to process the accident. Owen came around once or twice to see Daniel, and Claire visited as well. Mum and Kylie couldn't stand her visiting, but her visits made Dad and Tom feel as though something was still normal. Sometimes, she'd come out of Daniel's room with her hair mussed and then, Daniel would eat something.

One night, Tom overheard Mum and Daniel talking. Mum was angrily insisting that Claire's visits weren't good for Daniel and insinuating that the accident was Claire's fault. Daniel angrily disagreed, especially when Mum pointed out that Claire could just get on with her life. Tom knew that wasn't true: Claire left Mumbilli before even taking her final exams; her parents found her a nanny position overseas.

The morning of Daniel's hearing, Tom woke to the sound of Daniel vomiting. Later, Mum and Dad nearly turned green when Talbot told them that Judge Williams would hear Daniel's case. Tom knew it was the last time he'd see Daniel as a free man.

In the courtroom, Tom could see Nicole and Luke's parents, as well as Matt and his mother. They all sat and listened to Judge Williams talk about Daniel's depressed mental state, the letters he wrote, the counseling he received, and his excellent character references. Despite all this, Judge Williams insisted that he couldn't sentence Daniel lightly for good character. He told Daniel that because he was a team player, he should've known better the kind of responsibility he took on by driving his friends drunk and angry. Judge Williams sentenced Daniel to five years in jail with a non-parole period of three years.

CHAPTER TEN

Dad wakes Tom up early on Saturday morning and cooks a big breakfast. Tom is excited and nervous to see Daniel; it'll be the first time in six weeks. Mum shuffles into the kitchen, sits down next to Tom, and begins to rub his arm. Tom fixates on Mum's awful breath and yellow teeth as she chats nervously about how Tom should tell Daniel happy things. Finally, Tom blurts out that he made the rugby team. Mum seems nervous to learn that she never said anything about it, and she scratches her face and continues to rub Tom's arm while continuing to say that Tom was a sure thing for the team. Finally, Brendan insists it's time to go. Tom stiffens as Mum hugs him and thinks that her entire body stinks.

It's unclear exactly what Claire is going for here, given that she was afraid of Daniel prior to the accident. Her implied willingness to have sex with him suggests that the guilt Daniel feels is actually enough to earn back the attention of one person he hurt, which again shows that redemption will come at various times for Daniel.



Claire's departure reinforces the novel's assertion that Daniel didn't just kill and seriously injure two people—the effects of what he did are far-reaching, and Mumbilli as a unit will suffer for it. Mum's desire to blame Claire is an attempt to shift responsibility away from herself and Dad.



The discovery that Judge Williams will hear the case implies that Daniel will have to pay more in terms of legal action for what he did than he might have otherwise.



Given what Tom has said (and will go on to say) about how Daniel behaved in the weeks leading up to the accident, it's likely that Daniel's good character references were based more on Daniel's behavior long before the incident. However, remember too that Tom has implied that Daniel had a cruel streak that was visible long ago. Taken together, this suggests that the character references may have referred more to the Brennan family as a whole.



Mum's behavior here illustrates just how far she's sinking into her depression and her pain, and exactly what the consequences are for Tom when she does that. Tom's fixation on Mum's slipping hygiene and appearance shows again that this is one of the most profound losses brought on by the accident, as far as he's concerned. This in turn shows why Tom feels so unmoored: his family as he knows it is no longer the supportive group he came to rely on.



In the truck to the Westleigh Detention Center, Brendan laments that he can't do anything for Mum—she refuses help. When Brendan suggests that Tom talk to her, Tom can only say that Mum smells and her teeth are disgusting. Tom flashes on a memory of Mum in a bikini from a year ago and thinks he doesn't recognize the woman at Gran's house. Tom refuses to actually talk, and Brendan sarcastically tells Tom to stay silent, since talking might hurt.

After a while, Brendan comments that Tom hasn't seen Daniel in a while. He says that Daniel seems to look forward to Tom's visits the most and that Daniel is really down. Brendan tells Tom that if he needs to talk, he's always around, but Tom brushes him off. He feels as though he needs to preserve his strength for the visit with Daniel, as he's not sure what exactly he's going to find.

Tom thinks the prison feels sticky and disgusting when he and Brendan get in line for security. He can't help but think that he and Brendan aren't like everyone else here—they wouldn't try to smuggle anything to Daniel. Tom watches an old lady make a fuss about a male guard attempting to roughly search her. As he stands for the metal detector, Tom wishes he could tell the guards that he's just here to see Daniel, "the one who doesn't belong here," but he understands that in reality, everyone in the jail is somehow innocent. Tom knows that Daniel isn't really innocent either; he's just not a criminal.

Tom and Brendan sit in the waiting room and try not to catch anyone else's eye. Tom watches a mother and two children that he recognizes from his last visit. The older child, a toddler, has mosquito bites all over her legs. The bites are scabby and gross, and the child climbs over chairs as her mother tells her not to. Suddenly, the child knocks over a can of Coke. Her mother slaps her and starts to clean up the mess, and the old lady who made the fuss about being searched gets down to help. Tom watches the old lady comfort the young mother and wonders if he'll ever get used to coming here.

Brendan and Tom line up with other visitors and Brendan snags a table near the wall in the visiting room. They watch the prisoners file in in white overalls and Brendan waves his arms when he sees Daniel. Tom barely recognizes him and a lump rises in his throat. He realizes that Daniel and Mum look as though they're both struggling with the same depression and unwillingness to live. Tom struggles to make small talk and tell Daniel how Mum is. Daniel's voice cracks as he says he might be moved to the crisis center to participate in a peer support program, and Tom talks about making half-back for the Bennie's rugby team.

The assessment that Mum is refusing help suggests that she's doing this to herself, which begins to draw similarities between her and Daniel (since Tom says at several points that Daniel brought all of this upon himself with his poor choices). This shows another way in which Tom's family isn't actually as strong and connected as he once thought.



When Brendan attempts to talk to Tom, it offers Tom an outlet to talk to another family member. Tom's unwillingness to talk to Brendan specifically shows that he's not yet willing to expand his family and lean on others; he's too fixated on hoping Mum and Daniel will be better.



When Tom expresses the belief that Daniel isn't a criminal but also isn't innocent, it shows that Tom is beginning to grow up and develop a more nuanced grasp of the dynamics at play in his family and the world at large. His belief that Daniel doesn't belong in jail also suggests that Tom believes there should be another way for Daniel to atone for what he did, though he doesn't ever offer any alternatives, leaving jail as the one way that Daniel can redeem himself.



The kindness of the old lady suggests that while Tom may not be ready to realize it, there is a community available to him in the families of other inmates. Tom may see these other families as fundamentally different from his own, but it's clear from the behavior of the others in the waiting room that this is just as difficult for them as it is for Tom. This begins to show that if Tom is willing to look, he'll be able to find friends.



The similarities Tom notices between Mum and Daniel reinforce that Daniel is still a part of the family in fundamental ways, even if he's physically removed from them now. When Daniel mentions the peer support program, it begins to offer another avenue through which Daniel can begin to move forward. It's worth noting just how terrible Daniel looks now, before beginning the support program—it suggests he's not getting better or moving forward where he is.



After a few minutes of silence, Daniel starts to tremble and tells Tom that he's sorry he had to leave Mumbilli. Daniel bangs his head on the table and says he messed everything up; Tom tries desperately to make Daniel stop. Brendan cushions Daniel's head and assures him that he'll get through his time in jail. Tom remembers Brendan using the same voice to comfort Mum right after the accident. In a panicked voice, Daniel insists that nobody will want anything to do with him when he gets out, and he asks Tom if Tom hates him. Tom can barely breathe, but he says that they're brothers.

Daniel is quiet for a few minutes and then abruptly asks Tom who at Bennie's is playing five-eight. Tom is caught off guard, but answers that Rory is. He insists that Rory can't kick with both feet and for a moment, Daniel looks like his old self. Daniel asks Tom if he's going to teach Rory to kick and reminds him that Tom also used to not be able to kick with both feet. Tom insists that Rory is too old to learn.

A week after the visit, Daniel moves to the peer support facility and Tom starts running in the mornings with Brendan. Tom can barely make it up the ascent without vomiting, but Brendan makes sure that Tom keeps up by only offering information about Daniel if Tom is next to him. Brendan explains that the crisis center works more closely with inmates' families and helps inmates plan for the future. After the run, Brendan says that Daniel will be in the crisis center for a few months and it'll give him some space to breathe and deal with his guilt.

Brendan admits that there are times when he can't wrap his head around the idea of Daniel in jail. He reminisces that he never liked cars much, but Pa loved cars and taught Daniel to drive. Brendan shares a memory of hearing Pa squealing happily as he taught Daniel to drive, and thinking that he never had that kind of experience with his dad. Tom asks Brendan why he stayed in Coghill. Brendan admits that he never actually wanted to stay but after Pa died, it was an excuse to not leave. Brendan ends the conversation and Tom whistles as he heads back to the house. He wonders if Dad might be cooking a full breakfast.

Notice that Daniel's fears about life after jail closely mirror Tom's fears about his new life in Coghill. Both brothers fear what other people will think of them and are moving through the world assuming that others will hate and ostracize them. This shows that despite the legend of the Brennan brothers and Tom and Daniel's closeness, both boys are effectively acting as individuals and are unwilling to trust others.



