

All the Bright Places



INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF JENNIFER NIVEN

Jennifer Niven was raised in Indiana. She attended college in New Jersey and then earned a graduate degree in Los Angeles. Niven's mother, writer Penelope Niven, inspired and encouraged Niven to write throughout her childhood and into her adult years. Niven published her first book, a nonfiction work called *The Ice Master: The Doomed 1913 Voyage of the Karluk*, in 2000. Following this, Niven wrote several adult novels and nonfiction books. In 2013, immediately after finishing an adult novel, Niven had an idea for a young adult novel and wrote the ensuing book, *All the Bright Places*, over the course of six weeks. The book was inspired by a boyfriend Niven had in her 20s who, like Finch, suffered from undiagnosed bipolar disorder and ultimately committed suicide. After publishing *All the Bright Places*, Niven created the online *Germ Magazine* based off of the fictional magazine that Violet starts in the novel. Through *Germ* and *All the Bright Places*, Niven hopes to give young people a safe, supportive space—and to chip away at the stigma surrounding mental illness. *All the Bright Places* has won a number of awards and was adapted into a Netflix movie starring Elle Fanning in 2020. Since the publication of *All the Bright Places*, Niven has turned her attention away from writing adult novels and has written more young adult fiction, including *Holding Up the Universe* and *Breathless*. She splits her time between California and Georgia and lives with her husband, children, and cats.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

All the Bright Places explores several difficult topics, most notably mental illness and suicide. In interviews and in her author's note, Jennifer Niven confirms that Finch suffers from undiagnosed bipolar disorder, which is characterized by cycles of depression and mania (abnormally heightened mood). Although people have known about bipolar disorder for centuries—Ancient Greek doctor Hippocrates was the first physician to describe the illness—it has historically been heavily stigmatized and mistreated. The illness was often misunderstood as insanity, and prior to the mid-19th century, people suffering with bipolar disorder were often institutionalized rather than treated with proper medication or therapy. Today, mental health professionals have a much clearer understanding of bipolar disorder, but it can still be difficult to diagnose—especially in teenagers and children. This is because some of the hallmark symptoms like moodiness, recklessness, and emotional swings are also associated with normal teen behavior, so recognizing what's normal and what's a sign of

something more serious can be difficult for families and healthcare providers alike. But the consequences of not getting help with mental health issues, the novel shows, can be devastating—and in some cases, deadly. Suicide consistently ranks in the top 10 causes of death in the United States for all age groups, and according to the Center for Disease Control, it's the second most common cause of death for people ages 10-34.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Though *All the Bright Places* is Jennifer Niven's best-known young adult novel, she's also written two others: *Breathless* and *Holding Up the Universe*. It's possible to draw a number of similarities between *All the Bright Places* and the work of John Green, particularly his 2016 novel [Turtles All the Way Down](#). Like most of the teenaged characters in Green's novels, Niven's characters are witty and well-read—and [Turtles All the Way Down](#), like *All the Bright Places*, shows what it's like to live with mental illness (in that case, OCD). *All the Bright Places* is one of a number of recent books to explore bipolar disorder. Many of these books are memoirs, such as [Lab Girl](#) by Hope Jahren and *Haldol and Hyacinths: A Bipolar Life* by Melody Moezzi. Perhaps the best-known fictional representation of bipolar disorder is Matthew Quick's *The Silver Linings Playbook*, which was adapted into an award-winning 2012 film. Within the novel itself, Violet and Finch read a number of classic books, from Virginia Woolf's novel *The Waves* to Dr. Seuss's picture book *Oh, the Places You'll Go!*. Finch is also extremely interested in writers who died by suicide, most notably Virginia Woolf (who, in addition to *The Waves*, authored a number of novels such as [Orlando](#) and *Mrs. Dalloway*) and the Italian poet Cesare Pavese.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** All the Bright Places
- **When Written:** 2013
- **Where Written:** California and Georgia
- **When Published:** 2015
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary
- **Genre:** Young Adult Fiction; Issue Novel
- **Setting:** The fictional town of Bartlett, Indiana
- **Climax:** Violet discovers that Finch drowned in the Blue Hole, presumably by suicide.
- **Antagonist:** Gabe "Roamer" Romero; bullying; stigma about mental illness
- **Point of View:** First Person

EXTRA CREDIT

Reaching Out. Though Finch only seeks help for his suicidal thoughts once from an in-person support group, there are a variety of resources to people who are experiencing suicidal thoughts or who have friends who are struggling. The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline offers both phone (1-800-273-8255) and online chat services with crisis counselors, while a variety of other national and local organizations offer text, phone, or in-person crisis services.

Family Project. In addition to being an author, Niven won an Emmy Award for her 1996 short film *Velva Jean Learns to Drive*. (Later, in 2009, Niven expanded the script into a novel). Niven's *Velva Jean* story, however, is actually based on a four-page short story that Niven's mother wrote. She bought the rights to her mom's story for \$1 so she could make her film.



PLOT SUMMARY

As Finch stands at the top of his high school's belltower, prepared to jump, he wonders if today is a good day to die. Finch has spent the past few months "asleep" (his term for a depressive episode), but now that he's "awake," he's fixated on death. However, he realizes he's not alone: a popular girl, Violet Markey, is on the other side of the tower. He talks Violet off the ledge, and she convinces him not to jump either. Knowing that there are onlookers below, Finch makes it seem like Violet came up to save him, not to contemplate killing herself. They both make it down safely.

Later that day in U.S. Geography, their teacher, Mr. Black, announces a project to "wander Indiana." Finch tells the class that he's going to work with Violet. Violet feels awful for almost killing herself. She knows that her death would devastate her parents—especially since Violet's older sister Eleanor died in a car crash last spring. Since her death, Violet hasn't been able to write—something she once enjoyed—and now she wears **Eleanor's glasses** to try to connect with her sister. She hasn't been in a car since Eleanor died and insists on biking everywhere.

Wanting to appear normal to Violet, Finch creates a Facebook account so he and Violet can communicate with each other. They come up with their "Rules for Wandering" and begin to exchange Virginia Woolf quotes. Though Finch is familiar with Virginia Woolf's suicide note, he hasn't read the rest of her work. After school one day, Finch and Violet bike to Hoosier Hill (the highest point in Indiana) for their school project. Finch insists that it's beautiful, but Violet is underwhelmed. Next, Violet insists they go visit the Bookmobile Park. Though she gives Finch directions to get there by bike, Finch insists they take Finch's mom's car, a Saturn that he calls Little Bastard. Violet relents. As they continue to visit sites across Indiana,

their chemistry grows—and Finch encourages Violet to start writing again so she can document their project.

As their relationship progresses, Violet starts to heal and improve. She realizes that she doesn't enjoy spending time with her former friend Amanda and Amanda's boyfriend Roamer. Instead, Violet starts sitting with Finch's friend Brenda and some other girls. She comes up with the idea for a new web magazine to replace the website that she and Eleanor ran, and she decides to stop wearing Eleanor's glasses.

Finch's mental health, meanwhile, starts to decline; he constantly thinks about suicide and researches various methods of killing himself. He attends mandated Sunday night dinners with his sisters, Kate and Decca, at Finch's dad's house, but he doesn't enjoy them—his dad is physically and emotionally abusive, and Finch suspects that his dad fathered a son with his new wife, Rosemarie, while he was cheating on Finch's mom. Finch is, at times, unable to read or write, and he experiences headaches during which he can "feel sound" and "hear space." He knows he could talk to his mom—but his mom would only tell him to take painkillers and remind him that he's sensitive. His counseling sessions with Mr. Embry don't help much, since Finch does everything in his power to keep Mr. Embry from discovering how poorly he feels. Finch goes on runs to try to clear his head, but it only works sometimes. He also repaints his room blue when it starts to feel claustrophobic.

On the first warm day of the year, Finch takes Violet to the **Blue Hole**, a lake that's supposedly bottomless. Finch dives down as deep as he can, enjoying the weight of the water—but he doesn't want to upset Violet, so he returns to the surface. She's enraged that he was underwater for so long; she thought he'd died. Finch encourages her to scream and let go of her anger. When they get back to Finch's house later, they have sex for the first time. Then, they go to the Purina tower to talk, but they end up falling asleep and spending the night there. Violet's mom and Violet's dad are enraged in the morning, and they forbid Violet from seeing Finch anymore.

Both Violet and Finch are distraught. Violet is angry enough to want to run away with Finch, while Finch's mental health continues to decline. He starts to spend all of his time at home in his closet, though he continues to attend school sporadically. When Finch goes back to school after spring break, he continues to have issues reading. Then, in a meeting with Mr. Embry, Mr. Embry asks Finch what he knows about bipolar disorder. Finch stops listening and tries to just look pleasant—in his mind, "crazy people" have bipolar disorder, and it's a way to explain people away. Later that day, when Roamer insults Finch in the hallway, Finch chokes Roamer and is expelled from school. He calls Violet and invites her to skip class and see another Indiana wonder with him, but Violet refuses. She's concerned—Finch sounds unwell.

Finch spends most of the following day in his closet. At one

point, he checks the landline's voicemail and deletes a message from Mr. Embry to Finch's mom. After dinner, he takes a large dose of sleeping pills but runs to the hospital and asks them to pump his stomach. When he comes to after the treatment, he leaves the hospital without telling them who he is. Not long after, Finch decides to attend a Life Is Life meeting, a support group for teenagers who have thought about or attempted suicide. He's shocked to find that Amanda also attends the group; she struggles with an eating disorder and has attempted suicide twice. The meeting is depressing; the other kids seem altered by the medications they take, and it seems like their identities are tied to their mental health diagnoses.

Violet borrows her parents' car to visit Finch because she's concerned about him, and she joins him in his closet. Finch tells her about a **cardinal** that died when it hit the living room windows too many times. He was just a kid at the time, and he experienced his first "black mood" after the cardinal died. Violet is disturbed—and she's even more disturbed when Amanda pulls her aside the next day and says that she saw Finch at a suicide support group. Violet visits Finch a few days later to celebrate his birthday. At first, it doesn't seem like there's anything amiss with him—aside from the fact that he's still living in his closet. But when Violet mentions what Amanda said and asks Finch to get help, Finch coldly tells Violet to leave. Back at her house, Violet asks her parents to help her help Finch. She's concerned for his safety. But Finch's mom, Kate, and Decca all refuse help. And when Finch disappears, they're unconcerned since he always comes back.

A few days after he leaves, Finch starts sending Violet cryptic texts and never responds when she asks him questions. Finch's friends and family aren't concerned at all. Meanwhile, Violet and her parents celebrate the anniversary of Eleanor's death, and Violet continues to work on her new web magazine. Then, one Sunday late in April, Kate shows up at Violet's house with an odd email from Finch—and the concerning news that Finch has stopped checking in. Violet discovers that she and Finch's friends have all received cryptic emails as well, so she goes to Finch's house and inspects his closet again. She finds two lines of text and thinks she knows what they mean. She drives to the Blue Hole, where she finds Finch's clothes neatly folded. After she calls 911, emergency responders retrieve Finch's dead body from the water.

Violet's parents insist on going with her to Finch's funeral. The preacher doesn't mention suicide once—this is in part because the authorities couldn't rule Finch's death a suicide, since he didn't leave a note. As the days and weeks pass, Violet grows increasingly angry. Kids who once bullied Finch now seem to idolize and miss him. Violet has a counseling session with Mr. Embry in which Mr. Embry encourages her to realize that Finch's death wasn't her fault—instead, she needs to think of herself as a survivor and learn to live despite this loss. Violet also starts to reconnect with Amanda.

When Violet found Finch's body, she also found and took the map that she and Finch used for their geography project. She discovers that he marked five more sites for her to visit, so she visits them in order. At each place, Finch left her something important to see or do. She finds a pair of his shoes on "shoe trees" near the Kentucky border, and she paints a coat of paint the color of Finch's eyes on the world's biggest ball of paint (Finch painted it violet in honor of her). She visits an abandoned drive-in theater, where Finch wrote "I was here" on the screen. The fourth site is a monastery and grotto, and the final site is a small roadside chapel. The chapel was built to honor the victims of car crashes, a nod to Eleanor. Violet sits in a pew and cries as she reads lyrics and music that Finch left for her in the Bible—the song talks about how happy and whole she made him feel.

Several months later, Violet swims at the Blue Hole and remembers Finch. She misses him and still sees him everywhere, but she also thinks of all the places she has yet to see.



CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Theodore Finch – Seventeen-year-old Finch is one of the novel's protagonists and is Violet's love interest. He lives with his mom and his sisters Kate and Decca. Finch is tall and handsome—but despite his good looks, other kids at school refer to him as "Theodore Freak." This is because Finch has known anger issues, behaves erratically, and generally does what he wants—to most people, it's normal that Finch disappears for days or weeks at a time. But as the novel progresses, it becomes clear that Finch suffers from an undiagnosed mental illness: he cycles through periods of being "Awake" and "Asleep," and when he's Asleep he stays in his closet. And though Finch seems to suspect that he has bipolar disorder—and even seems to know that his dad, who's violent and abusive, has the same illness—he refuses to be diagnosed or to get help. A diagnosis, he believes, will reduce him down to that diagnosis. And though Finch doesn't know who he is or who he wants to be—he cycles through various identities throughout the novel, such as "Badass Finch" and "80s Finch"—he is nevertheless insistent that he remain himself, whoever that actually is. Finch and his classmate Violet meet when they both find themselves at the top of their school's belltower, intending to commit suicide by jumping off. Finch talks Violet off the ledge and then allows her to help him off as well. Though Finch insists he was on the ledge to remind himself that he has control of his life and not to kill himself, he is nevertheless taken with the idea of dying by suicide. He regularly researches different methods of killing oneself, ranks them, and has different authors' suicide notes memorized. As Finch enters into a relationship with Violet, he finds that he

finally has something that makes him want to stay alive and Awake. But though Finch tries to fight the Asleep and stay present with Violet, he nevertheless refuses to get help when Violet asks him to. Finch disappears for weeks before sending his friends, family, and Violet cryptic emails. Violet discovers that he committed suicide by drowning himself in the **Blue Hole**, a favorite swimming spot.

Violet Markey – Seventeen-year-old Violet is one of the novel's protagonists and is Finch's love interest. Nine months before the novel begins, Violet and her older sister Eleanor were in a car crash that killed Eleanor, a tragedy that traumatized Violet as well as Violet's mom and Violet's dad. Violet and Eleanor were extremely close, and in the novel's present, Violet is overwhelmed with grief for her sister. She wears Eleanor's **glasses**, changes her hair to look more like Eleanor's, and can't bring herself to work on the website that she and Eleanor started, *EleanorandViolet.com*. Indeed, Violet finds she can't write anything, whereas she used to want to attend NYU's creative writing program and be a writer. Violet and Finch meet on top of their school's belltower, which they both intend to jump off of. But Finch talks Violet off the ledge, and the two soon fall in love. With Finch's prodding, Violet starts to take interest in life again: he convinces her to ride in a car (which she refused to do after Eleanor's death) and inspires her to write again. As Violet recovers, she comes up with the idea for *Germ*, an online magazine. Just when she feels stable again, though, Finch's mental health deteriorates quickly. Violet finds Finch's odd behavior somewhat disturbing, as she realizes that he's living in his walk-in closet and learns from Amanda that Finch has attempted to commit suicide before. This prompts Violet to suggest that Finch seek help, but he refuses. She continues to try to help Finch, even after he stops contacting her and runs away from home. Because of the fact that Violet and Finch spent parts of their relationship exchanging Virginia Woolf quotes, Violet is the only one who's able to put together what's going on with Finch when she and Finch's family and friends all receive cryptic emails from him. She realizes that Finch drowned himself in the Blue Hole, a beautiful swimming spot, much like Woolf committed suicide by drowning herself in a river. Though Violet again has to grieve, she ultimately realizes that she has to take Finch's advice and live—and that if she takes full advantage of her life and remembers both Finch and Eleanor, her deceased loved ones will never truly be gone.

Eleanor Markey – Eleanor was Violet's older sister who, at age 18, died in a car accident nine months before the novel begins. Violet and Eleanor were extremely close and ran the web magazine *EleanorandViolet.com*. After Eleanor's death, though, Violet finds that she can't write anything out of her grief for her sister. To help deal with this grief, Violet wears Eleanor's **glasses**—thick, round frames that Violet admits look horrible on her, though they looked edgy on Eleanor. As Violet and Finch grow close, Violet is willing to open up more about Eleanor. She

shares that Eleanor was, in some ways, a lot like Finch: she always took things a step further than Violet would have, and she encouraged Violet to relax and live. Indeed, on the night that Eleanor died, she'd convinced Violet to come to a party with her. On the way home from that party, Violet suggested that Eleanor take the icy A Street Bridge and survived the ensuing crash off of the bridge, so she feels responsible for Eleanor's death. By the end of the novel, though, Violet realizes that she can't spend her life wallowing in her grief and mourning Eleanor's death—in order to properly honor Eleanor and Finch, Violet needs to live her life.