Tom's unwillingness to say anything nice about Rory's ball-handling skills makes him look snooty about rugby when it doesn't involve Daniel. This offers another way in which Tom's identity is trapped with Daniel's, and suggests he'll need to let that go if he wants to move forward.



When Tom begins to run with Brendan, specifically up such a steep hill, it's a tangible first step in separating himself from Daniel and Daniel's dislike of hills. Further, the fact that Tom is running with Brendan (and that they're having meaningful conversations about Daniel) suggests that he's becoming more comfortable looking for help outside of his immediate family.



Brendan's memories of Daniel and Pa's relationship reinforces the novel's growing implication that the Brennan family isn't actually as perfect as Tom would like to think, given that there's clear favoritism at play. However, Tom's positive feelings after having the conversation suggests that there's a great deal to gain simply by talking to someone and dissecting the ways in which the family isn't perfect. His renewed interest in food is also a major turn for the better.



When Tom walks into the kitchen, Dad is sitting at the table with a grim look and Kylie looks ready to kill. She spits that she likely just flunked her science assignment and cuts Dad off when he tries to smooth things over. Kylie opens the fridge and shrieks that Tom ate her apple strudel. She then slams the fridge closed, points to a sign telling everyone to leave the strudel alone, and tells Tom that he's being a jerk because he's too caught up in his own dark world. Kylie's screaming intensifies as she makes fun of Tom for being so secretive about repeating Year Eleven. She insists that things could be worse—Tom could be Fin. Tom starts to fire back, but notices Aunty Kath outside the screen door. Kylie runs to Kath, hugs her, and starts to cry. Tom feels impossibly small.

Kylie's not entirely wrong; Tom is extremely caught up in his own world and is, at this point, uninterested in creating new relationships with his nuclear family. When set next to Tom's growing relationship with Brendan, it suggests that Tom will need to heal with help from outside his family before he'll truly be able to make things right with Kylie, Mum, and Dad. When Kylie calls Tom out on his secretiveness, it reinforces for Tom that he will need to let others in at some point in order to complete this process.



CHAPTER ELEVEN

Tom had no idea that Aunty Kath was coming during Fin's move to rehab, so he feels caught off guard. Kath sends Kylie to shower and then tells Tom that Fin is fine; he's looking forward to getting out of the hospital and getting some independence. As she talks, Tom notices that she keeps looking down the hallway like she's expecting Mum to come out. Tom feels his appetite disappear when Kath mentions that Fin is looking forward to a getting a wheelchair and having a birthday party this year. Tom thinks that seeing Daniel is easier than seeing Fin; Daniel will improve, while Fin will never actually recover.

The differences in fate between Daniel and Fin reinforce how nonsensical and tragic the accident's aftermath is: while Daniel will certainly carry his grief and debt for the rest of his life, he's not a marked man in the same way that Fin visibly is because of the paralysis. This suggests that in many ways, Fin is paying for Daniel's decisions more tangibly than even Daniel is.



A bit later, Kylie returns from her shower and Aunty Kath promises to make another strudel before Kylie's science class. Tom explains to the reader that Kath is an amazing cook, especially when it comes to cakes. She used to make Fin impressive birthday cakes, which he reasons she did because Fin's birthday was always overshadowed by Daniel's a week before.

Again, this aside about Aunty Kath's habit of making amazing cakes because of Daniel shows that the family wasn't actually perfect before the accident; conflict had likely been brewing for a number of years.



When Tom gets home from school, Aunty Kath is still in the kitchen. Pots bubble on the stove and she's busy scrubbing the fridge. She snaps that she had to throw away half the food, as it and most of the fridge was covered in mold. Kath furiously stirs her sauce as Gran walks in. She gives Tom a strange look when he greets her cheerily. Gran watches Kath for a moment and says she thought that Mum was going to help in the kitchen. Kath snarls that she also thought that.

Aunty Kath's anger at Mum suggests that Kath is far more upset that the rest of her family isn't doing everything in their power to return to some sense of normalcy after the accident, given that Mum's depression makes it impossible to ignore that things are no longer the same.



The next afternoon, Dad and Tom arrive home to find everyone in Mum's room. Mum is curled into a ball on the bed. Brendan sits with her, Aunty Kath paces, and Gran and Kylie stand against the wall. Kath and Gran explain that Daniel called, hoping to speak to Mum, and was caught off guard when Kath picked up. Mum frantically insists that Daniel can't be caught off guard in jail, and Kath retorts that Fin can't even move. Kath shouts at Brendan and Dad for letting Mum lie in bed and wallow when she has a responsibility to her other two children. Shakily, Mum says there are days when she just can't move. Kath snaps that that's a luxury—she has to do everything for Fin, from helping him use the bathroom to wiping his tears.

Gran's house is quiet for the rest of the week, and Tom can't figure out why mass is a big deal on Sunday. Dad tries to make Tom wear his good shirt. Tom refuses and is perplexed when Dad explains that both Gran and Mum are coming. Tom steps out of the bathroom and is shocked to see Mum showered and dressed. Tom has to drive with Gran and he tunes out her lecture on Palm Sunday, hoping that Father Vincent is there today instead of his ancient and long-winded substitute. Fortunately, Tom is in luck, though Gran insists they sit in the front row.

Mum keeps her composure and instead of taking communion, she kneels and prays. Tom is just thankful she's up. He stands in line for communion and looks around at his Bennie's teammates, scattered throughout the church. Tom thinks that some of his teammates have potential, but not enough skill. A girl is singing a hymn by herself in the choir. Tom looks up and sees that it's Chrissy, and he doesn't want her to stop singing. He watches her wave at a guy down below and thinks that of course she's taken.

The first match that Bennie's plays is at the end of April. Daniel's birthday is days later, and Tom has grand plans for a birthday gift. One weekend morning, Tom goes to see Brendan at the sheds and makes up excuses for why he didn't join him for a run. Jonny comes out of Brendan's house in his boxers and Tom tries to play it cool. He thinks it makes sense that Brendan and Jonny are together. Tom tells Brendan that he'd like to make Daniel a scrapbook for his birthday like the ones Gran used to make. Brendan thinks it's a great idea and tells him that the old scrapbooks are in a wardrobe in Gran's house.

Kath can see clearly that Fin and Daniel aren't the only ones who are paying for Daniel's decision: Tom and Kylie have effectively lost their mother and as far as Kath knows, nobody else is stepping up to do much (as evidenced, in her eyes, by Dad and Brendan's unwillingness to force Mum out of bed). Bringing Kath into all of this makes it clear that in order for the family to move forward, it's going to need to be a group effort and everyone will need to accept that they're accountable to more people than they initially thought.



The fact that Mum is up and coming to church suggests that Kath's words did have an effect and Mum can now begin to expand her awareness to encompass her two other children. When this comes about because of church service, it suggests that the Brennan family is beginning to rely a little more on Gran's preferred ways of finding community—and that Gran might have it right.



The possibility that the Brennans are starting to heal thanks to Gran's insistence that they lean on religion becomes more likely here as Tom begins to take an interest in the people around him, not just in his fears and concerns about his own life. In particular, his interest in Chrissy foreshadows that she'll be a major contributing factor in Tom's healing process.



Tom's desire to help Daniel by giving him mementos of the past suggests that while Tom desperately wants to escape the past, he also recognizes that it has the power to help him and Daniel move forward. This also suggests that he's aware of the power of the legend of the Brennan brothers, as it's likely that evidence of that is in Gran's scrapbooks and will remind Daniel that he does have a team looking out for him.



As Tom starts to head back to Gran's house, he notices a car at the gate to come up to the sheds. He jogs over to open the gate and is shocked to see that it's Chrissy. Tom feels stupid in his boxers, tries to control an erection, and thinks his chest and arms are too skinny. Chrissy explains that she has tools for Jonny, and Tom agrees to carry the box to the shed. The box is almost too heavy, but Tom refuses to let Chrissy help him. She giggles as she drives away and as soon as she's out of sight, Tom drops the box.

Tom takes a long time in the shower and Kylie teases him about masturbating. After finding clean clothes, Tom begins to go through the old scrapbooks. He flips one open to a newspaper clipping of "**The Legend of the Brennan Brothers**" and then flips backwards. Tom pulls out the scrapbook on the bottom of the pile, which looks new. He opens to the first page and comes face to face with a photo of Daniel's car against the tree and an article about the accident.

CHAPTER TWELVE

On Wednesday night, Tom sits in his bedroom trying to work on Daniel's scrapbook. He only has Friday night to work on it, given the match on Thursday. He thinks that seeing the article about the accident set him back, but he recognizes that he's improving: he thinks that a few weeks ago, he wouldn't have been able to pick the albums back up. Tom carefully starts to remove photos to scan, feeling as though the pain is worthwhile since it'll help Daniel.

On Thursday morning, Tom tries to keep a straight face as Gran tapes a picture of Saint Vitus, the patron saint of oversleeping, on the fridge. She insists that Saint Vitus might be able to help keep Mum up for longer periods of time. Gran offers to make Tom eggs, which he hastily refuses. She tells him that she's going to buy premade lasagna later since Tom clearly doesn't like her cooking. Tom is shocked. Gran playfully ruffles his hair and tells him to say something if he doesn't like a meal. When Tom asks, Gran explains that Kylie stayed over at Brianna's to prepare for a presentation she's giving on Friday.