Violet's Mom – Violet describes both her mom and Violet's dad as perfect. Her mom is a writer and always encouraged Violet's passion for writing—so it's difficult for her mom to cope with the fact that since Violet's sister Eleanor's death, Violet hasn't been willing or able to write. Violet's mom mostly keeps her own grief for Eleanor hidden, though she does cry with Violet when Violet brings Eleanor up. But since Eleanor's death, both of Violet's parents have focused their attention on her to an uncomfortable degree. Though Violet's mom definitely wants Violet to get better and be able to live her life again, she's unwilling to push Violet too hard to do things like write or ride in a car again. And Violet's mom wants to be supportive of her daughter, but Violet is rarely willing to talk openly to her parents about her difficult emotions. Violet's mom appreciates Finch for convincing Violet to get back in the car and start living again—until Finch and Violet accidentally spend the night together without checking in, leading Violet's parents to worry that something happened to her. Though they forbid Violet from seeing Finch after this and are angry when Violet admits that she's been seeing him behind their back, both of Violet's parents try to find help for Finch when Violet tells them that she's worried about his mental health. They're also both incensed about the circumstances surrounding Finch's suicide—they blame Finch's mom for neglecting her son and not seeing the red flags.

Violet's Dad – Violet's dad is a teacher; he's often in the living room wearing headphones and grading papers alongside his wife, Violet's mom. Violet describes both of her parents as perfect, in part because it seems like her parents have either moved on from her sister Eleanor's death or are hiding their grief. Violet's dad has a habit of taking over school projects, and he also loves telling people the history of things, like specific dishes or the NYU campus. He desperately wants Violet to be able to move past Eleanor's death and live her life more fully, so like his wife, he's initially charmed by Finch's ability to revive Violet's interest in things she used to love. However, he's extremely angry at Finch when Finch and Violet accidentally spend the night together and don't check in with Violet's parents. He forbids Violet from seeing Finch after this—but when Violet does admit that she's been seeing Finch and that he's in trouble and needs help, Violet's dad is more than willing

to help track down a friend who's a psychiatrist. Both of Violet's parents blame Finch's mom for Finch's death; they believe that she neglected him and is at fault for not being concerned when he disappeared in the first place. Violet knows that this is because if she were the one to go missing, her parents would look for her right away.

Finch's Mom – Finch, Kate, and Decca's mom has been sad and disaffected since her divorce from Finch's dad a year before the novel begins. She drinks wine whenever she's at home and, in Finch's opinion, seldom makes any effort to actively parent them. She also has had to work two jobs since the divorce; she works as a real estate agent and part-time at the local bookstore. Because of her two jobs, she's not home much. Finch notes that in general, he and his family don't show emotion or have honest conversations with one another. So, although Finch's mom asks her children every night at dinner what they learned that day, she seldom seems genuinely interested in their answers. She's also not involved in her children's lives at all—she never checks the voicemails on the family's landline, for instance, so she never learns that Mr. Embry has concerns about Finch's well-being, or that Finch skips school for weeks at a time and is ultimately expelled. Finch suggests that part of this has to do with the fact that Finch's mom doesn't believe in illnesses that aren't physical, so she doesn't take Finch's headaches (a symptom of his mental illness) seriously when they occur. Instead, she reminds Finch that he's "sensitive." Finch's mom is so distraught when it seems likely that Finch committed suicide that she can't bear to go find Finch herself—she asks Violet to go. To Violet's parents in particular, this highlights her ineffectiveness as a parent and an avoidance of the hard, necessary work of parenting her children. Violet's parents also seem to blame Finch's mom for Finch's death.

Finch's Dad – Finch, Kate, and Decca's dad is a tall, burly, former hockey player from Canada. In the present, he's married to a woman named Rosemarie and lives with her and his stepson, Josh Raymond; he and Finch's mom divorced a year before the novel begins. Finch explains that his dad suffers from "black moods" and would try to kill anyone who tried to diagnose him with a mental illness. Finch is fairly certain that this is because his dad, like Finch himself, suffers from undiagnosed bipolar disorder. In Finch's dad, this manifests most often as fits of rage. As Finch thinks and talks about his childhood, he paints a picture of a man who was frightening to live with—Finch's dad put both Finch's mom and Finch in the hospital with injuries. Finch also suggests that his dad is disappointed in him because Finch isn't athletic and isn't "normal." Because of this, and because Finch's dad seldom seems genuinely interested in his three children with Finch's mom, Finch concludes that his dad prefers his "new family" to his old one. Throughout the novel, Finch wonders whether his dad is actually Josh Raymond's father—it would make sense

that Finch's dad was cheating on his mom around the time of Josh Raymond's birth, given what Finch knows of how his dad treated his mom. Finch eventually concludes that his dad probably is Josh Raymond's father, but he vows to not take this out on Josh Raymond, in part because he knows how difficult it is to live with his dad.

Kate Finch – Kate is Finch and Decca's older sister; she's about 19 and has been out of school for almost a year when the novel begins. She didn't go away to college because, since their parents divorced, Kate felt like she needed to stay home to take care of her and Finch's mom. However, Kate isn't around much to actually care for her mom. Though she makes a number of casseroles for her mom to heat up, Kate most often appears when she's on her way out the door to do things on her own. Like Finch, she detests Finch's dad and their obligatory weekly visits to his house. Kate and Finch are close in that Kate helps Finch hide his periods of being "Asleep" (depressed) from their parents—since Finch's mom never checks the landline's voicemail, Kate does in her stead and doesn't pass on the concerned messages from Finch's school counselor. During Finch's last episode of being "Asleep," she also told their dad that Finch was at a study-away program. But Kate is also notably absent from Finch's life in other ways. Like most others, Kate isn't concerned when Finch goes missing—his absences are normal to her.

Decca Finch – Decca is Finch and Kate's eight-year-old sister. She's bluntly honest and emotional throughout much of the novel. Finch tries to do his best to check on Decca and make sure she's doing okay, since Finch's mom seldom does anything that Finch would call "parenting." Though Finch doesn't pry, Decca seems to be struggling with difficult emotions about her mom and dad's divorce a year ago—she's vocal about hating having to go visit Finch's dad, and both Kate and Finch suspect that Decca has very mixed feelings about Josh Raymond given how close she is to him in age. (The siblings suspect that Josh Raymond is actually their dad's son and proof that their dad had been cheating on their mom for some time before the divorce). Like everyone else, Decca is unconcerned when Finch goes missing—as she tells Violet, she believes Finch will always come back.

Mr. Embry – Mr. Embry is Finch's school counselor. They meet every Friday and, after Mr. Embry catches Finch on the belltower at school, he insists they meet on Mondays as well. Mr. Embry is a serious and humorless man in Finch's opinion, since he never laughs when Finch jokes about killing himself. Indeed, Mr. Embry regularly reminds Finch that he has a legal obligation to keep Finch alive—and he'd face a lawsuit if Finch were to kill or hurt himself on school property. But Finch also knows that Mr. Embry cares deeply for him, since he keeps trying to connect with Finch. At times, Finch seems to return the affection, as when he decides he has to "give Mr. Embry something" and so tells him about his budding relationship with

Violet. Mr. Embry's response, though—a warning for Finch to be careful with his heart—doesn't sit well with Finch, and it signifies a break in Finch and Mr. Embry's relationship. This rift only intensifies when, a few sessions later, Mr. Embry asks Finch about bipolar disorder. Though it seems as though Mr. Embry tries to get Finch help by calling Finch's mom even after Finch is expelled, Finch rejects the help and deletes the voicemails. Following Finch's death by suicide, Violet asks to have her mandatory counseling session with Mr. Embry. During this session, Mr. Embry notes that while both he and Violet blame themselves for Finch's suicide, assigning blame isn't a fruitful or healthy endeavor. It's essential, he suggests, that they both learn to live after Finch's death.

Josh Raymond – Josh Raymond is Rosemarie's eight-year-old son and Finch's dad's stepson (though Finch and Kate suspect that their dad may actually be Josh Raymond's biological father). He's a small boy with glasses and a squeaky voice. Finch's relationship with Josh Raymond is complicated. Though Finch tells himself it's silly to be jealous or resentful of an eight-year-old, he also knows that if his dad *is* Josh Raymond's father, Josh Raymond is then proof that Finch's dad was cheating on Finch's mom long before they got divorced. Finch also sees that Josh Raymond possesses many qualities that he himself does not: Josh Raymond is small, quiet, and neat, and he never seriously pushes back when Finch's dad reprimands him. This makes Finch feel as though his dad truly prefers his new family (Rosemarie and Josh Raymond) to his dysfunctional old one (Finch, Kate, Decca, and Finch's mom). Finally, the way Rosemarie and Finch's dad treat Josh Raymond seems to be proof that Finch's dad prefers his new family over his old one, as evidenced by Josh Raymond's numerous battery-operated toys (luxuries that Finch and his sisters never had growing up). Despite Finch's resentment, though, he finds Josh Raymond to be sweet and unassuming. The last time that Finch sees Josh Raymond, he seems to conclude that Finch's dad is indeed Josh Raymond's biological father: Josh Raymond, Finch realizes, looks shockingly like Finch did at eight years old.

Amanda Monk – Amanda Monk is one of the popular girls at Violet and Finch's school. Before Violet's sister Eleanor died, she was one of Violet's best friends—but after this tragedy, Violet decided that she didn't have much in common with Amanda. Amanda, who's dating Roamer, seems like an antagonist for much of the novel. She and Roamer bully Finch incessantly, and Amanda also essentially tells Violet that she needs to get over Eleanor's death. But Finch starts to realize that there's more to Amanda when he runs into her at Life Is Life, a support group for teenagers who have attempted or are contemplating suicide. Amanda, Finch learns, struggles with an eating disorder and has tried twice to kill herself. She explains that she engages in bullying and gossip to remind herself that she's in control. Amanda eventually shows that although she bullies others to make herself feel better, she doesn't actually

want to hurt anyone—concerned for Finch's safety, Amanda lets Violet know that she saw Finch at the Life Is Life meeting. After Finch's death, Amanda breaks up with Roamer and seems ready to resume her friendship with Violet in a healthier way.

Charlie Donahue – Charlie is one of Finch's best friends. He's an athletic Black boy, but because he doesn't want to be “a Black stereotype,” Charlie refuses to join any sports teams at school and instead joins the chess club. He also believes that sex is the answer to nearly every problem; when Finch returns from his five-week “Asleep” (depressive episode), Charlie insists that Finch needs to have sex so he can get back to living. Charlie, like Finch's other friend Brenda, never questions Finch when he disappears or skips school—to him, Finch's disappearances and erratic behavior are normal. After Finch commits suicide, Charlie is incensed and offended by how others in their class talk about and respond to Finch's death. He's especially upset when kids who bullied Finch cry at Finch's funeral.

Gabe “Roamer” Romero – Gabe, who goes by “Roamer,” is one of the novel's antagonists. He's a senior on the baseball team at Finch and Violet's school who's extremely popular and is dating Amanda Monk for most of the novel. Finch reveals to readers that in eighth grade, Finch and Roamer used to be best friends—Finch even confided in Roamer about his strange headaches and invited Roamer to try jumping in front of a car to stop them. Roamer told his parents and got the school involved, and at that point he began calling Finch “Theodore Freak.” So, in the present, Roamer is one of Finch's biggest bullies. He continuously pushes Finch in the hallways, tells Finch that he should kill himself, and makes other snide comments. Finch tries to kill Roamer twice in the novel, first by holding his head under water at the river and then by choking Roamer. He places most of the blame for how other kids treat him on Roamer, since he constantly antagonizes Finch. Charlie Donahue is incensed when Roamer cries at Finch's funeral—in Charlie's mind, Roamer bears some responsibility for Finch's death.

Ryan Cross – Ryan Cross is the most popular senior boy at Violet and Finch's school and. Up until a month or so before the novel begins, he was Violet's boyfriend. Violet describes Ryan as stable, reliable, and all-around perfect, and Finch agrees with this. However, Violet also shares that Ryan isn't actually perfect: he's a “kleptomaniac,” compulsively stealing all sorts of items (even things he doesn't really want). Violet breaks up with him in part because he's unable to effectively support her in her grief, and Ryan spends much of the novel trying to get back together with her. Though they date briefly while Finch is missing, Violet breaks things off for good after Finch dies. However, the two remain friends, and Ryan joins Violet and a group of classmates on the top of the Purina Tower to honor Finch's memory.

Brenda – Brenda is one of Finch's best friends. She's

overweight and wears her hair in bright colors. She's overprotective of Finch because she sees him as a "gentleman," and she's concerned throughout the novel that no boy is going to love her for who she actually is. At various points, Brenda kisses Roamer, whom she acknowledges is a jerk but whom she's loved for years anyway. Brenda is Finch's go-to for fashion advice, and she skips school to go to Goodwill with him when he invents his "badass Finch" persona. After Finch runs away, Brenda also befriends Violet and agrees to work on *Germ* with her. But disturbingly for Violet, Brenda, like almost everyone else, isn't concerned that Finch has disappeared. By the end of the novel, after Finch commits suicide, Brenda and Violet are close friends.

Rosemarie – Rosemarie is Finch's dad's mousy, deferential second wife and Josh Raymond's mom. Finch knows that his dad cheated on Finch's mom with Rosemarie before his parents divorced, but it's somewhat murky when Rosemarie and Finch's dad's relationship actually began. Eventually, Finch concludes that Rosemarie's son, Josh Raymond, is actually Finch's dad's biological son, meaning that their relationship began at least nine years before the novel begins. Possibly because Finch cares so little about her, he makes few observations about Rosemarie's personality over the course of the novel. She mostly embodies what Finch realizes is his dad's vision of the "perfect wife."

Jordan Gripenwaldt – Jordan Gripenwaldt is the editor of the newspaper at Violet and Finch's school. Though Violet doesn't know her well, she thinks that Jordan is the kind of girl she *should* be friends with—Jordan is smart, sensible, and very interested in making sure the school paper adheres to proper journalism standards (in comparison to the *Bartlett Dirt*, the school's online gossip publication). Eventually, Violet invites Jordan to contribute to her magazine, *Germ*, and Jordan accepts.

The Three Brianas – "The three Brianas" sit with Brenda, and eventually Violet, during lunch at school. They're nice, smart, and driven girls, but Violet never gets to know them well enough to refer to them as anything but "the three Brianas." All three of them do eventually agree to contribute to Violet's magazine, *Germ*.

Mrs. Kresney – Mrs. Kresney is Violet's school counselor. Violet has been seeing her since her sister Eleanor died, nine months before the novel begins. Mrs. Kresney is a caring woman who smiles often. However, Violet is unwilling to trust Mrs. Kresney when she's still feeling overwhelmed by her grief, so she often lies about how well she's doing.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Principal Wertz – The principal of Bartlett High School, Principal Wertz is only a periphery figure in Finch and Violet's lives. When he does appear and interacts with Finch, he seems

to think of Finch as a troublemaker and a problem to be solved.

Suze – Suze is one of Violet and Amanda's friends; like them, she's extremely popular. She briefly dates Ryan Cross during the novel, and several years before the novel begins, she had sex with Finch.

Mr. Black – Mr. Black is Finch and Violet's U.S. Geography teacher. He's a large man who wheezes while he talks; Violet and Finch occasionally make fun of him for this.

Demetrius – Demetrius is the current facilitator for the Life Is Life support group, which provides group therapy for teens who are thinking about suicide or who have survived suicide attempts. He's a Black man with green eyes.

John Ivers – John Ivers is an elderly, self-described "thrill seeker" who constructed two rollercoasters, the Blue Flash and the Blue Too, in his backyard.

Mike Carmichael – Mike Carmichael owns the world's largest ball of paint.

Mrs. Mahone – Mrs. Mahone teaches Violet's Russian Literature class.

Mr. Kappel – Mr. Kappel is the baseball coach and gym teacher at Finch and Violet's high school.

Lara – Lara is one of Brenda's friends. As Violet gets to know her, she invites Lara to contribute to *Germ*.



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.



MENTAL HEALTH, STIGMA, AND SUICIDE

All the Bright Places follows the romance of 17-year-olds Finch and Violet, who meet at the top of their school's belltower where they both plan to commit suicide. Instead of jumping, though, they talk each other off the ledge and soon develop a friendship that leads to a romantic relationship. However, Finch and Violet's struggles with mental health—and the knowledge that they were both on the brink of taking their own lives—loom large over the novel. Finch has an undiagnosed mental illness, while Violet is still struggling to recover after her older sister died in a car crash nine months before the novel begins. Whereas Violet has supportive people in her life, Finch's parents and peers aren't very understanding, and he feels too ashamed to have his mental illness formally diagnosed and treated. Eventually, after Finch's mental state gradually worsens, he commits suicide. With this tragic outcome, *All the Bright Places* shows how stigmas about mental

illness and suicide—and more broadly, the pressure for people feel to act okay even when they aren't—can worsen mental health issues. And when people feel too isolated and ashamed to seek the help they need, the book suggests, they may be more likely to view suicide as their only option.

All the Bright Places shows that mental illness can be profoundly isolating. Although the novel itself doesn't specify exactly what Finch is struggling with, author Jennifer Niven has confirmed that Finch has undiagnosed bipolar disorder. As a result of his illness, by the time he was in eighth grade, Finch had begun to suspect that he wasn't actually real and was therefore invincible. But when he asked his then-best friend, Roamer, if he experienced some of the same things, Roamer turned on Finch and dubbed Finch "Theodore Freak." Following this, Finch's reputation as a "freak" means that he has a difficult time connecting with his fellow classmates. To many, he's "weird" and "unpredictable," and to some, his occasional angry outbursts even make him seem dangerous. Living with bipolar disorder, in other words, makes Finch feel alone and misunderstood. And, as a result, he hides the full extent of his problems when he becomes suicidal. At the same time, Violet struggles to cope with her grief after her older sister Eleanor's death in a car accident nine months before the novel begins. While Violet's mental health issue is a more short-term response to a traumatic event, the effect is profound: she feels unready to move on after Eleanor's death, and that life isn't worth living without Eleanor. But she also knows that admitting this is something that many people would find disturbing, so Violet keeps most of her inner turmoil to herself. Nobody knows she's entertaining suicidal thoughts until Finch finds her at the top of the belltower.