On Friday morning, Tom and several other players hang out and talk about the match the night before. Bennie's won, but the other team was horrible. Tom thinks that the Bennie's team has potential and it's Harvey's lax attitude that is keeping the team back. Tom was shocked when after the match, Harvey kept complimenting everyone and saying that having fun was the most important part. Tom believes Dad will straighten Harvey out soon.

Like Mum and Daniel, Tom has neglected his body in the months since the accident. When he recognizes that that's unattractive to girls like Chrissy, it again shows that Chrissy and female attention will be instrumental in helping Tom to move forward as an individual and work to make life better for himself.



The fact that Gran clearly believes that the accident is worth commemorating in a scrapbook suggests that for her, talking about it and committing what happened to memory is an instrumental part of her healing process. It suggests that none of them should endeavor to forget, so that they won't make the same mistakes again.



Tom's logic here—that the pain is worth it because it'll help Daniel—makes it very clear that he is, at his core, someone who cares deeply for others and has the potential to be a fantastic friend, if only he'd let other possible friends in.



It's telling that Tom finds Saint Vitus funny; it suggests that he no longer regards the saints with the same venom he did at the beginning. This indicates that he's starting to come around to Gran's attempts to help. Gran's offer to make different food further shows that she now recognizes that she'll need to make concessions in order to effectively help her family heal.



When Tom is shocked by Harvey's focus on fun and teamwork, it indicates that at St. John's, winning was all that mattered to the team—and Tom has internalized that mindset. This offers more evidence as to why Tom is unwilling to make friends with his teammates, as he doesn't see them as worthy since they can't win.



Rory and Jimmy tell Tom about where they'll have their footy camp in a few weeks. It's at a university with nearby nursing college, which means that the boys have numerous opportunities for sexual encounters. They tell Tom about a former player, Davin, who apparently had sex with so many girls that he fell asleep during practice. Brad joins Rory, Jimmy, and Tom and laughs about Davin. Rory points to Chrissy walking by and implies that she's Davin's girlfriend. Brad moans that he wants Chrissy and all the boys gawk at her when she talks to Tom. After she passes them, they notice Kylie and Brianna. Rory insists that Brianna looks like she's up to something.

At lunch, Tom notices some girls whispering and looking at him. Tom tries to tell himself he's just being paranoid since this isn't St. John's, but he knows something is wrong when one of the girls asks if he's Kylie's brother.

Tom finds Rory and Jimmy waiting by his locker after school and nervously accepts their invitation to go to Burger King. They haltingly explain that Kylie gave a speech on terrorism but instead of talking about 9/11, she talked about what happened to the Brennans in Mumbilli. Jimmy quietly admits that he already knew, which makes Tom feel panicky. Rory assures Tom that they're friends and part of a team, but Tom cuts him off. He runs away towards Gran's house. Tom remembers the morning after Daniel's sentencing, when someone spray painted "SHAME ON YOU BRENNANS, SHAME" on their house.

Tom gets home after dark. He finds Dad, Gran, Mum, and Kylie at the table, Kylie in tears. Tom calls Kylie a stupid cow and walks back outside. He thinks that Kylie isn't going to drag the rest of the family down with her as he heads down to Brendan's cabin. Brendan passes Tom a beer and asks if Kylie is still crying. He says she's been crying for four hours now and explains that when she came right home after her speech, Gran lit into her. Tom angrily asks why Kylie would do that when the family has been through so much, and Brendan suggests it's her way of getting it out and might actually be a good thing.

This entire conversation shows Tom that Rory, Jimmy, and Brad in particular are prime candidates for friends and are more than willing to help make Tom feel like one of the team. Again, however, Tom's unwillingness to truly integrate with them likely has to do with the fact that he prioritizes winning over friendship and teamwork, and thus devalues the Bennie's team as a whole.



Tom's fear suggests that what's happening here mimics what happened in Mumbilli, which implies that Tom is possibly not wrong to be so afraid of people finding out about the accident.



Though Tom is too emotional to see it, it's telling that Jimmy already knew but didn't say anything, as it suggests that what happened isn't as big of a deal here in Coghill as it was in Mumbilli. Running away shows just how intense Tom's fear is, especially when he thinks about the graffiti on their house. The graffiti in particular shows that Mumbilli truly turned against the Brennans and dissolved any sense of community there.



Brendan is suggesting here that time isn't the only thing that heals; talking about the trauma can also help people to heal. However, talking requires making a connection with other people and trusting them, two things that Tom isn't yet willing to do. The fact that Kylie trusted some of her classmates enough to give this speech suggests that she may be healing at a faster rate than Tom at this point.



Brendan says that Chrissy heard about the speech and came looking for Tom earlier. Tom moans that everyone will know about it now. Brendan tries to tell Tom that Coghill isn't little like Mumbilli, and notes that plenty of people already know about what happened. Tom asks why Chrissy then thought the wool stuff for Fin was for a grandfather, and Brendan says that Tom was clearly not ready then for people to know. Brendan asks if Tom thinks that people will look at him differently if they know what happened to Daniel. Tom buries his face in his knees and reminds Brendan of what happened in Mumbilli. Brendan assures Tom that Coghill is significantly bigger and nobody cares about other people's business.

Tom asks how Brendan can be so sure that nothing is going to happen. He admits he's scared of going backwards and having to relive what happened in Mumbilli. Brendan concedes that Kylie shouldn't have given the speech, but he insists that sooner or later, people would've found out anyway. He slaps Tom's leg and insists they should've talked about this a long time ago. He insists that Tom is stronger than Kylie and assures him a final time that absolutely nothing is going to happen now that the secret is out.

The next morning as Dad and Tom drive through Coghill on their way to see Daniel, Tom sees that Brendan was right: there's no graffiti or signs in windows telling the Brennans to go home. He asks Dad if they can stop for breakfast, which annoys Dad, as he made breakfast at home that Tom didn't eat.

The guards let the scrapbook through at the crisis center and Daniel's face brightens as he flips through it. Tom points out several pictures and he and Daniel go off down memory lane. Dad asks about an older inmate, and Daniel explains that the man is a mentor. He says his own mentor's name is Jerry. Daniel's face darkens some, but he remains calm as he explains that Jerry has been talking to him as well as a guy named Theo, who's in jail for the same thing as Daniel.

In the car on the way home, Dad tells Tom that they got an offer on their house in Mumbilli that they're going to accept. Dad sighs that they'll likely stay with Gran for a while longer and admits that he thinks Gran likes having them around. Tom asks if Mum is going to be okay. Dad points out that Mum is doing better, but Tom admits that he thought that Mum might get better faster. Tom thinks he's tired of how slowly everyone else is healing, and wonders if his impatience is a sign that he's moving forward.

Though Tom never specifies what he means when he talks about "what happened in Mumbilli," it's likely he's referring specifically to the graffiti and the fact that the community shut his family out and ostracized them. The fact that Tom fears being ostracized in particular shows that Tom is distancing himself from others as a defense mechanism; he does actually want to be close to others and have supportive friendships. However, he's just too scared to seek them out right now.



Brendan does have a point; the records of the trial are public, which means that anyone could look them up and discover that Tom is related to Daniel. Brendan's overarching point is that Tom is wasting his time worrying about what others think of him and his relationship to Daniel; what Tom really needs to focus on is himself and finding a sense of peace.



Again, Tom's returned appetite signals progress, as his ability to look at the lack of signs and graffiti and see that for what it is suggests that Tom is now able to take a less emotional view of what happened.



The fact that Daniel is finding the mentoring at the crisis center helpful suggests that he will be more successful in moving forward as he tries to tangibly give back in a way that's very different from the apology letters that he wrote. Daniel will soon start to mentor Theo himself, which will allow him to help Theo's community heal and help Daniel heal as well.



Tom isn't wrong; his impatience for others to catch up and start to feel better is a signal that he's healing. This is, notably, because Tom is starting to realize that he doesn't have to think of himself as intrinsically connected to Daniel and to Mumbilli. By understanding that he's an individual, he's able to make friends on his own terms.



CHAPTER THIRTEEN

On Monday, none of the other kids at school seem to even notice Tom and Kylie, let alone whisper about them. Rory checks and makes sure that Tom is okay, and, on the stairs, Chrissy tries to catch up with Tom. When she finally does, Tom insists that he's fine. After school, Tom, Rory, Jimmy, and Brad go to Burger King. They talk about jail; Jimmy's cousin is also in jail, but for a year more than Daniel will be. Tom feels secretly relieved. He's no longer hiding a secret and there are no consequences for that.

Tom and Kylie don't speak to each other. Tom feels as though he can't let Kylie know he's okay, since he still thinks she shouldn't have told anyone. Because everyone else is so preoccupied, Tom spends most of his time at home with Gran. One evening, he asks her if she misses her chickens. Gran lovingly reminisces about two of her chickens, Cain and Abel. Tom wants to know why Gran named two hens after men, and Gran explains that Cain was greedy. Tom tries not to laugh, especially when Gran reminds Tom that Cain murdered Abel without qualifying that she's referring to the Bible story, not the chickens. Tom suggests that Gran get more chickens, but she insists she's too busy.

Tom had been hoping that Fin would drop the idea of a birthday party, but Auntie Kath organizes a barbeque for everyone on Saturday. The night before, Tom goes out to see a movie with Rory, Jimmy, and Brad. They see Chrissy there with Davin, and Brad explains that Davin can have any girl he likes and then move on when he's ready.

Tom discovers Kylie on his bed when he gets home. She apologizes for her speech and admits that she thought giving it would make her feel good. She offers to let Tom read it so that he knows exactly what she said and explains that she didn't say anything bad about him. Kylie says that she feels bad mostly because her speech negatively affected Tom. She explains that she's angry at Daniel because he ruined everything and never considered anyone else, and she admits she did the same thing by giving the speech.

Tom relents and points out that people would've found out eventually, and he and Kylie discuss that there's been no backlash. Kylie asks if Tom will forgive her, and Tom decides he's done being angry with her. He forgives her, and they laugh for a few minutes before then talking about Fin's party. Tom says, almost to himself, that they couldn't have stayed in Mumbilli. Kylie agrees that Coghill is different, but not bad. Then, Kylie starts to giggle again and says she overheard Brendan on the phone—apparently, Chrissy thinks Tom is cute.

When Chrissy makes the effort to check in with Tom, it shows that she sees him as an individual in need of care, friendship, and connection—she clearly doesn't think he's a bad person because of his association with Daniel. Tom's relief at having the secret out suggests that he'll now be able to move forward and make friends with his teammates.



This conversation with Gran shows that in addition to seeing himself as an individual, Tom is also starting to understand that other people are individuals as well, not just grandparents or parents filling a specific role in his life. By trying to get at what Gran actually thinks is important and what she loves, he's able to form a deeper connection with her and start to understand how she sees the world in a more nuanced way.



Brad's description of Davin suggests that Davin is an awful lot like Daniel, which doesn't bode well for his relationship with Chrissy, given what happened to Daniel and Claire.



When Kylie and Tom become more aware of the ways in which they resemble other family members, it shows them beginning to reevaluate how their family actually works and the roles they all actually play. Here specifically, it suggests that there are no true "good guys" in the family; everyone is flawed.



By forgiving Kylie, Tom opens himself up to form a closer relationship with her which could, in turn, help both of them to heal. It's also important to note the undertones of acceptance here; both Tom and Kylie accept that they needed to move in order to be able to move on with their lives. This then suggests that they do recognize that they're growing, changing, and starting to feel better.



At the rehab center, Tom recognizes a lot of guys from the hospital where Fin was. He tries not to cry when he sees Fin in the wheelchair. Aunty Kath makes a wonderful cake and Mum even tries to look nice. Tom can feel the air get chilly when Mum and Kath are near each other, and Brendan tries to ease the tension with little success. Tom tries to escape by helping Dad barbeque, but Fin comes and parks his wheelchair next to Tom. Fin talks about St. John's losing a rugby match and remarks that Bennie's might beat St. John's. He asks who the Bennie's five-eight is and says that even if Rory is good, it's probably not the same as playing with Daniel.

Fin asks if Tom saw the stacks of birthday cards he got from people in Mumbilli. Tom quietly says he's sure everyone misses Fin and thinks that Fin is making it really hard to not hate him. A few minutes later, Tom finds Kylie and Fin to tell Kylie they're leaving. Kylie's eyes are watery, and Fin explains that he got a postcard from Claire. He says that she's in Rome and will bring back holy **water** for him. Tom wants nothing more than to leave and is thrilled to head back to Coghill. He thinks that there's no point anymore in looking backwards. The next morning, Mum and Dad get a call that Daniel's mental state went downhill with Fin's birthday. They leave for Westleigh and get a hotel so that they can visit him daily.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

For the weeks that Mum and Dad are with Daniel, Tom throws himself into running with Brendan. Tom either zones out or they talk about Daniel. One morning, when they get back to Brendan's cabin, Brendan starts his sit-ups and Tom insists that the worst thing is that nobody will talk about Daniel. He says it feels like Daniel never existed. Tom joins Brendan in doing sit-ups. Brendan says he believes Mum and Dad are having a really hard time and points out that not long ago, Tom wouldn't talk at all.

Jonny fills in for Dad as assistant coach. The team is somewhat annoyed, as Jonny likes to drill ball handling and technique. One afternoon Harvey doesn't come to practice, and Jonny asks Tom to take half the team. Grudgingly, Tom agrees. His half includes Rory, Marcus, and the captain, Tonelli, and they hang on Tom's every word as he starts to explain a defensive strategy to them.

Fin's attempts at conversation imply that he's still trying to remain involved with his old life, even if he can't physically participate in Mumbilli life or rugby anymore. This shows that Fin is also trying to figure out where he fits in going forward, and rugby still offers him a way to connect with Tom. His comment about Daniel suggests that like Tom, Fin still sees Tom and Daniel as intrinsically connected to each other.



Fin's language makes it very clear to Tom that he's still a beloved figure in Mumbilli, while the Brennans are not (especially given that Daniel's birthday was the week before and, outside of the Brennan family, seemed to pass without mention). This is indicative of just how angry Fin is with how things have turned out; he's willing to weaponize his status in order to hurt his family on purpose.



Tom is definitely making progress here when he wants desperately to talk about Daniel, especially to Mum and Dad. This suggests that Tom is starting to trust again that his parents will be around to act as parents, not just other people who share space with him.



The fact that the team is clearly interested in learning from Tom suggests that Tom is still behaving snobbishly about rugby: the team clearly wants to improve and Tom has the power to help them, but he's too caught up in thinking of them as useless to do so.



Brendan picks Tom up after practice and Tom jokes that his teammates are hopeless. Brendan suggests they go out for steak and mentions that Gran gave him clothes for Tom—Jonny is coming too, and the plan is that Tom will shower at Jonny's. Tom asks if Chrissy will be there. He tries to act nonchalant, but he starts to panic when he learns that Chrissy will be at the house *and* join them for dinner.

At Jonny's house, Jonny explains exactly how to turn the **water** on in the shower without getting burnt. Tom barely listens; he's concerned that the door doesn't lock. Tom finally steps into the shower and the hot water promptly scalds him. He can't even reach to turn it off and begins cursing and jumping around. Tom screams when the water hits him again and ends up trapped between the toilet and the sink, the water spraying all over the bathroom. Brendan and Jonny race in, Chrissy right behind them.

Jonny manages to turn the **water** off and hands Tom a towel, and then he and Brendan start laughing. Chrissy tries not to laugh and compliments Tom on his nice butt. Later, Tom thinks that it was a nice icebreaker given how much fun he has at dinner. He makes Chrissy laugh with all his jokes, which is a first since Daniel usually hogged the limelight and was an awful joke-teller. Chrissy suggests that they go out for dinner every night and blushes when Brendan and Jonny tease her about Davin.

Tom explains that the family's plan for footy camp involves complicated travel plans that will allow Dad to coach the camp and not leave Mum alone. Tom feels as though half his life is spent in the car these days.

On the bus ride to camp, the guys start a betting pool on which of them will top Davin's number of sexual encounters with the nurses from last year. This makes Tom feel like an outsider, as he doesn't know enough to make an informed bet. On the plus side, Tom learns that Chrissy dumped Davin over the weekend. Dad and Harvey meet the bus at camp and Harvey assigns rooms. Tom realizes he hates the teambuilding part of rugby in particular. He's assigned a room with Tonelli, Marcus, and Jimmy.

When Tom panics but doesn't run away, it's another sign that he's making progress. Dinner will help him connect more deeply with Jonny and Brendan, while having Chrissy around will allow him to get to know her without having to ask her out himself.



Though this is a humorous example, Tom's fixation on his fears and anxieties once again keeps him from engaging logically with others and in this case, it literally burns him. This shows that while Tom is starting to improve, he'll need to work on this as he moves towards maturity and discovering who he is as an individual.



In this case, water provides Tom a way forward with Chrissy and helps him see that he will possibly be able to construct his future in Coghill. Though the novel never confirms or denies it, it's possible that Brendan and Jonny arranged this dinner specifically to get Tom and Chrissy together, which would add more evidence to the novel's assertion that Tom can now look to new family members for support.



Making these plans for footy camp that take the entire family into account shows that the Brennans are trying their best to rally for each other and provide the support that they lost in Mumbilli.



Tom's insistence that he hates the teambuilding parts of playing rugby speaks again to the environment at St. John's: they were obsessed with winning and from what Tom has said thus far, it doesn't seem like the team was all that connected personally. This sets Tom up to learn at footy camp that teambuilding isn't actually a bad thing.



In their room, Marcus notes that they'll play St. John's in July and quickly says that they'll only play them once. The guys ask Tom how St. John's plays and they tell Tom that Dad is a great coach. Tonelli excuses himself to smoke, knowing that Harvey will confiscate everything illegal after dinner. Harvey also confiscates the book of bets. The daily routine includes running, training, and gym time in the morning, with teambuilding activities in the afternoons and watching old game footage after dinner. Most of the videos are of Bennie's losing.