But the novel also makes it clear that *nobody* is okay all the time—many people, at some time or another, deal with mental health or self-esteem issues. Indeed, the novel drives home this point in its opening chapter, when Violet and Finch both find themselves contemplating jumping off the school belltower. It's shocking for both of them to find someone else up there, both thinking the same thoughts. The simple fact that they are surprised to learn that they're not alone speaks to how isolating it can be to feel suicidal or otherwise experience intense emotional distress. As the novel progresses, Violet and Finch also discover that they're not the only ones who feel hopeless. The novel eventually reveals that Violet's former best friend, a popular girl named Amanda Monk, has also made several suicide attempts. This is a bombshell for both Finch and Violet because, in their minds, a girl as popular and with as supportive a family as Amanda couldn't possibly have a reason to kill herself. And it's impressions like these, the novel suggests, that make mental health issues so isolating and so difficult to talk about.

Through Violet and Finch's differing trajectories, the novel shows the necessity of getting help for mental health

issues—and the tragic consequences of feeling unable to ask for help. Life begins to improve for Violet when she and Finch fall in love and start spending more time together. As Finch encourages Violet to talk openly about her grief and the trauma she experienced, Violet ultimately comes to see that life is indeed worth living—and staying alive is also one of the best ways to honor Eleanor's memory. Finch's help isn't the same as formal therapy, but it nevertheless changes Violet's outlook on life and helps her move on from her grief. For Finch, though, his love for Violet isn't enough on its own to overcome his undiagnosed mental illness. Finch actively refuses to be diagnosed throughout the novel, even though he implies at several points that he's aware he has bipolar disorder. Allowing a mental health professional to diagnose him, Finch believes, will deprive him of his humanity and his individuality and turn him into nothing more than a label. It's also disturbing for him when he attends a group counseling session for teenagers struggling with suicidal ideation. Here, he hears other kids talk about how the medication they take to manage their mental illnesses seems to take away all the things that made them who they are. This makes Finch even more unwilling to get help. As a result of his shame, perceived isolation, and worsening mental state, Finch ultimately chooses to take his own life. And while *All the Bright Places* is clear that no one person or group of people can be blamed for Finch's choice, it nevertheless suggests that Finch's suicide could perhaps have been avoided had he not felt the stigma of having a mental health issue so acutely and had instead felt comfortable asking for help. It's essential, the novel suggests, to change what's perceived as shameful so that others in positions like Finch's or Violet's feel able to ask for the help they need.



COMMUNITY, SUPPORT, AND TRUST

As Finch struggles with an undiagnosed mental illness, he behaves erratically: disappearing for long periods of time, skipping school, and acting out violently. Yet as Violet gets to know Finch and talks to others about him, she's disturbed to realize that no one else seems as concerned about Finch as she is. Finch's family and community's failure to take his odd behavior seriously (or indeed, in the case of his family, to notice that he's behaving oddly at all) arguably creates a situation where Finch is able to run away and commit suicide without anyone fearing for his safety. With this, *All the Bright Places* shows that keeping people safe is, ideally, a communal responsibility. But the novel makes it clear that it's not enough to have a support system only in name—people must be able to trust that their support system will take them seriously and get them the help they need, no matter the problem.

Though *All the Bright Places* suggests that a good support system includes friends, family members, and mental health professionals, it also shows that simply having these things

doesn't make for an effective support system. For instance, though Violet's parents are happily married and very supportive—but because Violet thinks of them as “perfect,” she doesn't feel comfortable bringing her mental health issues to them. Their desire for life to return to normal after Violet's sister Eleanor's death nine months before the novel begins makes Violet believe that the overwhelming grief she still feels for Eleanor is inappropriate. So, she hides it from her parents and internalizes it instead. Finch's family is far less functional and dedicated, but he does regularly see a school counselor named Mr. Embry for support. But although Mr. Embry seems to genuinely care about Finch's well-being—at the very least, he wants to make sure that Finch isn't at risk of hurting or killing himself—he doesn't give Finch the level of support he needs. Though Finch likes Mr. Embry, he's also certain that Mr. Embry wouldn't believe Finch if Finch were to say that he doesn't actually want to die. So, to Finch, Mr. Embry may care—but he's also not someone Finch trusts to take him seriously. Finally, though both Violet and Finch outwardly appear to have friends, they both find their friendships lacking. As Violet struggles to process her grief, she realizes she doesn't have much in common with her friends anymore, and so she starts to pull away. And while Finch appreciates his friends Brenda and Charlie, he nevertheless keeps them at arm's length. He never lets on that he's contemplating suicide and makes it seem normal that he disappears for stretches of time, and so his friends don't think to worry about him.

The novel also suggests that accepting help and support isn't always something that people innately know how to do—rather, it's something learned. This is one of the biggest reasons why Finch distances himself from Mr. Embry, his friends, and even Violet to some degree. Moreover, Finch's mom is neglectful, and Finch's dad is prone to violent, rageful outbursts. As a kid, Finch was often his dad's favorite target—at one point, he also hurt Finch's mom so badly that she had to be hospitalized. This showed him that although his parents might be physically present in his life, they're not going to support him and keep him safe. Finch's family also makes it clear that in addition to not protecting each other from physical harm, they also don't take mental health issues seriously. As Finch begins to experience headaches that signal a decline in his mental health, he thinks that he could tell his mom—but he also knows that if he were to tell her, she'd tell him to take painkillers and remind him that he's “sensitive.” In Finch's family, “there's no such thing as being sick unless you can measure it with a thermometer under the tongue,” which influences how Finch thinks of his own mental health. Though he knows he's struggling with mental illness, he also believes that his family wouldn't believe him or support him if he were to get help, simply because mental illness isn't outwardly visible. In this way, Finch's family teaches him to hide and ignore his worsening mental health—and to fear help.

What makes a support system effective, on the other hand, is trust. This is why, as Violet and Finch grow closer to each other over the course of their romance, Finch is able to convince Violet to talk about Eleanor's death. And talking about Eleanor with someone she trusts not to judge her and who cares about her happiness has innumerable positive effects for Violet. Thanks to Finch, she realizes that suicide isn't the answer to her problems, and she begins writing again and makes a number of new friends through her new web magazine, *Germ*. Other effects of Violet's trauma, like being too afraid to get in a car and experiencing nightmares, also gradually improve. In part because Finch has learned he shouldn't trust his support network, though, he's never able to get the help he needs. He can barely listen to Mr. Embry after Mr. Embry brings up the possibility that Finch might have bipolar disorder, for instance, and he lashes out angrily at Violet when she admits she's worried and asks him to get help. Though the novel makes it clear that Finch's choice to commit suicide isn't anyone's fault, it's nevertheless possible to see that Finch felt suicide was his only option because he didn't trust his support system to be there for him. It isn't enough, the novel shows, for a person to have a support system in name only. Rather, people in a support system needs to be trustworthy and compassionate, and to acknowledge that invisible problems like mental illness are as legitimate and treatable as any other.



INDIVIDUALITY AND IDENTITY

Throughout the novel, 17-year-old Finch is caught up in figuring out who he is. He changes his identity every few weeks, cycling through “80s Finch,” “Badass Finch,” and finally “Dirtbag Finch.” Finch's undiagnosed mental illness makes him unsure of which aspects of his identity are real—but his quest to figure out who he is nevertheless reflects a struggle that most teenagers go through. Similarly, as Violet processes her grief for her sister Eleanor's death, she also changes her identity to try to be more like Eleanor—even going so far as to wear **Eleanor's glasses**. As Finch, Violet, and their classmates experiment with their identities, it becomes clear that it's all too easy for others to misunderstand or misinterpret a person's chosen identity. *All the Bright Places* thus suggests that while people have the power to craft their own identities and be who they want to be, they still have to contend with the possibility that their peers won't see them in that way. Identity is, in other words, a community project: a person can present any identity, but they can't totally control how others see them. And when people make assumptions about others' identities, it can be extremely damaging.

All the Bright Places shows that people's identities are often in flux. This is best illustrated by Finch's habit of changing up his persona. As he cycles through his various personalities and fashion styles, he learns things about himself. He wants to look attractive but not too clean-cut, for instance, and he wants to

be healthy, but not so healthy that he can't smoke. Though Finch's mental illness means that he's consistently unsure if he's a real person or not, his experimentation shows how easy it is for a person to change their identity and feel like a new version of themselves. Violet, on the other hand, shows how grief can change a person's identity. Following Eleanor's death, Violet feels like she's lost everything that made her who she was, from her ability to write to being able to take pride in her appearance. And over the course of the novel, as Violet heals, she changes into a version of herself that's better equipped to handle life's challenges.

But the novel also shows that as much as a person might try to portray a certain identity, this doesn't guarantee success—identity, the novel suggests, comes partially from how others see a person. So, although Finch enjoys being “Badass Finch” (an invented character from London) and even manages to convince a freshman that he's British, classmates who know Finch well aren't convinced. At school, Finch is constantly fighting against the cruel nickname that his former best friend Roamer gave him in eighth grade: Theodore Freak. To his classmates, it doesn't matter what Finch looks like—he's still someone who's “weird” and unpredictable. Peers' assumptions affect Violet, too. Though Violet has made outward changes to her appearance since Eleanor's death, such as wearing Eleanor's glasses and styling her hair like Eleanor styled hers, her friends seem unable to grasp the depths of Violet's grief. So, while Violet feels mired in her grief and unable to be the person she used to be before Eleanor's death, few others see that. In this sense, Violet maintains her status as a pretty, popular girl—but who she is inside doesn't match that identity.

All the Bright Places suggests that it's damaging to make assumptions about what kind of a person someone else is, though the tendency to do so is natural. Finch knows that people constantly make assumptions about him, and he even knows that his counselor, Mr. Embry—the one person at school who doesn't bully him—wouldn't believe him if he were to say that he doesn't want to die. Mr. Embry treats Finch like a constant danger to himself, and Finch implies that this assumption keeps Mr. Embry from ever getting to know who Finch is. But Finch isn't innocent: he, too, makes assumptions about other people. For instance, when he realizes that Violet is on the belltower with him, he notes that she's not the kind of girl one would expect to find there. This suggests that from his point of view, popular, pretty girls shouldn't have enough to worry about to justify trying to kill themselves, a perception that unwittingly puts pressure on Violet and other girls struggling with mental illness to *not* ask for help. Other people's perceptions make it seem like Violet shouldn't need help, which the novel shows isn't true. This idea also extends to Finch and Violet's classmates. Ryan Cross, Violet's ex-boyfriend, is widely considered perfect and irresistible. But Violet tells Finch that Ryan steals compulsively, and his bedroom is a mess because of

this. Similarly, Finch eventually discovers that their classmate Amanda Monk, a popular bully, attends a support group for teens who have considered or attempted suicide—she isn't perfect either. It's impossible, the novel suggests, to identify what a person “should” be like just by looking at outward characteristics. And especially in cases like Amanda's, the pressure to make one's feelings match up with others' perceptions only contributes to feelings of worthlessness.

Though *All the Bright Places* doesn't tie up its exploration of identity neatly, it nevertheless suggests that it's impossible to fully understand how another person sees themselves. Readers, for instance, only see that Violet is healed and confident in her identity as an aspiring writer at the end of the novel because her first-person narration allows for that. There's no guarantee that Violet's peers are going to see her for the driven, passionate person she's become. But through this, the novel also suggests that assumptions about another person's identity can make people feel alienated, misunderstood, and unable to ask for help—it's important to show people respect by allowing them to show who they truly are.



LANGUAGE, MEANING, AND CONTROL

Both Violet and Finch love language and literature. Prior to her sister Eleanor's death, Violet wrote content for a web magazine she created with Eleanor, and she planned to attend NYU's creative writing program. Finch, meanwhile, is a singer-songwriter who “collects” words as part of his creative process. As he and Violet get to know each other, they explore how their changing relationships to language and literature help them feel more in control of their lives and connect with each other—or, in some instances, do the opposite. With this, *All the Bright Places* shows that a person's relationship to language or to a work of literature isn't static. Rather, the way a person uses writing to describe their experiences or draws meaning from literature changes depending on their mental or emotional state. Moreover, putting one's experiences into words, or borrowing others' words to describe one's experiences, can help a person feel more in control of their life.

For both Violet and Finch, repurposing and reinterpreting others' words—whether that be novels, poems, or even suicide notes—helps them make sense of their lives. Finch habitually reads and memorizes famous authors' suicide notes. This interest goes hand in hand with his own interest in suicide—these authors' suicide notes help him think through what death might be like, or what makes a death “meaningful” or “heroic.” However, the novel also makes it clear that Finch's focus on authors' suicide notes has a cost—for instance, when he and Violet chat on Facebook and exchange Virginia Woolf quotes, Finch finds that he's out of his element. Though he has Virginia Woolf's suicide note memorized, for instance, he's unfamiliar with her body of work and so struggles to come up

with quotes to send to Violet. With this, *All the Bright Places* suggests that the specific pieces of writing that someone focuses on fundamentally shapes how they make sense of their life. Because Finch focuses so intently on writers' suicide notes, he never has the opportunity to consider other perspectives that focus on life over death. Violet, on the other hand, reads everything from the Brontë sisters' novels to Woolf's novel *The Waves* to Dr. Seuss's picture book *Oh, the Places You'll Go!*. And, as a result, she has a much broader range of works to draw on. In other words, the books Violet reads show her a variety of options when it comes to how to live her life—in comparison to Finch, who focuses mostly on death and suicide.

In addition, the novel suggests that putting one's experiences into writing gives a person the opportunity to shape their own reality and can thereby make them feel more secure and confident. Violet, for instance, only begins to heal from her grief over Eleanor's death when Finch convinces her to start writing again. Though Violet loved writing before Eleanor died, she found after Eleanor's death that she couldn't bring herself to do it anymore. As Violet starts to write again, she gradually finds herself feeling happier, healthier, and more in control. While she felt unmoored and hopeless during the period in which she couldn't write, being able to write again gives her control over her life's story as well as the sense of purpose that she craves. Finch also feels able to face the difficulties of living with an undiagnosed mental illness because he's nevertheless able to continue writing songs and "collecting" ideas. He keeps a "Wall of Thoughts" on one wall of his bedroom, where he sticks sticky notes and other scrap paper scribbled with words, phrases, and other interesting text. And the notes on the Wall of Thoughts, he explains, form the basis for his songwriting, something that keeps him grounded even as his mental health cyclically improves and then worsens.

All the Bright Places links the inability to control, interpret, or manipulate language to mental health—and it suggests that being unable to effectively describe one's experience can have disastrous consequences. Despite Finch's love of words and language, he can't describe his struggles with mental health clearly. The novel implies that Finch has undiagnosed bipolar disorder, and he refers to his cycles of depression and mania as being "Asleep" and "Awake," respectively. And though these terms describe how Finch moves through the world in a very basic sense, saying that he's "Awake" doesn't fully encapsulate his inability to eat or sleep; the sensation that time is "folding"; or his constant terror that Violet is going to find out he's mentally unwell. Further, as Finch's mental health deteriorates, he finds himself unable to read, write, or otherwise interpret the written word. As Finch begins experiencing the headaches that he knows signal the end of being "Awake," he struggles to pay attention in school or read anything. And so instead of taking in new material, Finch can't help but fixate on words that he knows are self-destructive and unhelpful (such as

"worthless" and "freak") as well as his favorite authors' suicide notes. He ultimately runs away and commits suicide without leaving a proper suicide note, something that drives home how wholly unable he was to put his thoughts and feelings into words.

Violet, on the other hand, demonstrates how fulfilling and healing it can be to put one's thoughts and experiences into words. When Finch disappears, and especially after his death, Violet begins to connect with other girls at school through *Germ Magazine*, an online magazine that she creates. As Violet invites classmates to contribute and spends time with them planning the magazine's features, she finds that she doesn't feel so alone anymore—and for the first time in a long time, she feels in control of her life. The fact that she experiences these revelations as she creates a web magazine for others to read and engage with speaks to her understanding of what writing and reading can do: help people discover that they're not alone in their thoughts or fears, and through doing so, connect them to others.



GRIEF, TRAUMA, PURPOSE, AND SURVIVORSHIP

Grief and trauma play a central role in *All the Bright Places*: when readers meet Violet, she's still struggling to cope with her sister Eleanor's death in a car accident nine months earlier. Feeling that her life no longer has meaning or purpose, Violet is contemplating suicide. Finch, meanwhile, idealizes death and suicide due to his struggle with an undiagnosed mental illness. As Violet and Finch get to know each other, both of them learn that having purpose and connecting with each other can be healing. Over the course of their relationship, Violet finally begins to move on from Eleanor's death, and Finch finds that he feels more alive than ever before. And though Finch eventually commits suicide, Violet emerges at the end of the novel understanding that, as a survivor, it's essential that she deal with her grief in a healthy way. Through Violet's journey in particular, the novel suggests that it's impossible to heal from trauma and focus on living without finding purpose and connection.

It's extremely difficult, the novel shows, for a person to find purpose when they're mired in grief or mental illness. Both Finch and Violet struggle to find meaning and purpose at the beginning of the novel. Since Eleanor's death, Violet has decided that life is meaningless and is just "filler" before a person dies—which is part of why she contemplates suicide at the top of the school belltower. She also gives up on writing after Eleanor dies, something that previously enjoyed and that made her feel powerful and intelligent. Grief, in this sense, keeps Violet from seeing that there's any point to living at all, since she can't write and is just going to die someday anyway. Finch's inability to find purpose is more complex. He is highly intelligent—he scored very high SAT scores and even secured

early admission to NYU—but because of his undiagnosed mental illness, it’s almost impossible for Finch to think about the future. Part of this has to do with the fact that the nature of Finch’s mental illness (implied to be undiagnosed bipolar disorder) means that he cycles through periods of being “Awake” (manic) and “Asleep” (depressed). Much of Finch’s time Awake is spent trying to *stay* Awake—and when he’s Asleep, all he can do is wait to wake up again. His purpose, then, is essentially just surviving his ups and downs; thinking about anything more long-term than that is impossible.

Connecting with others, though, has the unique ability to help people rediscover purpose and meaning in their lives. As Finch falls in love with Violet, he finds that his desire to stay Awake increases—and he takes what he implies are more steps than he normally would to keep himself Awake. Part of this is because Finch realizes that Violet sees him as someone “whole,” normal, and worthy of love and compassion—and few people, if any, have ever treated Finch that way. While Finch is aware that this episode of being Awake won’t last forever, he also suggests that his relationship with Violet is the reason why he should resist the Asleep as long as he possibly can. Violet’s relationship with Finch similarly puts her back in control of her life. With his encouragement, Violet gets back in a car again (she refused to ride in a car after Eleanor’s death), begins to write again, and even starts a web magazine called *Germ* to replace the website she and Eleanor ran. With Finch’s help, then, Violet is once again able to think about the future and see her life as something worth sticking around to experience.

Through Violet, *All the Bright Places* suggests that finding purpose in one’s life is a crucial part of coping with trauma and overcoming grief. When Finch commits suicide, Violet finds herself starting the process of grieving all over again. As she stands in front of the mirror on the day of Finch’s funeral, she wonders if she’s ever going to be able to look at her reflection and not see Finch and Eleanor’s losses there—loss, she seems to believe, is never going to leave her. Nevertheless, Violet ultimately decides to take Finch and Eleanor’s advice to heart and believe that life *is* worth living, even if it inevitably includes loss and heartache. Finch, after all, was the one who talked Violet off the belltower and showed her that life was still worth living—and Violet realizes that she can continue to learn from Finch’s lessons, even after he’s gone. Finch helps Violet do this in part by leaving her five places to visit after his death—places where he left her notes or encouraged her to see something specific and meaningful. Indeed, his final place for Violet to visit is a tiny roadside chapel built to honor victims of car accidents (a nod to Eleanor) and intended to provide refuge for “weary travelers.” Though this chapel and Violet’s journey more broadly gives her the closure she craves after Finch’s death, following Finch’s directions also reminds her that one of the things she desperately wants to do is travel the world. And with this, Violet is reminded again that she *does* have a purpose: to

live, so that she can see new places and have meaningful experiences even without Eleanor and Finch by her side. Through this, the novel makes it clear that people can find purpose after experiencing a loss—and that their ability to heal depends on it.



SYMBOLS

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



ELEANOR’S GLASSES

Eleanor’s glasses symbolize Violet’s grief for her sister. After Eleanor died in a car accident about nine months before the novel begins, Violet began wearing Eleanor’s glasses in the hope that they’d help her connect with Eleanor. But in practice, wearing Eleanor’s glasses means that Violet goes about her day unable to properly see, since she and Eleanor have different glasses prescriptions. Indeed, Violet even notes that the world swims and warps when she puts Eleanor’s glasses on—showing how her desire to stay connected to Eleanor is actually detrimental to Violet’s health and healing. In other words, Violet is so caught up in mourning Eleanor’s death that she struggles to see and connect with the world around her.

Thus, it’s significant when Violet eventually takes off Eleanor’s glasses and leaves them in Eleanor’s room. At this point, a few weeks after Violet and Finch start working on their geography project, Violet has finally begun to heal and is in the process of falling in love with Finch. Getting out with Finch has shown her that there are still things worth living for; she doesn’t need to focus on Eleanor’s memory and ignore everything else. When Violet notes that she can almost hear Eleanor laughing as she puts the glasses down and tells Eleanor that the glasses looked better on Eleanor anyway, it suggests that Violet is aware that Eleanor would’ve wanted her to move on. As Violet heals, she becomes more willing to accept that it’s better to honor Eleanor’s memory by living, not by trying to turn herself into Eleanor.



WATER (THE BLUE HOLE, SWIMMING POOLS, RIVERS)

Water (which shows up in a number of forms in the novel) symbolizes the interconnectedness between life and death. Finch admits at one point that he has “a thing for water.” His affinity for water takes a variety of forms: he swims in the summer when it’s warm enough, he practices holding his breath underwater for long periods of time, and some of the novel’s happiest moments take place when Finch and Violet swim together. Water, Finch explains, is his favorite way to “cheat the

Asleep”—that is, it makes him feel more alive, as when he holds his breath and feels invincible.

However, the novel makes it clear that one of the primary reasons Finch likes water so much is because he’s well aware that it can kill him if he lets it. Indeed, the fact that he fixates on writer Virginia Woolf’s suicide supports this: she filled her pockets with rocks and then drowned in a river. And as Finch’s mental health deteriorates and he begins contemplating suicide, he becomes increasingly interested in water and even leaves clues as to his whereabouts that mention water for Violet. Violet is ultimately able to follow his clues directing her to the Blue Hole, where Finch presumably drowned himself. Water, in this instance, symbolizes death.

Because of this, though, it’s significant that the novel ends with Violet swimming in the Blue Hole on a hot summer day. As she swims, she thinks of Finch—and she also thinks about all the places she wants to go and see in the future. This reinforces the idea that water symbolizes both life *and* death—and the idea that life and death exist in a delicate balance, particularly for suicidal people like Finch. Water can make a person feel more alive, as it does in that moment for Violet and it once did for Finch—but it can also take a person’s life away.



THE CARDINAL

The cardinal symbolizes Finch’s mental illness and his dysfunctional family dynamic. When Finch was a little boy, a male cardinal repeatedly flew into the living room windows and fell to the patio before flying off again while its female partner watched from a nearby branch. When Finch’s sister Kate called the Audubon Society, the person she spoke to suggested that the Finches’ home had been built where the cardinal’s tree once stood, and the cardinal was trying to get back to his former tree. Young Finch found this extremely disturbing; he begged his parents to bring the cardinal inside so they could save it from the pain of hitting the glass and being knocked unconscious. Finch’s mom and Finch’s dad refused—and one day, they discovered that the cardinal had finally died as a result of hitting the glass. It was after the cardinal died that Finch experienced his first symptoms of a mental health problem (he doesn’t remember much from the weeks following the cardinal’s death). This eventually balloons into what Finch experiences in the present (implied to be undiagnosed bipolar disorder): cycling between being “Awake” (depression) and “Asleep” (mania), as well as his obsession with suicide.

Finch’s mom sees Finch’s investment in the cardinal’s well-being as a sign of his sensitivity. But to Finch, this is insulting—comments about his “sensitivity,” he feels, ignore the fact that he’s mentally unwell. In this sense, the way that Finch’s family remembers and conceptualizes the cardinal’s death shows Finch that they don’t actually care about his mental and

emotional well-being. No matter what he does or how much he’s struggling, they’ll believe he’s just “sensitive,” and his reaction to the cardinal’s death will always be proof of that.

As Finch’s mental state deteriorates over the course of the novel, he thinks more about how tragic the cardinal’s death was—and his actions begin to mimic that of the bird. Whereas the cardinal flew into the glass again and again before it finally died, Finch knowingly and repeatedly puts himself in situations where he might drown. Finally, he runs away and drowns in the **Blue Hole**, and Violet knows that Finch died by suicide. And given that Finch thinks the cardinal would’ve died no matter what his family did to save it, this illuminates Finch’s belief that there was nothing anyone could do to save *him*. Just as it seemed inevitable that the cardinal was eventually going to die, suicide seemed inevitable to Finch.





QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Ember edition of *All the Bright Places* published in 2016.

1. Finch: I am awake again. Day 6. Quotes

☹️ The fact is, I was sick, but not in an easily explains flu kind of way. It’s my experience that people are a *lot* more sympathetic if they can see you hurting, and for the millionth time in my life I wish for measles or smallpox or some other recognizable disease just to make it simple for me and also for them. Anything would be better than the truth: *I shut down again. I went blank.*

Related Characters: Theodore Finch (speaker), Mr. Embry

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 15-16

Explanation and Analysis

Finch is in a counseling session with Mr. Embry and is trying to figure out how to answer when Mr. Embry asks about Finch’s six week-long absence from school. The truth is that Finch fell into another depressive episode (which he calls “the Asleep”); but Finch feels unable to tell anyone the truth about where he was.



In this passage, Finch starts to explore the impact of the stigma surrounding mental illness. Importantly, Finch is self-aware enough to recognize that he’s sick. But his sickness, he explains, isn’t something that people would have an easy time understanding, because mental illness is largely invisible. Unlike his examples of measles and

smallpox—which have visible symptoms and are well understood—many mental health issues are totally invisible and more difficult to understand. And Finch seems to imply that in his experience, any disease that isn't clearly visible to others isn't thought of as being legitimate or real. So, while Finch knows something is wrong with him, he feels compelled to keep quiet out of fear and shame of what other people will think or say.

Further, Finch also suggests that he lacks the language to be able to describe his illness. He implies that something like measles or smallpox has a language surrounding it that makes it easy to talk about. A person with one of those infections not only has visible symptoms; they can talk about how those symptoms affect them physically. Physical pain, in other words, is something that has a vocabulary to describe it. Mental pain, on the other hand, is something that Finch has a much harder time trying to describe—"shutting down" and "going blank" only get at what he was feeling in a very basic sense. But as the novel goes on, and as Finch talks more about what it's like to be "asleep," it becomes clear that this doesn't fully encapsulate Finch's experience.

☝ The thing I don't say is: I want to stay alive. The reason I don't say it is because, given that fat folder in front of [Mr. Embry], he'd never believe it. And here's something else he'd never believe—I'm fighting to be here in this shitty, messed-up world. Standing on the ledge of the bell tower isn't about dying. It's about having control. It's about never going to sleep again.

Related Characters: Theodore Finch (speaker), Finch's Mom, Mr. Embry

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 16

Explanation and Analysis

During Finch's counseling session with Mr. Embry, Finch shares with readers that he really wants to stay alive—but nobody would believe him if he were to tell people that.

With this, Finch starts to articulate how Mr. Embry is essentially making it more difficult for Finch to get the help he needs. Mr. Embry, Finch suggests, is so caught up in the "fat folder" describing Finch that he's unwilling to actually see and listen to the person in front of him. Throughout the novel, Mr. Embry treats Finch as though Finch is a danger to himself. And though it's important to note that Finch does everything in his power to not alarm Mr. Embry due to the

stigma surrounding mental health issues, Finch also makes it clear that he doesn't believe Mr. Embry would take him seriously if he did tell the truth about how he's feeling. This dynamic makes it even more difficult for Finch to get the help he needs for his mental illness.


Then, Finch also starts to show how far he's willing to go to stay alive and move forward. Finch gives the impression that he's his own worst enemy—he continually has to do things, like stand on the belltower ledge and consider jumping off, in order to feel like he has any control over his life. This is also why he engages in other risky behavior, like diving extremely deep in bodies of water and driving his mother's car 100 miles per hour when he has the opportunity. These things are dangerous and put him at risk of harm—but they also give him a much-needed sense of control over his life. If he's choosing to engage in these activities, in other words, then he's not at the mercy of falling "asleep" again (which, for Finch, means entering another depressive episode).

2. Violet: 154 days till graduation Quotes

☝ I have a headache. Probably from the glasses. Eleanor's eyes were worse than mine. I take the glasses off and set them on the desk. They were stylish on her. They're ugly on me. Especially with the bangs. But maybe, if I wear the glasses long enough, I can be like her. I can see what she saw. I can be both of us at once so no one will have to miss her, most of all me.

Related Characters: Violet Markey (speaker), Eleanor Markey

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 23-24

Explanation and Analysis

Violet is in class, but she's not paying attention—instead, she focuses on her sister Eleanor's glasses and explains to readers why she's wearing them. In Violet's mind, wearing Eleanor's glasses is one way that Violet can connect with her deceased sister and never have to forget her. This speaks to how mired Violet is in her grief. It's no longer enough to be herself; rather, Violet feels like she has to do everything in her power to embody Eleanor or else risk forgetting her. In her mind, this is how Violet can cope with the pain of Eleanor's loss. But this passage also includes clues that Violet is failing in this endeavor: the glasses were

“stylish” on Eleanor, but they’re “ugly” on her. She also later implies that she gave herself bangs in an attempt to look more like Eleanor, though Violet isn’t satisfied with this hairstyle either. Her attempt to look like someone she isn’t, in other words, just makes Violet feel uncomfortable in her own skin. It’s also not doing what it’s supposed to do: turn her into Eleanor and, in doing so, keep her sister’s memory alive.

Further, the fact that the glasses give Violet a headache suggests that there are very real consequences to holding onto her grief in this way. She makes it clear that the prescription isn’t correct for her—which means that in addition to experiencing headaches, Violet also can’t see the world around her as well as she’d be able to with the proper prescription. So, her grief, in this sense, keeps Violet from experiencing the world in a genuine, healthy way because everything she sees is both literally and figuratively filtered through Eleanor’s lenses.

6. Finch: Day 7 of the Awake Quotes

☝ “But that isn’t why. The why is that none of it matters. Not school, not cheerleading, not boyfriends or friends or parties or creative writing programs or...” She waves her arms at the world. “It’s all just time filler until we die.”

“Maybe. Maybe not. Whether it’s filler or not, I’m pretty glad to be here.” If there’s anything I’ve learned, it’s that you need to make the most of it. “It mattered enough for you not to jump.”

Related Characters: Theodore Finch, Violet Markey (speaker), Eleanor Markey

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 61

Explanation and Analysis

Finch and Violet are out walking at night, discussing why Violet was up on the belltower considering killing herself on the day that they met. Violet makes it clear that she no longer thinks life is worth living after her sister Eleanor’s death nine months ago. Without Eleanor around, life isn’t interesting anymore—but beyond that, Violet’s doesn’t feel like her life has purpose anymore. Therefore, it doesn’t seem like such a big deal to contemplate dying.

But Finch suggests that there’s a different way of looking at life. It’s not as important, he suggests, whether life has meaning or whether a person has a purpose—it’s good enough and important enough to simply be alive, no matter

what. And this, Finch implies, is something that a lot of people would agree with on some level, since he suggests that this is why Violet didn’t jump off the belltower.

What Finch doesn’t tell Violet, though (that he’s learned he has to make the most of life no matter whether it has purpose or not), shows that Finch is trying to take his own advice and remind himself that life is worth living. Since Finch struggles with mental illness and regular thoughts of suicide, it’s difficult for him to believe this all the time. But by telling Violet to essentially be thankful for her life, Finch is able to give himself a pep talk about the same thing. Helping Violet, in this sense, also allows Finch to help himself.

☝ *Worthless. Stupid.* These are the words I grew up hearing. They’re the words I try to outrun, because if I let them in, they might stay there and grow and fill me up and in, until the only thing left of me is *worthless stupid worthless stupid worthless stupid freak*. And then there’s nothing to do but run harder and fill myself with other words: *This time will be different. This time, I will stay awake.*

Related Characters: Theodore Finch (speaker), Finch’s Dad

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 63

Explanation and Analysis

When Finch goes on his first run of the novel, he explains for readers why he runs. The physical strain of running helps him “outrun” words that might hurt him, like “worthless,” “stupid,” and “freak.” With this, Finch shows readers how important language is. He suggests that because he’s grown up being told that he’s worthless, stupid, and a freak, he’s more likely to believe those words accurately describe him. Words, this shows, have power to shape how a person thinks of themselves—for better or for worse.



The fact that Finch can run to try to “fill [himself] with other words” that are more uplifting and hopeful shows how important it is to monitor one’s inner monologue for words that could be damaging. This also implies that Finch spends a lot of his time and brain capacity simply trying to make sure he stays awake and as healthy as possible. Because Finch struggles with a mental illness that causes him to think poorly of himself, he has a hard time looking into the future for more purpose in his life—his purpose, at this point, is to keep himself awake and make sure he doesn’t fall into a depression again.

Furthermore, the fact that Finch grew up hearing people call him worthless, stupid, and a “freak” illuminates why he feels so alone in his mental illness and in life more generally. He’s never had people he can trust to be truly supportive or help him be the best version of himself. And instead of encouraging Finch to get help, his support network has instead made him feel abnormal and ostracized. This has far-reaching consequences, as Finch’s mental health gradually worsens, and he eventually commits suicide. Though it’s no one’s fault that Finch kills himself, the fact remains that Finch felt uncomfortable asking anyone for help with his mental illness because he didn’t think he could trust anyone to take him seriously.

8. Finch: Day 8 of the Awake Quotes

☝ Dad asks about the November/December study-away program, and it takes me a minute to realize he’s talking to me. “Uh, it was okay.” Good one, Kate. I make a note to thank her. He doesn’t know about the shutting down or the trouble at school beyond sophomore year because last year, after the guitar-smashing episode, I told Principal Wertz my dad was killed in a hunting accident. He never bothered to check up on it, and now he calls my mother whenever there’s a problem, which means he actually calls Kate because Mom never bothers to check voicemail.