Tom becomes more and more disenchanted as the week goes on. In Mumbilli, Dad used to get a professional coach out at the beginning of the season to work the team into the ground so they could win. Tom doesn't see the point of the "fluffy" teambuilding activities. Finally, on Wednesday afternoon, Dad pulls Tom aside. Tom complains that his teammates play horribly, but Dad puts his head against the rail and asks if he pushed Tom too hard and caved to the pressure to win the Wattle Shield at all costs.

Tom is confused, but Dad continues. Dad admits that he got someone else to lead camps at Mumbilli because he didn't fully believe that winning was all there was to rugby. He says the only thing he's sure of is that Tom has more natural ability than Daniel ever had, and Daniel and Tom's endless drilling made them unstoppable. He says that Daniel's attention gave Tom a fair chance at doing well and tells Tom that he needs to take this chance to play for Bennie's, even if the team seems pathetic. Dad tells Tom to try, because he knows Tom can do better.

Tom feels awful. He knows that Dad has always been willing to tell him hard truths, so he accepts Dad's challenge and throws himself into training. He's able to teach the team a few things and gets into the teambuilding activities. Tom comes to truly believe that the Bennie's guys are fun and friendly. He thinks he's just not used to that as at St. John's, winning was everything—this outlook is confusingly different. Tom thinks about Dad's words at night, trying to figure out if he's right that winning isn't everything.

The questions about how St. John's plays shows that the Bennie's team understands that Tom is an asset to them for a number of reasons—besides being an excellent player, he also has insider knowledge into St. John's. This does suggest that camp isn't going to be easy for Tom, as he has to live with the knowledge that he's an outsider and is still emotionally part of a different team.



Again, describing the teambuilding activities as "fluffy" indicates that Tom is only playing rugby to win. Because Bennie's has no hope of doing that, Tom has simply decided that playing at all isn't worth it. Dad's suggests here that he blames himself for the accident, as the pressure to win the Wattle Shield was a major contributing factor in the fight on the night of the accident.



Dad suggests here that teamwork and camaraderie are extremely important to being able to play well, and Tom is holding himself back by not embracing his team. The fact that Dad can also give Daniel credit for giving Tom this chance shows that Dad is able to recognize Daniel's positive roles throughout his life, not just fixate on the accident.



The fact that Tom is struggling to come around to Dad's way of thinking is indicative of just how flawed the St. John's team's ethos was, as well as how much of an impact that had on the players. This makes it clear that changing one's thinking on this sort of thing is actually extremely difficult, even if the "right" answer seems pretty clear.



CHAPTER FIFTEEN

At the end of camp, Dad and Tom wave the rest of the boys off on the bus and then head for Westleigh. Tom gets to see Daniel by himself the next morning while Mum and Dad meet with Daniel's social worker. Daniel doesn't look well; Tom thinks that for the first time, he truly looks like a prisoner. Daniel's eyes light up when he sees Tom, however, and he immediately asks about footy camp. Tom thinks about Dad's pep talk and explains that the Bennie's boys enjoy playing. Daniel is confused; he insists the game is all about winning.

Daniel asks about Harvey, and Tom explains that Harvey makes the team feel like they're better than they actually are, as he believes that teamwork is a life skill. Daniel scoffs, but Tom wonders if Harvey might be correct. Tom hesitantly says that St. John's was all about winning and they put so much pressure on themselves to win, and he suggests they might've suffered for it. Daniel is derisive, but Tom insists that the best thing about playing at St. John's was playing with Daniel. He privately thinks that at the end, it was the worst too, as he had to carry Daniel's weight when Daniel stopped trying.

Daniel sighs that things are different because he messed things up and refuses to let Tom say otherwise. Daniel says seriously that he has his mentor, Jerry, and he needs to keep it together for Theo's sake, as he's not doing well. He lists all the people he's hurt and says that the thought of Fin's birthday set him off. He can't stand the thought of Fin in a wheelchair, but he declares that he'll see everyone again and make it through this. Tom tries to smile.

When Mum, Dad, and Tom get in the car, it's already getting dark. They stop for dinner and when they get back on the road, Mum invites Tom to sit in the backseat with her. Mum puts her arm around Tom and he lays his head on her shoulder. He thinks she finally smells right again as she apologizes and promises that things will keep getting better.

When Tom and Brendan run up the ascent a few days later, Brendan suggests they go away for Christmas to climb to the Mount Everest base camp. Before Tom knows it, they've made it to the top. On the way down, Brendan insists he's serious and even offers to give Tom a loan in exchange for work in the sheds. Gran is making breakfast when Tom gets back to the house and sends Tom immediately to the shower. Kylie is in the bathroom, whining about hating her hair. Tom insists it'd be fine if she stopped putting goop in it and kicks her out of the bathroom. He notices that he's getting fitter and flashes on how Daniel used to make him look at his muscly arms every morning. Now, Daniel's arms are thin and wasted.

The fact that Daniel seems unable or unwilling to come around to Dad and Tom's new way of looking at rugby provides some insight into why he behaved the way he did on the night of the accident: he truly doesn't understand the value of friendship and teamwork. This also suggests that he'll struggle to learn this in jail.



When Tom recognizes that the best and the worst part of playing at St. John's was the relationship he shared with Daniel, it suggests that he's leaving behind "the legend of the Brennan brothers" and is now ready to move forward on his own, as an individual, without Daniel's ghost hanging over him. This also implies that Tom will now be able to integrate into his new team far better with these realizations.



Daniel's seriousness when he talks about Theo illustrates the power of giving back: now that Daniel feels a responsibility toward someone else, he's more willing to help himself. With this, the novel shows that Daniel is actually learning some of the same lessons that Tom is; he's just not yet able to apply them to other parts of his life.



This moment is another one that signals that the Brennan family is healing at last, as Mum is now starting to act like a parent again. This means that going forward, Tom will have even more people to truly care about him and help push him towards maturity.



Brendan's suggestion gives Tom a tangible goal to work towards as a team, which makes the running and the training more like something akin to rugby. As Tom is able to form a closer relationship with his family members, and he's also starting to notice more ways that Daniel wasn't always a great person. The fact that Tom is passing Daniel in things like strength suggests that Tom is coming of age.



Tom is excited about the lunchtime match with St. Xavier's, Bennie's brother school. Bennie's has lost the last two years, so the guys are itching to win. As the St. Xavier's buses arrive, the Bennie's team watches Xavier's girls in jerseys arrive to watch. Twenty minutes later, the Bennie's boys are thrilled to see that some of the Bennie's girls came too. They play superbly and win 22-5. Brad and Tonelli lift Tom onto their shoulders and Tom grins the entire way back to school.

This win is more of a symbolic one for Tom, as it's the first game after footy camp and after Tom's realization that teamwork is important. When the other guys celebrate him after their win, it impresses upon Tom just how important it is to have close relationships with teammates—at the very least, it means more opportunities to feel like a hero.



At dinner with Brendan, Jonny, and Chrissy later, Chrissy wishes she'd been there to watch the match. Brendan asks Chrissy if she's still thinking of studying nursing, and she explains she is—she's thinking about going to the nursing college at the university where Tom's footy camp was. Brendan points this out, which annoys Tom, and he turns the conversation back to safer topics. Brendan tells Chrissy and Jonny that he and Tom are going to climb Mount Everest for Christmas, and Chrissy gives Jonny a hard time about his fear of flying. She teases Jonny and Brendan about staying in Coghill like an old married couple. Tom finds himself agreeing to go to Nepal.

When Tom agrees to go to Nepal with Brendan, it shows him stepping outside of his comfort zone to try something new—and most importantly, to connect with a member of his family who has become newly important to Tom. This is one of the ways that the novel shows how Tom is coming into himself as an individual and discovering what kind of person he is when he's not living constantly in Daniel's shadow.



Later, Tom reflects that he's totally in love with Chrissy. He hears Kylie still awake and knocks on her door. He pushes it open and finds Kylie sitting in front of her mirror with scissors, handfuls of hair in the garbage can. She cries that she feels awful.

Kylie's intense emotional state implies that while Tom is moving forward, she's still struggling intensely with the trauma she suffered as a result of the accident.



CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Tom sits next to Kylie, puts his arms around her, and tells her that her hair isn't that bad. She insists it's not her hair and starts to sob. Tom thinks the look in her eyes is the same as it was the first few days after the accident: terrified and lost. Finally, she gulps that she has a secret about Fin and Claire. Tom insists that everyone knew they liked each other, but Kylie shushes him. She says that she and Fin used to talk about Claire; Fin couldn't believe that Claire liked him, since all the girls wanted Daniel.

The fact that Kylie has been hiding a secret about the accident makes her volatile behavior make more sense: she's likely very guilty about whatever it is and feels totally alone about it. Unlike Tom, who now has an entire rugby team to support him, Kylie is comparatively alone, and her language implies that she hasn't shared this information with Brianna.



Kylie asks Tom if he remembers the fight that Fin and Daniel had the week before the sudden death match. It started because Fin talked to Claire, and Daniel was jealous. Kylie says that Daniel knew he was losing Claire, and it made him especially mad that he was losing her to Fin. She brings up the time in Year Nine when Daniel found out which girl Fin wanted to take and then asked her himself, just so Fin couldn't take her. Tom thinks that Daniel did that sort of thing a lot.