Related Characters: Theodore Finch (speaker), Mr. Embry, Principal Wertz, Kate Finch, Finch’s Mom, Finch’s Dad

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 69

Explanation and Analysis

During the first Sunday night family dinner with Finch’s dad since Thanksgiving (Finch was “asleep,” or in the midst of a depressive episode, from before Thanksgiving to the first week of January), Finch learns that his sister Kate told their dad he was at a study-away program. More broadly, this passage shows how fractured Finch’s support network is.

Finch doesn’t trust his dad or, for that matter, want anything to do with him. His dad, he implies, suffers from undiagnosed bipolar disorder, which causes him to have violent outbursts. He’s put both Finch and Finch’s mom in the hospital, so Finch is unwilling to give his dad any more insight into his life than is absolutely necessary. In all ways, then, Finch’s dad is unsupportive. But Finch also shows that his mom isn’t able to support him, either. Because the school believes that Finch’s mom is the only parent Finch has, they only call her when Finch is struggling. And because Finch’s

mom never checks voicemail and is generally uninvolved in her children’s lives, she never gets any indication that Finch is struggling and might need extra support or guidance.

And though Kate seems to be lying for Finch in order to protect him from his dad and to protect their mom from more heartache, her lies mean that nobody is truly aware of how alone Finch feels—and how much he’s struggling with his mental health. Because nobody knows what’s actually going on with Finch and because Finch’s parents can’t communicate with Principal Wertz or even Mr. Embry, they’re unable to form an effective support system and get Finch the help he needs.

11. Violet: 151 days till graduation Quotes

☝ I look in the direction Brenda pointed and there he is. Theodore Finch leans against an SUV, hands in pockets, like he has all the time in the world and he expects me. I think of the Virginia Woolf lines, the ones from *The Waves*: “Pale, with dark hair, the one who is coming is melancholy, romantic. And I am arch and fluent and capricious, for he is melancholy, he is romantic. He is here.”

Related Characters: Violet Markey (speaker), Theodore Finch

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 107

Explanation and Analysis

Violet and Finch are preparing to make their first trip for their geography project to Hoosier Hill after school. They’ve already been exchanging Virginia Woolf quotes over Facebook and have discovered her novel *The Waves*. As this quote from *The Waves* flashes through Violet’s mind, it shows her using literature to make sense of her life and how it’s changing. Violet may be taking this quotation out of its context in *The Waves*, but the novel suggests that doing this is a normal way that people make sense of their realities. Language and literature, in this sense, aren’t things that are static and can only be understood one way—it’s possible, and expected even, that Violet would use a passage like this to describe seeing Finch. Indeed, in Violet’s mind, this passage becomes even richer with meaning as she uses it in this context. For her, it will forever be linked to Finch.

Furthermore, this quote from *The Waves* also foreshadows how Finch and Violet change and develop over the course of the novel. Violet (the “I” in this passage) is “capricious” and “arch,” words that evoke lightness and living. Finch, however



(the “one who is coming”) is “melancholy,” though he’s also “romantic.” Violet may not totally grasp the significance of this yet, but the way that the two are described so differently in this passage foreshadows that Violet will go on to heal from her trauma and find purpose in her life again—while Finch’s melancholy will consume him and ultimately result in suicide.


12. Finch: The night of the day my life changed Quotes

☝☝ Water is peaceful. I am at rest. In the water, I am safe and pulled in where I can’t get out. Everything slows down—the noise and the racing of my thoughts. I wonder if I could sleep like this, here on the bottom of the bathtub, if I wanted to sleep, which I don’t. I let my mind drift. I hear words forming as if I’m sitting at the computer already.

In March of 1941, after three serious breakdowns, Virginia Woolf wrote a note to her husband and walked to a nearby river. She shoved heavy stones into her pocket and dove into the water. “Dearest,” the note began, “I feel certain that I am going mad again. I feel we can’t go through another of those terrible times...So I am doing what seems the best thing to do.”

Related Characters: Theodore Finch (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 106

Explanation and Analysis

Finch is taking a bath instead of running because it’s sleeting outside. In this passage, he articulates why he likes water so much. It helps him feel safe and peaceful, as though he might sleep—even though Finch seldom sleeps when he’s experiencing a manic episode like he is now. Describing water in this way shows that more than anything, Finch wants to feel peaceful and slow, rather than like his thoughts are running him ragged. This shows again that Finch’s biggest adversary is his own mind, and most of his energy is spent simply trying to master his mind and stay in control of his mental illness. Spending time in water is one of the best ways for Finch to do this.

It’s telling, then, that after describing how helpful and peaceful water is, Finch launches into an explanation of Virginia Woolf’s suicide by drowning. This shows that Finch doesn’t just like water for giving him a way to control his racing mind and out-of-control thoughts—he also likes

water for the fact that it could kill him, just as it killed Virginia Woolf. It becomes clear, then, that Finch can’t separate even the things he’s doing to keep himself healthy and present from the things that might kill him—which points to how much he’s struggling with his mental health.

18. Finch: Day 15 (still) Quotes

☝☝ I made the mistake of talking about it once. A few years ago, I asked my then good friend Gabe Romero if he could feel sound and see headaches [...] and he went home and told his parents, and they told my teacher, who told the principal, who told my parents, who said to me, *Is it true, Theodore? Are you telling stories to your friends?* The next day it was all over school, and I was officially Theodore Freak. One year later, I grew out of my clothes because, it turns out, growing fourteen inches in a summer is easy. It’s growing out of a label that’s hard.

Related Characters: Theodore Finch (speaker), Gabe “Roamer” Romero, Finch’s Dad, Finch’s Mom

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 141

Explanation and Analysis

Finch tells readers about his headaches that signal that he’s going to go back to sleep (experience another depressive episode again), and he explains that he once asked Gabe Romero—Roamer—whether he experienced any of the same things. It’s important to note that in the whole novel, this is the only time that Finch mentions ever having been truthful with someone about how he experiences the world. So, it’s perhaps not surprising that after Roamer told everyone, and people started to call Finch “Theodore Freak,” Finch decided that it’s better to stay quiet about what he’s feeling. Nobody, in his experience, even tried to understand; indeed, he was accused of “telling stories.” After this, it became clear to Finch that it’s better to pretend he’s normal so that he doesn’t have to deal with such a humiliating situation ever again.

Finch doesn’t dwell on it, but it’s important to note that Roamer telling his parents about Finch’s headaches didn’t have to go poorly. Indeed, every person Finch lists here who was told about the headaches could, in theory, be a valuable member of Finch’s support network. But given how all of this turned out, it doesn’t seem like any of these people took Finch seriously or saw this as a sign that he needed help with a mental illness. It’s impossible to say exactly why this happened the way it did, but the effect is nevertheless that Finch learned he can’t trust any of these people to be here

for him. If he tells the truth, he knows they won't believe him, since he's a "freak" and a storyteller.

And this, Finch suggests, is the worst part of all of this. He bared his soul to Roamer, not realizing that this was going to give him a label ("freak") that he'd never be able to get rid of. Finch also suggests that no matter how old or how tall he gets, the label is going to persist. This explains why Finch is so afraid of labels and tries so hard to be normal: they've made his life difficult and painful, and he doesn't see how a diagnosis (which he sees as a label) could possibly be a good thing.

21. Finch: Day 22 and I'm still here Quotes

👁️ In 2013, a man in Pennsylvania committed suicide via carbon monoxide, but when his family tried to rescue him, they were overcome by the fumes and every single one of them died before rescue crews could save them.

I think of my mom and Decca and Kate, and then I hit the opener, and up goes the door, and out I go into the wild blue yonder. For the first mile or so, I feel high and excited, like I just ran into a burning building and saved lives, like I'm some sort of hero.

But then a voice in me says, *You're no hero. You're a coward. You only saved them from yourself.*

Related Characters: Theodore Finch (speaker), Kate Finch, Decca Finch, Finch's Mom

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 161

Explanation and Analysis

Finch is sitting in the garage, getting ready to leave—but though he turns his mother's car (nicknamed "Little Bastard") on, he spends a few minutes sitting in the garage, seemingly experimenting with committing suicide via carbon monoxide poisoning. The fact that Finch is doing this in the first place makes it clear to readers how alone and at-risk Finch is. This isn't the first time he's considered killing himself and has even taken steps to do so—thus far in the novel, he's contemplated hanging, drowning, and jumping from a building. Suicide is an ever-present thought in Finch's head, suggesting that he needs help of some sort to make sense of these thoughts and keep himself safe and alive. It's also important to note that for the most part, the reader is the only person who is privy to these thoughts—and readers are, of course, unable to help Finch. So, within the world of

the novel, Finch is mostly on his own to deal with his suicidal thoughts, since nobody else is aware that he has them.

The fact that Finch ultimately chooses not to kill himself for his mom and sisters' sake shows how much Finch loves his family. He wants to make life easy for them and not make them worry, especially his mom, and he recognizes that committing suicide would do the exact opposite. Moreover, he knows that it would be even worse to unwittingly kill his family members while trying to kill himself.

Finch's mixed emotions after he leaves the garage show how conflicted he is about suicide. He implies throughout the novel that he thinks suicide should be noble and cement his reputation—and at times like this, he also suggests that staying alive should do much the same thing. When he's not able to come to any one conclusion about whether suicide or living is better or more noble, it illustrates that Finch feels caught in between these two opposing desires. He wants to stay alive, and sometimes, he also wants to die—but more than anything, he wants to feel like a "hero." But it's difficult, he's realizing, to figure out how to feel like a hero, no matter what he does.

👁️ "Why are we doing this, Dec?"

"Because they shouldn't be in there mixed with the good. They like to trick you."

And somehow I know what she means. I think of the *Bartlett Dirt* and all its mean words, not just about me but about every student who's strange or different. Better to keep the unhappy, mad, bad, unpleasant words separate, where you can watch them and make sure they don't surprise you when you're not expecting them.

Related Characters: Theodore Finch (speaker), Violet Markey, Finch's Dad, Josh Raymond, Kate Finch, Decca Finch

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 166

Explanation and Analysis

Finch is sitting with his little sister, Decca, cutting "bad" words out of books at her request. Decca is currently under a lot of stress because, according to Kate, she's uncomfortable with how close and age she and Josh Raymond are and the possibility that Finch's dad is Josh Raymond's biological father.

Decca's exercise of cutting the mean words out of books

shows that, like Finch and Violet, she's trying to use language and literature to make sense of the world around her. When it seems like she can't control anything in her life—such as whether her dad prefers Josh Raymond to her—it's comforting to engage in an exercise like this, where she gets to exert total control over what she reads. The exercise shows, in other words, that Decca wants to be able to scrub all the bad and uncomfortable things from her life, just as she can cut the bad words out of books to make them exclusively happy.

This makes total sense to Finch. He knows firsthand how much damage “mean words” can do (the *Bartlett Dirt* just ran an article of the top 10 suicidal students at school, and Finch topped the list). Those mean words make Finch feel bad, and they also make him feel out of control—and he realizes that they no doubt have the same effect for other people as well.

However, it's worth noting that the *Bartlett Dirt* has, for the most part, already done the hard work of separating the “good” words from the bad. It's the school “gossip rag,” and the way that the characters talk about it suggests that it doesn't print anything kind about anyone. So, while Finch might realize that the *Bartlett Dirt* doesn't do anyone any favors and indeed causes a lot of harm, it's nevertheless comforting that the publication is very clear about what it offers.

25. Finch: Day 27 (I am still here) Quotes

☝ I can go downstairs right now and let my mom know how I'm feeling—if she's even home—but she'll tell me to help myself to the Advil in her purse and that I need to relax and stop getting myself worked up, because in this house there's no such thing as being sick unless you can measure it with a thermometer under the tongue. Things fall into categories of black and white—bad mood, bad temper, loses control, feels sad, feels blue.

Related Characters: Theodore Finch (speaker), Finch's Dad, Finch's Mom

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 185

Explanation and Analysis

Finch's headaches are starting to get worse, but he doesn't think he can ask his mom for help. This is especially true since Finch's headaches aren't normal headaches; they're part of his undiagnosed mental illness, and they signal an

impending decline in Finch's mental health.

In this passage, Finch clearly articulates how his mom thinks about mental health issues. Mental illnesses are, to her, not real illnesses. Illness, in her mind, is something that comes with a fever or (as Finch has mentioned previously) presents with a rash or other easily identifiable physical markers. In many cases, mental illnesses are invisible, though this doesn't mean they don't have symptoms (like Finch's headaches, his fears that he's not real, or his trouble sleeping or eating). And the effect of this way of thinking about illness, Finch makes clear, is that he doesn't feel like he can ask for help even though he knows on some level that he needs it. His mom won't take him seriously, so in his mind, it's not even worth bringing up.

As Finch talks about the “categories” his mom puts things in, he also explains how she thinks about Finch's dad's violence. His violent outbursts, to her, are the result of a bad temper and of losing control—not an indicator that Finch's dad, like Finch, is dealing with an undiagnosed mental illness. (Finch later implies that his dad, like him, probably suffers from bipolar disorder). And given what Finch has shared about his dad putting him and his mom in the hospital, the novel makes it clear that there's a real risk in describing mental illness (or indeed, violent behavior more generally) in these black-and-white terms. Describing behavior like this with euphemisms means that it's impossible to know exactly what happened and then condemn the behavior.

26. Violet: 133 days to go Quotes

☝ I set her glasses down on her dresser. “Thanks for the loan,” I say. “But they make my head hurt. And they're ugly.” I can almost hear her laughing.

Related Characters: Violet Markey (speaker), Eleanor Markey

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 191

Explanation and Analysis

After spending a few weeks hanging out with Finch, Violet is feeling more mentally stable and excited about life—and she no longer feels the need to wear Eleanor's glasses. This represents a major turning point for Violet. Up until now, she's has been marking off the days until graduation on her wall calendar. Marking the days off has been a way to pass

the time without enjoying it—and since Eleanor’s death, Violet has felt wholly unable to enjoy life. But as Violet has spent more time with Finch, she sees that it’s actually possible for her to enjoy her life. Giving up Eleanor’s glasses makes it clear that this is the moment when Violet chooses to enjoy her life again and stop dwelling so intently on Eleanor’s memory.

Prior to this moment, Violet has been trying to make herself as much like Eleanor as possible. In her mind, it will mean that she doesn’t have to miss Eleanor as much if she can actually become some version of Eleanor. So, in addition to this moment signaling that Violet is moving on with her life, this also shows that Violet is choosing to celebrate herself and not be someone she isn’t. She’s now willing to voice that she thinks the glasses are unattractive and don’t do anything for her, a clear indicator that she’s going to move forward and chose to wear and do things that make her happy. And, most importantly, acknowledging that the glasses made her head hurt shows that Violet now realizes how misguided it was to try to embody Eleanor by wearing her glasses. The glasses kept her from seeing and experiencing the world properly. Without them, Violet will be able to grow and turn into the person she wants to be—not just another version of Eleanor.

28. Finch: Day 28 Quotes

☝️ For once, I don’t want to be anyone but Theodore Finch, the boy she sees. He understands what it is to be elegant and euphoric and a hundred different people, most of them flawed and stupid, part asshole, part screwup, part freak, a boy who wants to be easy for the folks around him so that he doesn’t worry them and, most of all, easy for himself. A boy who belongs—here in the world, here in his own skin. He is exactly who I want to be and what I want my epitaph to say: *The Boy Violet Markey Loves*.

Related Characters: Theodore Finch (speaker), Violet Markey

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 202-03

Explanation and Analysis

The night after Finch and Violet ride roller coasters, kiss, and admit that they’re romantically interested in each other, Finch suddenly knows exactly who he wants to be. This is remarkable for Finch because, as he notes at various points throughout the novel, he’s constantly unsure which of his identity or emotions is real. But thanks to his relationship

with Violet, Finch now knows that he’d like to be himself. While this in and of itself is a major step for Finch, what’s even more important is that he even seems to recognize that he can be complex—he doesn’t have to choose just one quality to describe himself. He can be flawed, he can be a jerk, and he can even be a “freak.” (Finch’s peers call him a “freak” because of his mental illness, so this suggests that he’s now acknowledging his mental illness and accepting that that’s a part of who he is). Deciding that all of these qualities and desires can be one person as long as Violet loves him shows how meaningful their relationship is to him. It gives him something to work for, as he can be flawed and make mistakes but still continually work to earn Violet’s love and affection.

Finally, it’s particularly important that he ends this passage by saying that he wants to be “a boy who belongs—here in the world, here in his own skin.” In this moment, Finch isn’t thinking at all about suicide because, for seemingly the first time in his life, he realizes that loving another person is a good reason to stay alive.

32. Finch: The first warm day Quotes


☝️ “What are you most afraid of?”

I think, *I’m most afraid of* Just be careful. *I’m most afraid of the Long Drop. I’m most afraid of Asleep and impending, weightless doom. I’m most afraid of me.*

“I’m not.”

Related Characters: Theodore Finch (speaker), Violet Markey

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 221

Explanation and Analysis

Violet and Finch are preparing to leap into the Blue Hole to swim. Finch asked Violet to tell him what she was scared of before jumping, and she poses the same question to him in return.

Being afraid of “just be careful” suggests that Finch is having a difficult time dealing with his support network’s lack of support regarding his relationship with Violet. To Finch, Violet is amazing, she’s his motivation to stay alive—but no one else can see that, and so few people are effusively supportive. Then, as he moves on to say that he’s afraid of

the “Long Drop,” “Asleep,” and “impending, weightless doom,” as well as himself, it shows that what really frightens Finch is his mental illness. Finch describes his mental illness (which the novel implies is bipolar disorder) as featuring periods of being Awake (manic) and Asleep (depressed)—and when he’s Asleep, all he can do is wait to wake up again. His mental illness, in this sense, robs Finch of his ability to live his life to the fullest. And when he mentions the Long Drop (which is the official term for a judicial hanging), this illuminates how out of control Finch feels. He’s previously described entering the Asleep as feeling like a Long Drop, which suggests that Finch feels like he’s at the mercy of some outside force trying to take his life.