Kylie's example of Daniel's vindictiveness continues to show that Daniel wasn't necessarily a nice person; he had a cruel streak and sought to hurt others for his own pleasure. By vocalizing this, both Kylie and Tom will be able to better understand Daniel's role in the family.



Kylie continues that when Fin told her about the fight with Daniel, she reminded him of the Year Nine dance debacle and insisted that Daniel shouldn't get his way. She says that the day before the accident, when Aunty Kath was out, she suggested Fin invite Claire over and said she'd keep watch. Fin and Claire snuggled and kissed, and Claire decided to break up with Daniel. Kylie cries that she feels like the entire thing was her fault.

Tom admits that on the night of the accident, he told Daniel he was a jerk and walked away. He says he knew Daniel was upset and drunk, but he hated him right then and didn't stop him from driving. Tom says that he's not even sure now if he could've done anything. He admits that one of the last things he said to Daniel was, "you're going down."

Slowly, Tom says that Daniel is different now. Then, he drank a lot and was hung over all the time, as were Luke and Owen. Tom says he knew things were bad, but he's only recently realized that St. John's was basically playing with twelve players instead of fifteen, and Fin was doing most of the work. The young players were scared, nobody was having fun, and winning the last match was a total fluke.

Tom says that Dad was under intense pressure, and Mum and Dad knew they couldn't control Daniel. Tom wonders if Daniel just needed to fall this far. Tom suggests that Kylie go see him, and she asks why Tom seems to understand more and feel better than she does. Tom assures her she'll feel better soon and asks her what she's going to do about her hair. He takes the scissors and does his best to even it out.

Brendan asks Tom to do some work around the sheds to earn the trip to Nepal. Tom can barely believe he's going and is getting more excited by the day. Some days Chrissy comes by to drop things off for Jonny and then she and Tom talk. Tom feels as though he can be himself around her, and he loves her laugh. One afternoon, Jonny says with a meaningful look that Chrissy still isn't seeing anyone. After Jonny leaves, Brendan asks Tom if they can talk. Tom panics; he wonders if Jonny is actually a scarily possessive brother.

To an outside observer, Kylie's thoughts and actions make a great deal of logical sense—Claire was afraid of Daniel and needed a way out of the relationship, while Fin was a much better match. However, it's also worth keeping in mind that whatever Kylie did, she didn't force the fight or Fin to get in the car—her guilt is, to a degree, unfounded.



With this, Tom begins to show that he understands that in a number of ways, all the members of his family are partially responsible for what happened that night. This shows Tom taking responsibility—a sign of maturity—and recognizing the intricacies of his family.



This realization can be traced directly to Tom's experience at footy camp and his newfound understanding of the importance of teamwork. He understands now that the team couldn't function with only twelve members, just as the Brennan family couldn't function with Daniel so out of control.



When Tom fixes Kylie's hair, it's one way for them to begin to repair their relationship, as letting Tom cut her hair is a major leap of faith for Kylie. Note too that Tom also acknowledges their parents' role in the accident—again, demonstrating an understanding that his whole family is responsible.



When Tom feels as though he can be himself around Chrissy, it suggests that Chrissy will be one of the major forces in Tom's quest to find himself and discover his identity separate from Daniel's. Tom implies that he hasn't had a girlfriend before and it's possible that if he'd expressed interest, Daniel would've taken her; this means that this is all new territory for him and will help him come of age.



Brendan says he wants to talk about what Chrissy said at dinner the other week. Tom thinks this conversation will absolutely be a warning to not go near Chrissy, especially when Brendan says that Jonny can get emotional. Brendan confirms that Tom is aware that he and Jonny are together. Tom breathes a sigh of relief to be talking about Brendan's sexuality, not Jonny being violently possessive. Brendan remarks that they always talk about Daniel when they run instead of themselves, but Tom tells him to forget it. Brendan says that he just wants to have it in the open since they're going to travel together. Later, Tom thinks that he's never seen Brendan as anything more than an uncle, but now, Brendan wants Tom to truly see him. Tom thinks that Daniel probably sees Brendan this way too.

Rory comes over that weekend. He looks around, asks where everyone is, and says he always used to call Gran's place "Saint Margalette the Butcher's." Finally, Tom says that his family members are either visiting Fin or Daniel. They discuss Kylie's haircut and then play a video game. In a break, Rory brings up the match next weekend with St. John's. Tom is dreading it; he knows he'll need to talk to Matt before the game. He tells Rory that some of the guys are still his friends, but he thinks that he's not sure if that's true anymore. More than anything, Tom is scared that the game will push him back into the dark hole.

Mum, Kylie, and Tom make dinner a few days later. It's the first time Mum has cooked in ages, so Kylie and Tom humor her when she explains her methods to them. Tom wonders if he's more like Mum than he realizes, as he thinks that going back to bed and not coming out sounds like a reasonable plan. To keep his mind off of the game with St. John's, Tom goes to Brendan's cabin to research Nepal. Tom knocks and lets himself in. Brendan doesn't see Tom. He's sitting on the couch, drinking gin and looking at pictures of Daniel. Brendan staggers to the stereo and restarts his music: the song "Daniel" by Elton John. He's crying and mouthing the lyrics. Tom slowly backs out.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

On Monday morning, Tom muses that it's strange watching someone else cry. He thinks that a few months ago, seeing Brendan cry would've sent him into a dark spiral. Tom thinks that seeing Brendan cry put the game with St. John's into perspective: it's just another hill to climb, and then life will go on.

The crushing anxiety and fear that Tom feels about Jonny makes it clear that even though Tom is doing much better, he's still ruled by fear of others and specifically, of others' violence or unkindness. This reminds the reader that for Tom, he'll have to continually remind himself that the social structure at St. John's and between himself and Daniel wasn't healthy, and there are better and more meaningful ways to connect with others.



The fact that Rory also joked about the name of Gran's property keeps Tom from recognizing yet that Gran finds community with her saints that she doesn't find anywhere else. Tom's ability to wonder if some of the St. John's guys aren't actually friends anymore shows that he's come to the conclusion that teamwork is important, which in turn makes him question whether he actually had relationships with his old teammates.



By witnessing Brendan's private grief, Tom is able to see again that his family is grieving still and is healing at very different rates. This also helps Tom to see Brendan as an individual in his own right, not just as the calm and collected pillar of support that Brendan has been for the Brennan family since the accident. Brendan looks much more like Dad here; he must grieve in private so that he doesn't let others down.



It's telling that Tom is so aware of his own progress, as it suggests that Tom is learning to actively frame his struggles in ways that make sense to him and will help him get through darker moments.



As Tom and Brendan run, Brendan asks Tom if he's aware that Chrissy really likes him. Tom immediately is doubtful, but Brendan tells Tom to ask her out quickly. Brendan turns off their normal track and yells that he's taking Tom somewhere special. He refuses to tell Tom where until Tom hears the **river**. When they come to a clearing by the water, Tom tugs on an old rope on which Brendan says that Daniel used to swing. Brendan explains that he brought Daniel and Fin here when they were about thirteen, and Daniel treated it like an initiation ceremony. Brendan says he never brought Tom because the river got infested with poisonous algae and then he forgot about it. He remembered after seeing a photo of Daniel on the rope, and it's safe to swim here now.

Brendan says that what he said the other day about not leaving Coghill is actually complicated. He says that he and Jonny were going to leave and go to Sydney, but then the accident happened. Tom thinks that Brendan held the family together by taking pressure off of Dad, especially when Mum got bad. He thanks Brendan for staying. After a few minutes, Brendan says he didn't come to the **river** at all last summer because of the memories. Tom notes that Gran says they need to leave their ghosts behind, but Brendan insists that you can't underestimate sacrifices you make because of something someone else did. After a moment, he does admit that Gran is right.

Tom says that he wants to build Gran a chicken coop and get her some chickens, but says he'll need help. Brendan suggests he do it for Gran's birthday in September. Tom asks Brendan for help and says that they'll get Kylie to help too.

Tom is nervous about the upcoming match with St. John's all week, though the team makes him feel supported. He's relieved when he learns that they'll play at a spot halfway between Coghill and Mumbilli. On Thursday afternoon, Harvey asks Tom to help him carry equipment. Tom asks if there are any players who might make the New South Wales team, and Harvey says Tom has a chance. Harvey recounts seeing Tom play last year and thinking that he didn't look like he was enjoying it. Tom knows he *didn't* enjoy last season. Now, he understands that rugby is better when a team is united and loves the game.

When Brendan heads into town later in the evening, Tom stays in the sheds and cleans. He checks his email and feels cowardly for not replying to Matt. He knows, however, that Matt will forgive him, and they'll be able to pick their friendship up when they're done with school. As Tom gets ready to leave, he spots Chrissy driving up. They sit together and talk about rugby. Tom explains that St. John's getting into the Wattle Shield was a fluke last year and it was only because of Fin that they did.

The fact that Daniel treated his trip to the river like an initiation or coming of age ceremony suggests that the river might play a similar role in Tom's life—he's here for the first time right after figuring out how to look at life in a more constructive way, after all. The algae in the river can be read as a metaphor for Daniel and Daniel's issues; now that Daniel is in jail and can no longer make life so miserable for others, the way is clear for others—like Tom—to move forward and mature.



Brendan's comment that he can't underestimate sacrifices undertaken because of someone else gives Tom permission to take his move to Coghill and the changes that brought seriously. It was a sacrifice for him to uproot his life and move, even if things are overwhelmingly turning out well for him now. This also reinforces that, per the logic of the novel, family members have a responsibility to care for each other over anything else.



Tom's suggestion to build a chicken coop shows that he now sees Gran as a full person deserving of love and attention, just like he is.



It's telling that Tom's chances of making a famous team in the future aren't hurt by his association with Bennie's, even if the Bennie's team isn't the best team around. This only further reinforces the novel's assertion that teamwork is far more meaningful than winning—and importantly, that even sacrificing winning for friendship doesn't mean that someone can never win in the future.



It's unclear whether Tom is telling himself that Matt will forgive him because it's true or because he's too afraid to try harder in that relationship. Either way, the fact remains that Tom is still healing and not ready to reach out to repair things with old friends. This is also why he still struggles to be around Fin; new relationships are easier than old ones.



Tom says that Fin never talks to him about what his life is like now, but he doesn't like to visit so there's not a lot of opportunity to talk anyway. Tom admits that he feels guilty about Fin in particular, and it's made worse because Fin is so angry about everything. Tom says it's stupid that he's so upset about the match in these circumstances. Chrissy says that after her dad's last stroke, she didn't want to see him much because he drooled and it was kind of gross, but now, she wishes she'd spent more time with him.

Before the match, Harvey gives everyone a pep talk, and then Tonelli insists that the team needs to support Tom. Out on the field, Matt gives Tom a thumbs-up, but Tom can barely smile back. By the midpoint, St. John's is winning 9-0. Harvey barks instructions for the last half and Bennie's plays better. Tom helps Bennie's bring the score to 9-7. As they restart play, Tom hears "killer" and "Brennan" from the St. John's team. He staggers backwards as Brad curses and lunges forward. Bennie's loses, but they celebrate like they won. Tom walks away, ignoring Matt as Matt tries to follow and apologize. Chrissy grabs Tom and steers him to her car.

Chrissy drives for hours and near dusk, turns off the highway onto an empty dirt road. Tom finally starts laughing and Chrissy stops the car. She explains that her dad used to come here for picnics. Tom thanks her for getting him off the field and explains that Matt was the St. John's player trying to talk to him. He puts his hands over his face and says he has to call Matt. Chrissy lowers her seats and they lie under a blanket. They talk about the game, Tom burning himself in the shower, and Chrissy's dad. Tom takes Chrissy's hand and they kiss. He feels as though this is the day he kissed Chrissy, not the day he faced St. John's.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

Because Fin is almost ready to leave the rehab center, Tom's entire family plans to spend the school holidays in Aralen helping Aunty Kath move. Tom loudly complains about it at dinner one night, but Dad tells Tom very seriously that he has to go to keep Fin updated on what's going on in the outside world. He says that helping is their responsibility. Tom thinks that this is making Fin feel like a burden, and it's even harder since Tom is happy with his life right now.

When Chrissy and Tom share more about their experiences with Fin and Chrissy's dad, it helps Tom in particular to feel like he's not alone. This shows again that his relationship with Chrissy will help bring Tom more fully into himself, as well as help him see the value in making friends and starting romances in his new life.



Pay particular attention to the ways in which the Bennie's team rallies for Tom; this shows Tom that even when his team is losing, the most important and meaningful part of playing rugby is knowing that his teammates will stand up for him in tough times. It's also important to note that Tom is instrumental in bringing the scores so close; this again shows that he's still an exceptional player, regardless of what team he plays for.



Tom's ability to reframe this day as the one in which he kissed Chrissy, not the one in which he faced St. John's, shows that these new friendships are helping him learn how to reframe his experiences and better manage his grief. This is notably because Tom finally chooses to define himself in some way other than through his association with St. John's, in either a positive or a negative way.



Dad's seriousness suggests that he believes that it's his entire family's duty to do whatever they can to make up for Daniel's actions, regardless of their thoughts on the matter. The fact that Tom is happy with his life makes this even harder, as it suggests that Tom will have to consistently struggle going forward to balance his desires with his responsibility to family.



Chrissy agrees with Dad that Tom has to go see Fin. She encourages Tom to actually try to talk to Fin, citing Tom's phone call to Matt as proof that he's capable of having tough conversations. Tom is somewhat annoyed as they lie on her bed. He tells the reader that they haven't had sex yet, though they want to. They just haven't found the right time yet. Though Chrissy isn't a virgin, she insists that she's never felt this way about anyone before and wants their first time having sex to feel like her first time too.

Tom walks around Aunty Kath's living room in her new flat, looking at all the contraptions she installed so Fin can shower and eat. He hears her telling Kylie and Dad that it's like having a baby again, and she admits that Fin is terrified to leave rehab. Dad and Tom throw themselves into unpacking boxes and assembling furniture. Kath and Kylie cook and shop for new clothes for Fin. Once, Tom notices Dad stuffing receipts in his pocket and is shocked to learn that Dad is paying for most of Kath's expenses. Dad darkly says that they'll never be able to repay their debt and they have no choice—Fin and Kath are family.

One clear day, Tom goes to the rehab center and takes Fin for a walk. They laugh that Fin's wheelchair reminds them of the soapbox races they used to have with Daniel on Daniel's Whine. Daniel would always make Tom push the cart back up. Tom points out that Daniel isn't bossing anyone around now, and after a moment of silence, Fin groans. Tom stops the chair and sits on a bench so they can both look out at the **ocean**. Fin whispers that he doesn't hate Daniel and says he got another postcard from Claire. He mentions that Kylie feels responsible, but says she was only trying to help. Fin admits he wanted to hit Daniel then, and Tom suggests he should have.

Fin says it's too late now for that and says that soon, maybe, he's going to see Daniel, since Daniel was like a brother. Tom wonders what the real difference is between brothers and cousins, given how close the three of them were. He thinks that this is why he wants to be with Chrissy—she's an escape from the pain Tom feels with his family. When Tom is with her, he feels like himself and isn't guilty about it. Tom knows now that what he missed the most the last year was himself, not Mum or Fin or Daniel or Mumbilli.

Though the conversation with Matt is never described, Chrissy implies here that it was the beginning of a new turn in Matt and Tom's relationship. This suggests that Tom is becoming more able to think critically about relationships with old friends and bring them into the future, where he's now a different and more mature individual.



Dad clearly believes it's imperative to continue trying to make up for Daniel's actions. However, it's worth noting that what he's doing is something tangible that will actually make a difference, just like Daniel's new mentoring relationship with Theo is making a difference. This shows that giving back like this is the only way to truly find redemption.



The memory of Daniel bullying Tom reminds both Tom and Fin that Daniel wasn't actually a nice person all the time, while Tom's reply suggests that he may now be more convinced that Daniel's time in jail will be a good way to help him be better. Fin's admission that he doesn't hate Daniel suggests that Fin understands that the only way he can go is forward; fixating on who Daniel was in the past will only make Fin sadder and angrier.



The choice to go see Daniel shows Fin accepting that family is extremely important, even though family is also what paralyzed him in the first place. Like Tom, this shows that Fin is beginning to understand that his relationships with family members will necessarily have to shift to accommodate the changes that have taken place.



Mum, Dad, and Tom return home for the last week of the school holiday. Kylie stays behind and one night, she calls to say that she's going to stay longer: Fin is having a hard time and she wants to make sure he's settled. Tom overhears Mum and Dad fighting about it. Mum is upset that Kylie will miss school and possibly Tom's birthday, which she insists they can't forget this year. Dad assures Mum it'll only be a few days, but Mum points out that Kylie is struggling. Dad asks if they're supposed to say that their physically capable daughter can't help. Tom knows that Mum and Dad don't understand the guilt Kylie is carrying, and wonders if this is her way of making things up to Fin.

Tom finds the last week of the holiday blissful. He loves working on the chicken coop with Chrissy and Brendan. One afternoon Chrissy and Tom discuss being monogamous, but Mum interrupts them with cold drinks. Tom drinks his and gives Mum the look to leave. As Mum walks away, Chrissy notes that Mum is pale and thin. Tom says she's actually much better now and talks about the months when she only got out of bed to visit Daniel. He says that that time was weird, but it's almost weirder that he barely remembers what she was like then.

Chrissy suggests that that's a good thing, but Tom admits he didn't see Mum as a real person then—he only noticed that she was going gray and smelled. Tom says he's nervous about next week, since it's the anniversary of the accident. Matt told him that Mumbilli is having a service at the site of the accident, and Tom says he's too scared to go back. Chrissy and Tom lie back on the grass, holding hands. Tom says he's thinking about how ghostly the trees looked that night and says that Fin recently thanked him for staying with him the night of the accident.

Chrissy asks Tom to talk about the accident. Tom says he remembers a disgusting taste in his mouth and being really thirsty. He remembers Fin's terrified voice as the paramedics cut him out of the car. Chrissy tells Tom that the accident will always be with him but eventually, he'll stop asking why it happened. Tom says that he's already sick of feeling awful about it all the time.