It’s telling that Finch is only willing to answer this question in his own mind, where only readers know what his real answer is. Telling Violet that he’s not afraid of anything means that Violet never knows how afraid Finch is or how much he’s struggling. And though the novel insists that engaging in hypothetical questions aren’t a good use of time, it also makes the case that because Finch so carefully keeps his mental health issues secret, nobody in his life can help him when he eventually runs away and commits suicide.

42. Finch: Days 65 and 66 Quotes

☝☝ The thing I know about bipolar disorder is that it’s a label. One you give crazy people. I know this because I’ve taken junior-year psychology and I’ve seen movies and I’ve watched my father in action for almost eighteen years, even though you could never slap a label on him because he would kill you. Labels like bipolar say *This is why you are the way you are. This is who you are.* They explain people away as illnesses.

Related Characters: Theodore Finch (speaker), Mr. Embry, Finch’s Dad

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 271-72

Explanation and Analysis

In a counseling session, Mr. Embry senses that something is off with Finch and raises the possibility that Finch might be suffering from bipolar disorder. This suggestion, however, is abhorrent to Finch.

Finch is so upset by the suggestion that he might be suffering from an identifiable, legitimate mental illness largely because mental illness is so stigmatized, especially in his family and community. He shows this most clearly when

he suggests that only “crazy people” have bipolar disorder. In reality, bipolar disorder is relatively common in the U.S.; furthermore, it’s inaccurate (and offensive) to refer to someone with a mental illness as “crazy.” But it’s difficult to counteract the stigma when, as Finch implies, movies and TV sensationalize mental illness and don’t offer realistic portrayals—either good or bad—of what it’s like to live with one. So, when Finch thinks about possibly having bipolar disorder himself, that means having to accept that he’s “crazy” and lesser because of it.

Though being diagnosed with a mental illness might make it more likely that Finch could receive effective treatment in the form of counseling or medication, to him, a diagnosis is nothing more than a “label.” And labels, in his experience, are bad and reductive. They reduce a person down to one thing—in this case, their mental illness—and deprive people of the other things that make them human and who they are. Given that Finch is so fixated on figuring out who he is, this is particularly offensive and scary. In his mind, he’s done too much work to figure out who he is to accept a label from someone else without a fight.

However, it’s also interesting that Finch implies that he knows his dad suffers from bipolar disorder. This suggests that Finch thinks it’s acceptable to “explain away” other people (at least, people he doesn’t like) as a mental illness—it’s just not something he’s going to let happen to him.

44. Finch: Days 66 and 67 Quotes

☝☝ Most people haven’t heard of [the Nest Houses], but one old man tells me, “Sorry you came all this way. I’m afraid they been ate up by the weather and the elements.”

Just like all of us. The Nest Houses have reached their life expectancy. I think of the mud nest we made for the cardinal, all those years ago, and wonder if it’s still there. I imagine his little bones in his little grave, and it is the saddest thought in the world.

Related Characters: Theodore Finch (speaker), Mr. Embry

Related Themes:    

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 276

Explanation and Analysis

After Finch is expelled from school, he drives to Southern Indiana to see an art installation of “Nest Houses,” or houses

built out of sticks. Finch is in a fragile emotional state, as Mr. Embry just suggested that Finch might have bipolar disorder, and he's beginning to behave erratically as he gets closer to another depressive episode.

Because Finch is feeling so vulnerable now, discovering that the Nest Houses are gone is a major blow. Though the novel never shares why Finch was so interested in seeing the Nest Houses to begin with, it seems clear that their symbolism in Finch's mind changes now that they're gone. Though before they may have represented resilience and beauty in the natural world, the man's explanation (that "they been ate up by the weather and the elements") shows Finch that nature is destructive and can take away life as easy as it can give it.

This is why Finch then thinks of the cardinal, which died after hitting the glass too many times. Finch's family buried it in a "mud nest." While nests are where birds lay eggs and raise their young, Finch seems to associate nests instead with death and decay. They're not happy and symbolic of life—they're places where birds die. And since this is a major turning point in Finch's mental illness, it's possible to see this trip to the nonexistent Nest Houses as the point at which Finch's ability to keep going similarly dies. Especially since Finch suggests at various points that the cardinal's death was inevitable, it begins to seem to him like his own impending death is also inevitable.

45. Finch: Day 71 Quotes

☝☝ I want to get away from these kids who never did anything to anyone except be born with different brains and different wiring [...] I want to get away from the stigma they all clearly feel just because they have an illness of the mind as opposed to, say, an illness of the lungs or blood. I want to get away from all the labels.

Related Characters: Theodore Finch (speaker)

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 284

Explanation and Analysis

Finch drives to Ohio to attend a meeting of Life Is Life, a support group for teenagers who have considered or have attempted suicide. He recently attempted to kill himself by taking sleeping pills.

The meeting is not helpful for Finch; though he never shares what he hoped to gain from it, he doesn't come away feeling less alone or like he has a reason to live. Instead, Finch gets

even more proof that living with a mental illness will turn him into some unknowable "other" and fundamentally change his identity. While the other kids seem to feel better having the space to talk about their struggles with suicide and mental illness, Finch instead wants to distance himself from other mentally ill people. By associating with them, Finch suggests, he shares in the stigma they experience for having mental illnesses instead of physical ones—and he's a step closer to being labeled with a mental illness of his own.

Importantly, though, Finch also recognizes that none of the stigma is these kids' faults. They were simply "born with different brains and different wiring," which suggests that their mental illnesses are a part of them and not something to be ashamed of. The fact that Finch seems unwilling or unable to apply that kind of grace and understanding to his own life suggests that he still buys into the stigma surrounding mental health issues, even as he sees how damaging they can be.

☝☝ "Why do you do that? Don't you get tired of people talking about you?"

"Including you?"

She goes quiet.

"I do it because it reminds me to be here, that I'm still here and I have a say in the matter."

She puts one leg in the car and says, "I guess now you know you're not the only freak." It's the nicest thing she's ever said to me.

Related Characters: Theodore Finch, Amanda Monk (speaker), Demetrius

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 286

Explanation and Analysis

When Finch gives a noncommittal answer to Amanda asking what he was doing in the belltower, Amanda suggests that the way people talk about Finch is partially his fault. She suggests that if Finch were to conform to the way that everyone else acts and responds to questions, he could avoid being the subject of gossip and whispers. This speaks again to the stigma surrounding mental health issues. Finch understandably doesn't want to talk about being on the belltower and feeling suicidal—but Amanda suggests that Finch's desire to protect his privacy is only making the gossip at school worse. In this way, Finch can't win.

More important here, though, is that Finch finally calls Amanda out on her bullying tactics and asks her to explain herself. And her explanation sheds more light on why bullying, to her, seems like the only way to get through life. Talking about other people takes attention off of Amanda—and it also makes her feel like she’s in control. Finch speaks often throughout the novel about wanting to have control over his life, so this is no doubt something that resonates with him. In this way, he and Amanda realize they actually have some important things in common.

Amanda even confirms this when she tells Finch that now he knows he’s not the only “freak.” It’s possible that any number of their classmates are also dealing with mental health issues, but learning about the other’s suicidal thoughts makes both Finch and Amanda feel more compassionate toward each other. Indeed, Amanda even goes on to alert Violet that Finch might be in trouble after this meeting, suggesting that connecting with Finch shows Amanda the importance of supporting others and forming connections.

48. Violet: March 21 and beyond Quotes

☝ “Listen, I’m the freak. I’m the weirdo. I’m the troublemaker. I start fights. I let people down. Don’t make Finch mad, whatever you do. Oh, there he goes again, in one of his moods. Moody Finch. Angry Finch. Unpredictable Finch. Crazy Finch. But I’m not a compilation of symptoms. Not a casualty of shitty parents and an even shittier chemical makeup. Not a problem. Not a diagnosis. Not an illness. Not something to be rescued. I’m a person.”

Related Characters: Theodore Finch (speaker), Gabe “Roamer” Romero, Eleanor Markey, Finch’s Dad, Finch’s Mom, Violet Markey

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 307

Explanation and Analysis

On Finch’s birthday, Violet asks Finch to get help for his mental illness. Finch is unwilling to do so, as he sees accepting that he suffers from a mental illness as something that will make him less of a person.

Violet and Finch are coming from two very different experiences. Though Violet received counseling after Eleanor’s death, it wasn’t what got her through her own suicidal ideation and showed her that life was worth living

again. Rather, her relationship with Finch taught her the importance of living life. Nevertheless, she sees getting help as a necessity and positive, which is why she asks Finch to get help in the first place.


Finch, though, has been raised in a home where mental illness isn’t thought of as real. The one time he asked his then-friend Roamer to talk about his mental illness, it backfired on him—and since then, he’s been bullied and ostracized for being different from his classmates, and they think of him as “Moody Finch,” “Angry Finch,” and “Crazy Finch.” Those qualifiers, Finch feels, make him less of who he actually is and deprive him of humanity.

But even more than this, Finch’s outburst shows how he’s struggling to deal with the stigma attached to mental illness. This is why he says he’s not just his “shitty parents” or a “shitty chemical makeup.” Accepting that would mean accepting that Finch’s mental illness is something natural and was, perhaps, inevitable. And accepting that he has a mental illness in the first place would, again, mean that Finch would have to totally rethink his identity. So, instead of thinking of himself as Finch, Finch would instead think of himself as his diagnosis.

☝ “He’ll be back. He always comes back.” *That’s just his thing. It’s what he does.*

I want to say to her and Charlie and Brenda, to Kate, to his mom: *Doesn’t anyone care why he comes and goes? Have you ever stopped to think that something might be wrong with this?*

Related Characters: Violet Markey, Decca Finch (speaker), Kate Finch, Charlie Donahue, Brenda, Finch’s Dad, Finch’s Mom

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 313

Explanation and Analysis

Violet has just searched Finch’s room one more time after he disappears. As she leaves, Decca tells her that Finch always comes back when he does this. The fact that Decca can say this with such certainty makes it clear that Finch has done this before—she knows what to expect, and from past experiences, she doesn’t think Finch is in any real danger of not coming back. As Violet suggests, this begs the question of why Finch disappears regularly, and what might be wrong to cause him to do this.

But as Violet attempts to figure out what’s wrong with Finch and where he might’ve gone, she runs into opposition and

apathy from all of Finch's friends and family members. As part of his attempts to keep anyone from finding out that he was struggling with a mental illness, Finch has, throughout his life, made sure that nobody was going to suspect that anything was amiss whenever he acted erratically. So, he framed his odd behavior as impulsiveness and presented himself as someone who does what he wants, when he wants, for no particular reason other than that he wants to. Everyone's apathy about his disappearance shows how successful Finch was in this regard.

Because Finch was able to do this, the consequence is that nobody aside from Violet seems concerned for his health or safety. And this means that if Finch is in danger—which he is, since his suicidal thoughts mean he's at risk of hurting himself or trying to take his own life again—there's nobody to help him. This may be exactly what Finch wants, but it nevertheless keeps him from getting the help he needs.

49. Finch: Day 80 (a muthaf#@*ing world record) Quotes


☝☝ All I know is what I wonder: Which of my feelings are real? Which of the *mes* is me? There is only one me I've ever really liked, and he was good and awake as long as he could be.

I couldn't stop the cardinal's death, and this made me feel responsible. In a way, I was—we were, my family and I—because it was our house that was built where his tree used to be, the one he was trying to get back to. But maybe no one could have stopped it.

"You have been in every way all that anyone could be...If anybody could have saved me it would have been you."

Related Characters: Theodore Finch (speaker), Violet Markey

Related Themes:     

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 314

Explanation and Analysis

Finch has recently run away from home after refusing to get help when Violet asked him to. This is the final chapter before Finch's narration ends. The quotation in this passage is from Virginia Woolf's suicide note to her husband, a note that Finch comes back to again and again throughout the novel.

The disjointed ideas in this passage show how difficult of a

time Finch is having organizing his thoughts and articulating them effectively. He's still dealing with all sorts of questions, like who he is, whether he's truly at fault for the cardinal's death, and whether he should commit suicide. Throughout the novel, Finch's worsening mental health is linked to his inability to organize or articulate his thoughts, and this shines through here. And as in previous chapters, it's worth noting that this is Finch's inner monologue, not something that he's sharing with any of his friends or family members. Nobody who can help him knows what he's thinking and struggling with.

It's worth noting that throughout this passage, Finch phrases his statements in a tone that suggests finality. He's still asking questions about who he is, but he also says—as though there's no room for argument—that he's only ever liked one version of himself. He also makes it seem inevitable that he's going to return to an "asleep" (depressive) state soon. The same thing goes for the way that he talks about the cardinal's death. It was inevitable, he suggests, that the cardinal was going to die, that he couldn't save it, and that his family is responsible for its death. All of this shows that Finch has his mind made up that what he's saying is true—no one can convince him that he might be able to stay "awake" if he'd ask for help, or that it was chance or bad luck that the cardinal die the way it did. What Finch is saying, in other words, may or may not be true—but it feels true to him right now, so for all intents and purposes, these statements are true.


It's especially sinister that Finch's statements mirror the tone in Virginia Woolf's suicide note. Woolf makes it seem as though her death, like the cardinal's, was inevitable and that there was nothing her husband could do to save her. This suggests that in this moment, Finch is making up his mind to kill himself—and he's using Virginia Woolf's suicide to support this decision and tell himself it's the right one.

54. Violet: May 3 Quotes

☝☝ In all his words, the preacher doesn't mention suicide. The family is calling his death an accident because they didn't find a proper note [...]. I stand, thinking how it wasn't an accident at all and how "suicide victim" is an interesting term. The victim part of it implies they had no choice. And maybe Finch didn't feel like he had a choice, or maybe he wasn't trying to kill himself at all but just going in search of the bottom.

Related Characters: Violet Markey (speaker), Finch's Dad, Finch's Mom, Theodore Finch

Related Themes:    

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 341

Explanation and Analysis

At Finch's funeral, Violet observes that the preacher doesn't mention that Finch took his own life, something that Violet finds offensive and ridiculous.

First, it's worth considering that Finch didn't leave a "proper note" because the novel generally links his worsening mental health to an inability to describe his experience through language. So, in this situation, being able to leave a "proper note" for his friends and family would mean that Finch would've been in a mental state that was well enough to be able to write and formulate his thoughts, something the novel implies wasn't the case. As Finch's mental health worsened, he felt more and more trapped in his own mind and unable to either take in new information or produce any sort of text to describe his experience. So, in this context, not leaving a suicide note isn't an indicator that Finch's death wasn't suicide. It instead speaks to how poor his mental health was at the end of his life.

But this doesn't stop Violet from considering the language people use to describe suicide. As she thinks about the term "suicide victim," she acknowledges that it contains both an acknowledgement that the person in question made a choice to take their own life but also an acknowledgement that they may have felt like they didn't have a choice in the matter. This is one of the clearest ways that the novel suggests the language used to describe mental health issues and suicide is lacking. There isn't a better term to describe the choice that Finch made to end his life, one that would encapsulate his inner turmoil and his inability to articulate his thoughts and emotions.

55. Violet: May—weeks 1, 2, and 3 Quotes



☝☝ Then he adds, "I feel responsible."

I want to send his computer and books crashing to the floor. *You can't feel responsible. I'm responsible. Don't try to take that from me.*

He continues, "But I'm not. I did what I felt I could do. Could I have done more? Possibly. Yes. We can always do more. It's a tough question to answer, and, ultimately, a pointless one to ask. You might be feeling some of the same emotions and having some of these same thoughts."

Related Characters: Violet Markey, Mr. Embry (speaker),

Theodore Finch

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 347

Explanation and Analysis

In Violet's required counseling session with Mr. Embry in the weeks after Finch dies, they discuss who—if anyone—is responsible for Finch's death. Both Mr. Embry and Violet were important people in Finch's support network; they both saw Finch's mental health begin to decline, and they both expressed concern and suggested he get help. This, Mr. Embry implies, is as much as they could do. And for that matter, it's not healthy or fruitful to dwell on what they perhaps should have or could have done to save Finch, especially since Finch went to such great lengths to keep people from knowing what he was going through.

Violet gets so upset with Mr. Embry for suggesting that he feels responsible because part of processing her grief entails dwelling on these thoughts. But Mr. Embry suggests that while they should both take the lessons they've learned from this experience with Finch and use them in the future if the opportunity arises, he also suggests that focusing on her own responsibility isn't a healthy use of her time. Nevertheless, though, he makes it clear that it's normal to feel this way—Violet isn't weird or different for thinking these thoughts. In this way, Mr. Embry is able to do for Violet what he wasn't able to do for Finch. He's able to impress upon her that she's not alone, she's not weird or a "freak," and it's okay to be open about her thoughts, fears, and emotions. She'll only be able to move forward as she talks to people and is able to process these difficult feelings.

☝☝ She looks at me. "In those moments, none of it matters. It's like that stuff is happening to someone else because all you feel is dark inside, and that darkness just kind of takes over. You don't even really think about what might happen to the people you leave behind, because all you can think about is yourself."