Finally, Tom finishes the chicken coop and buys three hens and a rooster. On the morning of Gran's birthday, he blindfolds Gran and leads her outside, Kylie, Mum, Brendan, and Dad close behind. They pull the blindfold off and Gran stares at the chickens, dumbfounded. Tom notices a tear in her eyes. She walks into the pen and picks up her rooster. She declares that she'll name him after Saint Harvey, who was famous for miracles. The chicken squawks and Gran scolds him that if he's not quiet, she'll name him after Saint Benedict, the patron saint of bachelors.

The side of the argument that Mum chooses again suggests that she's more like Daniel than Tom is truly willing to give her credit for: while her desire for Kylie to come home is understandable, it's also somewhat selfish. This helps Tom to see that his parents are individual people with flaws of their own, which is something he realizes now because he saw Mum so low for so long.



The fact that Tom barely remembers Mum's months of being so depressed indicates that the Brennan family as a whole is extremely resilient and capable of changing for the better—and in some cases, capable of moving past the awful things that happened in the past. This realization suggests that things have now settled into a new normal, and Mum is once again reliable.



Again, Tom's understanding that he didn't see Mum as a person when she was so depressed is pretty mature, which shows that Tom himself is coming of age and learning to see others as individuals in addition to himself. When he admits to Chrissy that he's scared to go back to Mumbilli, it reminds the reader that Tom still has a long way to go as he faces his fears, however.



When Tom mentions mostly his memories of being with Fin and caring for him, it shows that the hours he spent with Fin were truly the seeds that grew into what Tom went on to learn about friendship: that it's more important than winning.



Tom certainly knew that Gran would name the chickens after either saints or beloved Bible figures; his decision to get her the chickens anyway shows that he now recognizes the role that religion plays in Gran's life. She's able to have some control over her life by deploying her saints at particular times, even if it's simply to punish a noisy rooster.



CHAPTER NINETEEN

Tom's friends hassle him about having a birthday party, but Tom knows a party at Gran's house would be boring and he also wants to see Daniel. Brendan says that Daniel is doing better one morning as they run one of Brendan's hilly routes, specifically designed to get them ready for Everest. Tom is thrilled with how strong and muscular his body looks now. He attributes it to Gran's dinners, which he now eats for the most part. Gran is thrilled about that.

One morning, Brendan and Tom run to the **river** and jump in. Tom thinks about bringing Chrissy to the river and tells Brendan that he won't have to go to the overly chlorinated Coghill pool anymore. Tom remembers how seeing Chrissy there last year sent him into a tailspin. Brendan notes that Daniel is taking the mentoring thing very seriously and getting him into the crisis center was the only thing that saved him. They discuss whether Fin will actually go see Daniel, and Brendan suggests that Fin and Aunty Kath are still too preoccupied with simply figuring out how to care for Fin to think that far ahead.

As Brendan and Tom run back, they discuss their Everest climb. Brendan says that Tom will surely miss Chrissy, but Tom says that he knows she'll be waiting for him when he gets back.

The day before Tom's birthday, he drives to see Daniel with Mum and Brendan. It's a week after the anniversary of the accident, and Tom thinks he could do the security checkpoints at the jail in his sleep. Daniel looks better, though Tom thinks he still looks like a prisoner. Tom muses that no matter how horrible Daniel was, he's still his brother and he figures into every one of Tom's memories. Tom wonders what would've happened had Daniel died or been paralyzed, and he wonders if it's bad that he's happy Daniel lived, even though what Daniel did was horrible.

Brendan and Tom visit with Daniel while Mum talks to the social worker. Daniel wants to know about Chrissy and jokes that they've brought in strippers and alcohol for the prisoners. Taking a more serious tone, he says that Owen made a surprise visit the other day. Tom notes that he didn't see Owen at the game with St. John's. Daniel says that Owen was there and told him all about how much Bennie's improved thanks to Dad and Tom. Daniel tells Tom he's proud of him.

Tom's happiness with his body must be considered in relation to Daniel—Tom was never able to think about his own body with Daniel so caught up in his own, which suggests that this change in Tom has happened in part because Daniel is no longer around to influence Tom's sense of self.



The discussion of Daniel's mentoring program and specifically, Brendan's assessment that mentoring saved Daniel reinforces the novel's earlier assertion that giving back in tangible ways like this is the only way to find a sense of relief and redemption. When Tom notes that he can go to the river instead of the pool, it shows that he's moving forward towards a brighter and less painful future.



Tom's trust in Chrissy indicates that he's more trusting of people in general, now that he truly believes friendship is important.



Here, Tom finally chooses to accept that love and family don't always make logical sense. Daniel won't have to ask for forgiveness from Tom the same way he will from Fin, as Tom will love Daniel unconditionally. However, it's worth keeping in mind that Tom can only really make this leap because he now sees himself as his own person, not someone who's chained to the mistakes Daniel made.



Daniel's admission that he's proud of Tom acts as his blessing for Tom to continue his journey of finding out who he is separate from Daniel and "the legend of the Brennan Brothers." In turn, this suggests that both boys are truly growing up and coming of age, which is also evidenced by the fact that Daniel is clearly doing much better.



Mum arrives and says that the social worker told her that Daniel is doing a great job with Theo. Daniel says that it's going well; he and Jerry are finally starting to get through to him. Tom notices that when Daniel smiles, his eyes look just like Mum's. He marvels that Daniel's eyes look happy now, but they held such rage and hatred the night of the accident.

Gran makes roast pork for Tom's birthday dinner and cooks it perfectly. Chrissy makes a cake and Jonny brings party hats. Tom thinks that Gran's saints seem to be smiling at his family. Most of the gifts are items or money for the Nepal trip; Chrissy's gift is a travel journal in which she wrote notes for every day Tom will be gone. After the party winds down, Gran calls Tom into her room for his present. He knows it'll be birthday socks as usual. She pulls out a card with a saint on it, notices Tom's horrified look, and then says that card is actually for Father Vincent.

Tom asks her which saint was on the card. Gran says it was Saint Clare; she wants Father Vincent to find her a larger painting when he's in Sydney so that she can replace Saint Bernadine in her bedroom. Gran mutters that Saint Bernadine was never any help to her, and Tom remembers that Bernadine was supposed to protect gamblers like Pa. He asks Gran about Saint Clare, and Gran says that Clare saved her home and town. She pulls out an envelope and passes it to Tom, and Tom feels like he understands who Gran is for the first time: she turned to religion to protect herself from a marriage that didn't serve her. The envelope contains plane tickets to Nepal.

As Chrissy studies for her finals, Tom does his best to stay out of her way. He hangs out with Rory, Brad, and Jimmy at the **pool**. He feels bad about not telling them about the swimming spot at the river, but Brendan swore him to secrecy. Tom also keeps it a secret because he's decided to take Chrissy there after her final exam. On Friday afternoon, he discovers that she's been planning the same thing. He discovers a note on his bed from her, asking him to meet her at the river at seven the next morning.

The next morning, when Brendan sees Tom dressed to go for a run without him, he's thrilled. Brendan talks about how hot it's going to be, and Gran asks Tom to check the chickens later, as one is laying. She gives Tom detailed instructions and by the time she's done and in the car with Kylie and Brendan, it's 6:50. Tom races down the track to the river. He can't see Chrissy, but he's sure she's there and yells for her. Finally, he hears her giggling. She swims out from behind some water lilies, naked. Tom rips his shoes off and Chrissy says he can only get in the **water** naked. He strips off his boxers and jumps in.

Again, Daniel's obvious joy at the fact that he's making a difference in Theo's life suggests that while Daniel may not be able to fix what happened in Mumbilli, he can find relief by helping others in a similar situation.



In particular, Tom's observation that the saints seem to be smiling encapsulates Tom's journey: while he once thought them dark and creepy, they're now his friends too in a way. This is also indicative of his closer relationship with Gran, who shows that she's taking Tom's individuality into account by not giving him a card with a saint on it.



Gran's decision to replace Saint Bernadine is a decisive example of the way that Gran is able to find a sense of control and power through religion—when one of her saints doesn't do what they're supposed to do, she can literally remove them from her life. Tom's new understanding of this fact shows that he now truly sees Gran as a whole individual who cares for her family more than anything; she's even willing to use her beloved saints to help them.



Hanging out at the pool with the guys shows that Tom now truly embraces all that Coghill has to offer: friends, a girlfriend (assuming she finishes her finals), and a window into his future. It's also notable that he's not spending this time alone in his room, wallowing. This shows clearly that now, Tom is willing to lean on friends to help him through.



In this moment, Tom begins to pull away from his blood family in favor of someone who is, in some ways, his chosen family. The fact that this happens near water further reinforces that for Tom, Chrissy and their romance is his future and will allow him to truly recover from the trauma of the accident.



Chrissy swims to Tom and he takes her in his arms. They tell each other that they love each other, and Tom says that Chrissy helped him find his old self after the accident. They swim to the shore, climb out, and have sex on the riverbank. Tom feels as though he's finally himself again.

Having sex completes Tom's coming of age journey, while the fact that this happens next to the river reinforces that Tom is truly moving towards a brighter future as he comes of age.





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