Related Characters: Amanda Monk (speaker), Theodore Finch, Violet Markey

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 351

Explanation and Analysis

Violet has just excused herself from an assembly and is sitting with Amanda in the hallway, discussing what it's like

to feel suicidal. Violet asked Amanda how she could possibly feel suicidal when her life seems so perfect in so many ways. Amanda's response makes it clear that an outwardly perfect life can obscure all sorts of angst and turmoil. Having supportive parents, being popular, and being beautiful doesn't mean much when one feels "dark inside" and like that darkness is taking over. In that kind of mental state, Amanda suggests, it's impossible to think of anyone but herself and how miserable and alone she feels.

Violet is, at this point, trying to piece together why Finch chose to kill himself and what he might've been thinking as he made that choice. Violet, for her part, hasn't really experienced the "darkness" that Amanda describes to quite this extent—when she and Finch discussed why she was on the belltower, for instance, Violet told him that she really

couldn't remember getting up there and was too afraid to follow through or save herself once she realized where she was. So, she's trying to develop more compassion for Finch and Amanda's feelings, since she doesn't have as much firsthand experience with these thoughts.

Though it's possible to see Amanda as suggesting that suicide is selfish, to Violet she makes the point that Finch didn't kill himself because of anything that Violet did or didn't do. Violet has been trying for weeks now to figure out why Finch killed himself, and for much of that time, she's blamed herself at least in part. But Amanda makes it clear that at the very least, if she'd been in Finch's position, it wouldn't have had anything to do with anyone else. It would've been no one's fault except for the "darkness" in her own mind.



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.

1. FINCH: I AM AWAKE AGAIN. DAY 6.

Finch is standing six stories up, wondering if today is a good day to die. He asks himself this question all the time, whether he's eating dinner or lying awake all night. Finch doesn't remember climbing up here—but then again, he doesn't remember anything before last Sunday. This happens “every time,” but Finch still isn't used to blanking out like Rip Van Winkle. The last time was the worst; Finch was “asleep” (which means he was awake but “completely empty”) from the middle of November through New Year's. He's been awake for six days. This is his first day at school since November.

Finch puts his arms out and shouts, welcoming everyone to his death. He acknowledges that one might think he should welcome people to his *life*, since he just woke up. But he only thinks about dying when he's awake. Finch overbalances and almost falls but continues shouting. There are a few people below, but because it's the first week of the last semester of senior year, they don't care about much—including Finch. To them, he's just “Theodore Freak.”

One kid looks up and points, but not at Finch. Finch looks over and sees a girl standing on the ledge on the other side of the tower. She's staring down, frozen. Calmly, Finch tells her not to look down. When she looks at him, he notices her chunky **glasses**. As she wobbles, Finch tells her that from up here, the town looks prettier. The girl's name is Violet, and she's extremely popular; she dates people like Ryan Cross and hangs out with Amanda Monk, a “queen bee.” She's not the sort of person one would expect to find on the belltower ledge.

The way the novel begins makes it clear that Finch is struggling with suicidal thoughts and some sort of mental illness. The aside that Finch regularly experiences memory lapses (and that they seem to be getting longer) indicates that Finch's symptoms are getting worse over time. He describes his period of being “asleep” as being awake but “completely empty,” which means that he wasn't literally asleep. Rather, these months-long periods of “sleep” are perhaps his way of describing depressive episodes. Missing months of school also makes it clear that whatever Finch is dealing with is seriously affecting his day-to-day life.



The fact that Finch only thinks about dying when he's awake (that is, more mentally sound) implies that he contemplates different things when he's asleep (in the thoughts of his mental illness). Furthermore, although his “awake” periods initially seemed preferable to his “asleep” periods, this passage suggests that he becomes suicidal once he emerges from his depressive episodes. Noting that Finch's classmates don't care about Finch and even call him “Theodore Freak” makes it clear that Finch is a victim of bullying—he may not have a robust support system.



Finch is seemingly less popular among his peers than Violet is, as everyone pays attention to Violet rather than him even though they're both in danger up on the ledge. As Finch explains what kind of a person Violet is, he implies that he doesn't think popular girls have enough wrong in their lives to be justified in considering suicide. This is a narrow view, but the fact that Violet is contemplating suicide nevertheless makes the case that anyone—even popular people—can experience mental health issues.



Finch introduces himself and chats to distract Violet. He notes that it's starting to rain—which means the rain will wash away the blood if he jumps, but he also doesn't "want to look like [he's] been run through the wood chipper at [his] funeral." He says that although he wants to be cremated, Finch's mom doesn't believe in cremation. Privately, Finch recalls Finch's dad saying that they didn't need to talk about that and upset his mom. He tells Violet about how terrible the undertaker's job would be, and just then, someone shouts Violet's name. She begins to say, "Oh God."

Finch shouts for Violet to stop trying to save him and then, quietly, he coaxes her over the ledge into the protected center of the belltower. Once she's safe, Finch imagines stepping off. He imagines how peaceful and weightless he'll feel, but then Violet starts to talk him through climbing back over the railing. The urge to jump passes. Finch laughs and imagines the look on Amanda Monk's face if he were to fall—but his laugh makes him wobble. Suddenly, Charlie Donahue, Finch's best friend, appears in the belltower and says that the cafeteria is serving pizza today.

From below, Finch hears Gabe Romero—Roamer—tell Finch to "get it over with." In response, Finch shouts a thanks to Violet for saving him. He catches his counselor, Mr. Embry's, eye below, and he allows Violet to help him over the wall. People applaud for Violet, "the hero." Finch notices how beautiful Violet is, even with the **glasses**. As Violet starts to say that she didn't climb up here to kill herself, Finch asks if she believes in "a perfect day" where nothing bad happens. She isn't sure if she believes this, since she hasn't experienced a perfect day before. Violet kisses Finch's cheek, thanks him, and heads down the belltower stairs.

Then, Charlie asks Finch why he's doing this. Finch replies that they all have to die someday, but this isn't the real reason. His real reasons change daily: school shootings, kids dying of cancer, Finch's dad.

Finch begins rambling to try to gain control of the situation. He doesn't want Violet to jump, and as he talks through what dying from jumping off the belltower would be like for him, he seems to conclude that he doesn't want to die like this either. What he reveals about his parents confirms that Finch doesn't have much of a support system at home—Finch's dad, at least, seems to underestimate how interested Finch is in death.



Finch believes that dying is going to feel peaceful and weightless. He makes it sound like something that intrigues him, at least in fleeting moments. But Violet's presence seemingly convinces him not to jump, which shows how important support can be for someone with a mental illness. And though Finch might not have a ton of parental support, it seems at least some of his classmates are willing to help him.



Roamer's comment to "get it over with" offers some explanation as to why Finch might be considering suicide: he doesn't feel like anyone wants him around. But helping Violet save face and control the narrative of what happened on the belltower shows that Finch does want to connect with people.



Finch suggests that for him, life is perhaps too overwhelming and sad to be worth living—especially when there are other young people dying all the time.



Finch has been on probation this year because last year, he got in trouble: he threw a desk into a chalkboard, smashed a guitar, and got into fights. So now, he has to endure weekly counseling, keep his grades up, and join a club (he chose macramé because of the pretty girls in the club). After coming down from the belltower, Finch heads for the counseling office, and soon, Mr. Embry waves him in. Mr. Embry asks why Finch was in the belltower and whether Finch plans to hurt or kill himself. Finch jokes to avoid the questions, but Mr. Embry doesn't laugh. Instead, he threatens to call Finch's mom. Finch promises to behave, take a drug test, and come to counseling twice per week going forward.

This settled, Mr. Embry asks about Finch's illness at the end of last semester, supposedly with the flu. Finch was sick—but not with the flu. He's found that people are sympathetic if they can see what's wrong, and he wishes he had smallpox or something visible. This would be better than the truth, which is that one minute he was fine; the next, he just shut down. But he tells Mr. Embry that he'll stay in school and keep up with his classwork. Finch thinks that he really *does* want to stay alive, though Mr. Embry wouldn't believe this if Finch were to tell him. Standing up in the belltower is actually about having control, so he doesn't "go[] to sleep again."

2. VIOLET: 154 DAYS TILL GRADUATION

It's Friday morning, and Violet is in Mrs. Kresney's office for her counseling session. Violet is still shaking after being on the belltower ledge, and she waits for Mrs. Kresney to tell her that they're going to admit her for inpatient psychiatric treatment. But instead, they do what they always do at the start of sessions: exchange pleasantries and talk about Violet's nightmares, which started after the accident. Violet insists she's sleeping fine, though she still has nightmares that she's melting away.

Then, Mrs. Kresney asks about college. A year ago, Violet would've loved to talk about college; she and Eleanor used to talk about where they'd go to get away from the small town of Bartlett, Indiana. Mrs. Kresney lists the colleges Violet has applied to but asks why NYU (where Violet has wanted to go since seventh grade) isn't on the list anymore. Violet says she missed the deadline, but really, she changed her mind after the accident.

As Finch explains what happened to him last year, his nonchalant tone suggests that he's not taking his problems seriously. This is also why he jokes with Mr. Embry instead of answering Mr. Embry's questions truthfully. On some level, Finch doesn't seem to want help for whatever he's dealing with. Rather, he's being forced to receive counseling, which suggests that the school is committed to keeping their students safe and monitoring their mental health.



Finch articulates why he doesn't want to accept help: he's concerned about the way mental illness is often stigmatized. He suggests that it's easier to explain smallpox to others—and get help for it—than it is to try to explain “shutting down” and “go[ing] to sleep.” With this, Finch implies that one of his problems is that he doesn't have the words to appropriately articulate how he's feeling. Without the right language, it's even harder to ask for help.



Violet, like Finch, is struggling with a problem (in her case, trauma surrounding the accident she experienced)—and she's concerned about the stigma surrounding mental health issues. She doesn't want to admit that she's still struggling, which is why she lies to Mrs. Kresney about her nightmares.



The book doesn't yet reveal who Eleanor is, but the way Violet talks about her suggests that Eleanor isn't in Violet's life anymore—perhaps because of the accident. Violet also makes it clear that the accident marked a major shift in her life and caused her priorities to change.



Mrs. Kresney then asks about Eleanor and Violet.com, which Eleanor and Violet started after they moved to Indiana. The website got really popular last year, but Violet hasn't touched it since Eleanor died. The site was "about sisters," and Violet's words died when she and Eleanor went through the guardrail. The conversation turns to "the accident," and Violet tells Mrs. Kresney that she doesn't feel like she's being punished for it—but privately, she thinks she's responsible and *should* be punished. When Mrs. Kresney asks, Violet confirms that she hasn't been in a car yet and still isn't participating in cheerleading or student council. She's not ready. Mrs. Kresney sighs and says that she's not pleased with Violet's progress—Violet needs "to remember that [she's] a survivor." At this, Violet walks out of the office.

As Violet walks to class, lots of people tell her she was brave for saving Finch from killing himself. Privately, Violet thinks Finch was the worst person she could've saved. People either love him or hate him because he does what he wants and is "weird" and "extreme." Violet is five minutes late to Russian Literature. The teacher, Mrs. Mahone, assigns a 10-page paper, but Violet doesn't groan like her classmates—she can get out of it since she has "Extenuating Circumstances." She ignores Mrs. Mahone and focuses on her headache. It's probably from wearing Eleanor's **glasses**, but Violet hopes that if she wears the glasses, she'll become like Eleanor and won't have to miss her anymore. Violet has good days and bad days, and the good days make her feel guilty.

The girl behind Violet passes her a note. It's from Ryan Cross, the best-looking boy in school who was Violet's boyfriend until last month. The note asks if she really saved Finch, and Violet writes back that she was just there at the right time. When a reply comes back to her, she doesn't open it. Lots of people, including the old Violet, would love to get a note from Ryan. When the bell rings, Violet stays in her seat. She used to be able to write anything—but since the accident, she can't bring herself to write. She knows that teachers go easy on her because she's still grieving. Sure enough, when Mrs. Mahone notices Violet, she tells her to just write "a page or a paragraph." Satisfied, Violet leaves the classroom; Ryan has been waiting for her in the hallway. Over Ryan's shoulder, she sees Finch strut past and nod.

Here, Violet confirms that Eleanor died in a car accident—and that she was also in the car. This passage also explains why Violet is struggling to move on after Eleanor's death: she feels responsible for what happened to her sister and like she has to pay for it somehow. Though Mrs. Kresney probably means well when she reminds Violet that she's a "survivor," to Violet, this reminder isn't particularly encouraging. However, Violet seems to be keeping her true feelings from Mrs. Kresney, so Mrs. Kresney may see Violet's progress very differently than Violet herself does.



Violet may be receiving so much attention because she's popular, not necessarily because of what she did. The way Violet describes Finch further reveals how other kids view him: he's considered unknowable and "weird," and he isn't well-liked because of that. As Violet thinks about Eleanor's glasses, it encapsulates how acutely she's still feeling her grief. In order to remember Eleanor, she seems to reason, it's essential to do whatever she can to be like her sister.



The way Violet talks about "saving" Finch suggests that she's ashamed to have been up on the belltower for the exact same reasons that Finch was there. Her suicidal thoughts aren't something she's comfortable talking about—and in order to preserve her reputation, she doesn't feel like she can be open about her problems. Again, not being able to write after the accident shows that Violet is still struggling to process her grief, and it's affecting her everyday life.



3. FINCH: DAY 6 (STILL) OF BEING AWAKE

By lunchtime, everyone knows that Violet saved Finch from jumping off the belltower. Finch heads for class and follows a group of girls discussing him, unaware that he's behind them. They talk about him like he's "tragic and dangerous," which Finch enjoys. He feels "not just awake, but Awake." He takes his seat in U.S. Geography with Mr. Black. Though Finch has lived in Indiana all his life, it's news to him when Mr. Black says that they all live about 11 miles away from the highest point in the state, Hoosier Hill. As Mr. Black drones on, Finch raises his hand. He wonders if things would look different from Hoosier Hill, 1,257 feet up.

Mr. Black finally calls on Finch, and Finch suggests they take a field trip to see Hoosier Hill before they graduate. Annoyed, Mr. Black continues on. He's interrupted when Violet comes to class late and accidentally drops all of her books. Everyone laughs, and Violet looks ready to die or cry. Finch knows this feeling well, so he knocks a book to the floor and then purposefully tips his chair over and sends his other books flying when he reaches to get it. This successfully distracts the class. Finch smiles at Violet, and she smiles back genuinely.

Mr. Black glares at the class and then introduces a project: the students must report on two or three "wonders of Indiana." They can choose any sites, but they have to document their visits to these places and explain why these sites make them "proud to be a Hoosier." Finch raises his hand again and asks if they get to choose their partners—he wants to work with Violet. Violet blushes and asks if she could do something else, since she's "not ready." Mr. Black refuses her request and says it's "time to get back on the camel." She's clearly upset. Finch remembers that Violet and her sister were in an accident last year. The sister didn't survive.

When class ends, Roamer—surrounded by Amanda and Ryan—blocks Finch's way. He accuses Finch of looking at him (they've been "sworn enemies" since middle school). Roamer knocks Finch's books out of his hands, and Finch feels his anger build. He felt this way last year when he hurled the desk into the chalkboard. Roamer walks past, tells Finch to pick up the books, and slams his shoulder into Finch's chest. Finch wants to rip Roamer's heart out, but instead he counts to 60 and gives Mr. Black a nod to show him that everything is under control. Finch has promised himself that this year will be different: he's going to "stay awake and here" and not just be "semi-here."

The fact that Finch enjoys the way these girls are talking about him suggests that he gets a kick out of being unpredictable. And when he doesn't fully define what it means to feel "Awake" as opposed to just "awake," it reminds readers that Finch doesn't have the words to describe how he feels. Readers can infer that Finch means that keeping others on their toes makes him feel more alive and powerful, but it's hard to tell for sure.



Even though Finch made it seem like he enjoys the attention he receives for his antics in earlier passages, here he suggests that that's only a front. If he knows well what it's like to feel "ready to die or cry," this suggests he experiences these emotions often. His antics, then, start to seem like a way to control the kind of attention he receives. If he shocks people on purpose, he might feel less embarrassed and ashamed.



The way that Mr. Black describes the "wonders of Indiana" and makes this project about being proud to live in Indiana suggests that he's trying to get his students to understand that there's a lot to live for—there's beauty all around, if one is willing to look for it. This is, perhaps, why he denies Violet's request—indeed, Violet can't sit back and do nothing forever. Finch, though, begins to develop some empathy for Violet when he remembers that her sister recently died.



Staying "awake and here" as opposed to just "semi-here" again suggests that being "awake" is Finch's way of describing periods between depressive episodes. And Finch implies that maintaining control over his emotions is essential to staying "awake." This means that he can't let Roamer's bullying get to him, though Finch's response to Roamer suggests that this is extremely difficult. Sometimes, Finch gets to the point that he loses control, as when he threw the desk into the chalkboard.



Later, out in the parking lot, Finch and his friend Brenda listen to Charlie talk about sex. Charlie spent his winter break working at the movie theater, where he let “hot” girls sneak in for free. Most of them were then willing to have sex with him. Charlie asks where Finch has been, and Finch replies that he went on a road trip since he didn’t feel like coming to school. He can’t explain “the Asleep” to his friends, but fortunately, Charlie and Brenda don’t usually ask for explanations. If he disappears, that’s just what he does. Charlie nods and says Finch needs to have sex. Finch usually has bad luck with women, since he goes for “bitchy ones” or “crazy ones.” He spots Violet across the parking lot and feels himself falling for her.

When Finch get home, Finch’s mom is defrosting a casserole while she talks on the phone. Finch’s older sister, Kate, grabs keys and heads out the door. Finch has an eight-year-old sister too, Decca—they all know “she was a mistake,” but Finch think that *he’s* the actual mistake in the family. He heads upstairs, puts on a record without looking at it, and puts a cigarette in his mouth. But then he remembers that he’s trying out being an 80s kid, and this version of Finch doesn’t smoke. Annoyed with his current persona, Finch chews on his cigarette instead of lighting it and plays along on his guitar.

Finch puts his guitar down and opens up his computer. He types into a document about how he almost killed himself today by jumping off the belltower at school, and about other men who have committed suicide by jumping. Then, he turns to the internet and finds that only 5-10 percent of suicides are committed by jumping. Finch returns to his document and writes that he didn’t jump because it would’ve been too messy, public, and crowded.

Then, Finch gets onto Facebook and finds Amanda Monk’s page. He searches her friend list for Violet and finds Violet Markey. Violet’s page is only visible to her friends, so Finch searches her name on Google, desperate for more information. He finds EleanorandViolet.com and a news article about the accident that killed Eleanor. Then, he decides to make a Facebook account and send Violet a friend request. This, he thinks, will make himself look normal to her. After sending the request, Finch plays guitar, does homework, and heads downstairs for dinner.

Comparing how Charlie and Finch spent their winter breaks shows just how distanced Finch is from his friends and classmates. While Charlie knows he has a willing audience to hear about his sexual exploits, Finch writes off his friends as being incapable of understanding what “the Asleep” is like for him. Finch also makes it clear that he’s taught his friends to think of his disappearances as normal. This means that Finch’s friends might not think to worry if, for instance, Finch’s mental health worsened. This adds to the impression that Finch doesn’t get the support he needs.



This passage gives the impression that Finch’s family isn’t particularly close-knit or at home much, as they all seem busy and preoccupied with their own lives. As Finch describes his family and who’s the “mistake” of his siblings, he shows that he defines a “mistake” differently than perhaps Decca and Kate do. While his sisters think of Decca as being a mistake because she wasn’t planned, Finch suggests that he’s the real mistake, perhaps because of how he views his mental health issues.



Finch’s research on suicide drives home for readers that this is a pressing concern for him. Thinking through ways to kill himself occupies a lot of his time and brainpower—but it seems like Finch is concerned with the spectacle of his death as much as anything else. Writing about it is a way for Finch to make sense of his suicidal thoughts and attempt to process them.



Finch doesn’t think of himself as normal in any sense of the word—but he also seems to think that Violet doesn’t necessarily know that, so he can choose to behave in ways that make him seem normal. This quest for normalcy, though, also suggests that Finch isn’t content with who he is right now—in his mind, he isn’t good enough.



Finch's family has been eating dinner together since the divorce last year. Finch enjoys it because, though he doesn't really like eating, he likes being able to "turn [his] brain off." Finch's mom asks Decca what she learned today. Decca tells the table about how a boy at school glued his hands to the desk, and his skin came off when they finally freed him. She says that the boy deserved it. Finch's mom says Decca's name in a disapproving tone, but this is as much as she ever does as a parent. Finch knows she's still upset about the divorce; Finch's dad left her for a younger woman named Rosemarie. Since then, Finch has tried to be pleasant and unobtrusive, which is why he pretends to go to school when he's in "the Asleep."

Finch's mom asks how Finch's day was, and Finch says it was good. He doesn't eat—eating, like sleeping, is a waste of time. He thinks about a Chinese man who died when he stayed awake for 11 days in a row. Finch notices his mom is looking at him funny and gives her a slightly more involved answer about his day. After dinner, his mom asks Decca if it's nice to have Finch back. Finch feels terrible: his mom thinks he was in school for the last five weeks, but he missed a lot of family dinners during that time.

That night, Finch checks Facebook and finds that Violet accepted his friend request. He's elated. He scrolls through her pictures and finds one of her with Eleanor. Finch realizes that the **glasses** Violet was wearing today were Eleanor's. Suddenly, Violet messages Finch, accusing him of "ambushing" her. Finch says that their "mountain is waiting." He insists that it's important to see Indiana, appreciate the state's sights, and make this project mean something. Violet doesn't respond, but Finch imagines her smiling. He picks up his guitar and starts to play. He's grateful to be awake—he'd miss this otherwise.

4. FINCH'S RULES FOR WANDERING

Finch's rules are that there are no rules, since life already has too many. Instead, there are guidelines: he and Violet have to use real maps, not their phones, to find places. They'll alternate choosing where they go and might also just see what they can find, but they can't go anywhere ordinary. And at each site, they have to leave something to prove that they were there.

As the conversation around the dinner table unfolds, it's clear that Finch's family isn't particularly involved in his life. His mom, for instance, doesn't seem to do much to discipline or guide her children—halfheartedly reprimanding Decca for saying something mean, Finch suggests, is the bare minimum a parent should do. And Finch also suggests that he feels an immense amount of pressure to appear normal to his family and not make waves—they don't seem to know what's going on when Finch enters "the Asleep." He cares about them, and he doesn't want to make their struggles even worse.



Again, Finch shows that he's very interested in the many ways people can die. And when it comes to dying due to lack of sleep, Finch also seems to suggest that this wouldn't be totally out of the question for him. Insomnia and a lack of appetite seem to be symptoms of Finch's illness when he's in his "awake" periods, which could suggest that he's experiencing manic episodes (periods of heightened mood and energy) when he's not "asleep." It's telling that Finch feels so guilty when his mom talks about "having him back." He doesn't want his family to worry, so he's uncomfortable with the fact that his mom missed him.



As Finch realizes that Violet's glasses are actually Eleanor's, he gains important insight into how Violet is handling her grief. In short, she's not handling it well—Violet's narration in the previous chapter confirmed that. When Finch is grateful to be awake for this moment, it suggests that he's starting to take his own advice. It's worth it, he's realizing, to stay alive—and connecting with someone else can be fulfilling.



Laying down these ground rules in addition to Mr. Black's guidelines allows Finch and Violet to better dictate how they want this project to play out. Especially when Finch insists that they can't go anywhere ordinary, it suggests that he wants them to find the beauty in the mundane sights around Indiana.



5. VIOLET: 153 DAYS TILL GRADUATION

It's Saturday night. Amanda invited Violet to a sleepover, promising it'd just be them and a handful of friends. Since the accident, Violet has been drifting away from Amanda, but Violet accidentally mentioned the sleepover to her parents. They insisted she go and "get back to living." When Violet turns the corner, she sees that the "sleepover" is actually a party with lots of people. But she goes in, accepts a red cup, and thinks that everyone is too loud. She finds Amanda and Suze on the couch in the basement. People are dancing and kissing.

Amanda waves at Violet, tells her they need to fix Violet's hair (Violet recently gave herself bangs), and asks if Violet could wear one of Eleanor's sweaters instead of her **glasses**. Ignoring this, Violet says she's going to leave because she's not feeling well. Suze asks if it's true that Violet saved Finch. Violet says it is true, but she silently wishes the day would just disappear. Suze goes on to say that Finch is weird, but she's had sex with him, and he knows what he's doing. Violet thinks that she's just glad Finch was there to save her from killing herself. She can't imagine what her parents would've done; she's here tonight in part because she feels so guilty for almost putting them through losing their last living child.

Roamer appears, sets down an ice bucket of beer, and asks why Violet was in the belltower in the first place. He notes that the door is locked and barricaded. Violet says she saw Finch sneak up; he must've picked the lock. (Violet actually picked the lock, but no one suspects her because she looks innocent.) Roamer says she should've let Finch jump after Finch threw the desk at him last year, and Amanda asks if Finch might like Violet. A year ago, Violet would've fit in at this party. She would've spent the evening writing witty commentary in her head. But now she feels out of place, and everything is too loud. When Violet sees a reporter from the school paper coming, she excuses herself, goes outside, and vomits.

The last party Violet went to was on April 4th, the night Eleanor died—and now, this party is bringing all the memories back. As Violet picks herself up from vomiting, she runs right into Ryan. He's perfect—unlike Violet. Violet wonders what he'd do if he knew Finch saved *her*, not the other way around. Ryan picks Violet up, spins her around, and tries to kiss her. Violet remembers the night of their first kiss: it was April, and it had started to snow. While Eleanor was upstairs with Ryan's older brother, Ryan led Violet outside and kissed her. Now, Violet wishes she had a picture of that moment—it was the last good moment before everything changed forever. Violet pulls away from Ryan and runs home.

Violet's parents seem intent on returning to normal after Eleanor's death. By insisting that Violet needs to "get back to living," they propose that Violet is holding herself back as she mourns her sister's death. But this also suggests that Violet's parents perhaps aren't fully aware of how much Violet is still struggling. Indeed, Violet's perception that everything is too loud suggests that she's still traumatized over the accident.



Amanda seems to think much the same thing as Violet's parents—that Violet should try harder to move on. This makes Violet feel even more alone among people who are supposed to be her friends. And this feeling gets even worse as Violet thinks about the fact that nobody except for Finch knows the truth about why she was up on the belltower. Again, it's impossible for her to ignore the stigma surrounding mental health issues and suicide in particular—and that stigma makes her feel unable to talk about her problems.



The aside that nobody suspects Violet of being able to pick locks introduces one of the novel's main ideas: that it's impossible to know everything about a person just by how they look. Violet may look innocent and be popular, but there's more to her than that. And further, Violet seems to find people's perceptions of her exhausting and difficult to manage. She no longer feels like the same person she was a year ago, when those perceptions weren't wrong. In short, she's having a hard time being herself.



Here, the novel explains why Violet is struggling so much with this party: it's bringing back all the good and bad memories of Eleanor's last night alive. When Violet insists that Ryan is perfect, unlike her, it implies that she sees herself as lesser because of her mental health issues. And again, she fears the stigma attached to contemplating suicide—this is why she wonders what Ryan would think if he knew that Finch saved her and not the other way around. Given how unmoored and upset Violet is in this moment, it's perhaps unsurprising why she's not ready to get back to "living." Living is, in many ways, too painful and brings up too many unhappy memories.



Violet's mom and Violet's dad are on the sofa when Violet gets home. They comment that she's home early, and Violet says that she knew it was a bad idea: it was a party, not a sleepover. Violet's mom invites her to sit with them and talk about it. Violet thinks that her parents are perfect, like Ryan; they're involved and supportive, but Violet is too upset to humor them. She heads upstairs and changes into her favorite pajamas and slippers. Then, she crosses off the day on the calendar with a big X and settles in with her books. She's currently trying to decide which Brontë sister she likes best.

After a while, Violet checks Facebook and finds a video that Finch posted a few hours ago. He's singing a song about jumping off the school roof, and when he's done singing, he asks Violet to confirm that she's still alive. Angry, Violet messages him and asks him to take the video down. He messages back, saying that they should talk about what happened, and he explains that Violet is the only one who saw the video—she's his only friend. He also deletes the video.

Finch suggests that he could come over so they can talk in person instead of talking online. Violet, scandalized, writes that it's too late. But when Finch notes that they could talk at lunch tomorrow, Violet says he can come over—as long as he agrees to drop the subject afterward. She regrets this immediately.

6. FINCH: DAY 7 OF THE AWAKE

Finch climbs into his mom's Saturn, which he's nicknamed Little Bastard. He pushes Little Bastard to 100 miles per hour and thinks about the Italian poet Cesare Pavese. He wrote about wanting to matter and said that "love is truly the great manifesto." Then, five months later, he chose his obituary photo and took too many sleeping pills. Finch understands the desire to matter as he pushes Little Bastard faster and faster, feeling "more awake" every second. Just when it feels like his heart and the car might explode, Finch lets off the gas and drives off the road into a ditch, but then he continues on.

Finch pulls up to Violet's house and finds her sitting on the porch. She meets him on the sidewalk, looks around like she's looking for someone, and says she doesn't need to talk—she's fine. Finch says he knows what cries for help look like and starts to walk. She pulls him in the opposite direction but then follows him down the sidewalk. Violet insists that she's not suicidal. Finch tries to get her to talk about herself and about her website, but she answers "like a robot." He insists that she should be thrilled to be alive and notes that lots of girls would be happy to be out with him.

As Violet talks about her parents and Ryan being perfect, she implies that she's flawed by comparison. This speaks, in part, to the stigma surrounding mental health issues: in Violet's mind, she's not perfect simply because she's struggling with trauma and grief. The X's on her calendar (and the countdown to graduation in her chapter titles) show that Violet also isn't making any effort to enjoy high school. She wants to move on to the next thing, as soon as possible.



Finch seems to feel the same way about mental illness as Violet does (that struggling with mental health is something private and shameful), so it's somewhat perplexing why he'd post a video about suicide on a public forum. But by doing this to reach out to Violet, he implies that they should use their mental health struggles to connect with each other.



Violet doesn't want to speak to Finch at lunch tomorrow because she knows that being seen talking to him at school will damage her reputation. This shows how precarious her social circle and support network are, if she fears that one conversation might topple them.



Cesare Pavese's story presents an interesting dilemma for Finch: is it more important to focus on finding love and mattering in one's life, or is it better to choose how one dies? As Finch pushes Little Bastard to go so fast, it suggests that he's currently focusing on living and potentially finding love with Violet. But even as Finch does this, he still can't stop thinking about death and suicide. For him, life and death are intimately connected.



Finch doesn't elaborate, but it's possible he knows what a cry for help looks like because he's asked for help before. In this sense, Finch seems to be trying to give Violet the care and compassion that he perhaps didn't receive when he asked for help. Because Finch is so interested in suicide, it's notable that he essentially tells Violet that life is worth living. He knows the socially acceptable thing to say, even if he might not always believe it.



Violet snaps at Finch, asking him what he wants. Finch drops his charming persona and asks what she was doing on the ledge, and if she's okay. Violet starts walking again, and after a few blocks, Finch promises not to tell anyone. She says that she wasn't thinking, and it's like she woke up on the ledge. She hasn't told anyone what happened. With some prodding, she admits that it was Eleanor's birthday that day—but that's not why she was up there. Violet insists that nothing matters; everything is "just time filler until we die." Finch says that he's glad to be here in any case.

Violet asks Finch why people call him "Theodore Freak." Finch decides on "a version of the truth." He says that in eighth grade, he was small and awkward—and people don't like that he does things without thinking. When they get back to Violet's house, Finch suggests they head to the Quarry, the local nightclub, but Violet says she's going to sleep. Before she heads inside, Finch asks how she got onto the belltower. With a smile, she says she picked the lock.

When Finch gets home, he parks Little Bastard and goes for his nightly run (he swims when it's warm). As he runs, he tries to outrun the words "worthless" and "stupid." Finch tells himself that this time, he'll stay awake. He runs and doesn't count the miles. He takes a new route home, over the A Street Bridge. There's still a huge hole in the guardrail and a cross near it. Finch runs down to the dried riverbed that's full of trash. He finds glass, metal, and a license plate. Suddenly, the accident is real to Finch. He grabs the license plate and runs home. He runs until all he can feel is his heartbeat and the cold metal of the license plate.

7. VIOLET: 152 DAYS TILL GRADUATION

On Sunday morning, Violet sits in her bedroom. The EleanorandViolet.com domain is expiring, so Violet sorts through her and Eleanor's ideas for the site. She doesn't understand most of Eleanor's notes. Violet makes some notes of her own and then reads the site's final post. It's silly and unimportant. Violet deletes all the notes, as well as the webhosting company's email notifying her of the expiration.

Finally, Violet starts to articulate some of her difficult emotions surrounding Eleanor's death. She suggests that it's hard to believe it's actually worth it to enjoy life when she can't do so without Eleanor. Again, the fact that Violet hasn't told anyone about being on the ledge speaks to how much she fears the way other people might treat her if they knew the truth. It's easier for her to hide her true thoughts than be vulnerable around someone else.



Both Violet and Finch start to share a little more of their true selves in this passage. Finch hints at there being one specific reason why people gave him the cruel nickname "Theodore Freak," and Violet shows Finch that she's more than a popular girl with mental health struggles—she also has skills that she keeps secret from most people.



The fact that Finch runs to "escape" words like "worthless" and "stupid" speaks to the power that words can have over a person's life. Finch implies that if he doesn't run from these words, they'll overtake him and make him feel even worse than he already does. Through this, he shows that he's trying to help himself feel better, though it's hard to tell yet if his running is actually helpful for him.



Seeing EleanorandViolet.com expire forces Violet to confront that Eleanor is gone. She seems unable to work on the site on her own—and without Eleanor to give the site meaning, it doesn't seem so important anymore. This shows how Eleanor's death seems to have robbed Violet's life of any meaning or purpose, as writing blog posts (something she previously enjoyed) no longer matters to her.



8. FINCH: DAY 8 OF THE AWAKE

On Sunday evening, Kate, Decca, and Finch drive to Finch's dad's house for their weekly dinner. They're silent on the drive over. This will be Finch's first dinner since before Thanksgiving—and his first in the home his dad shares with Rosemarie and Rosemarie's son. Kate pulls up in front of a big house that looks like all the others on the street, with new matching SUVs out front. Rosemarie answers the door, and Finch's dad comes from the backyard, where he's grilling despite the January cold. He used to play hockey professionally before he shattered his femur 12 years ago.

Finch's dad greets Kate and Decca and asks Finch how the study-away program was. Finch says it was great and tells himself to thank Kate for that lie later. His dad doesn't know about any of Finch's problems from the last year—Finch told Principal Wertz that his dad died. Now, the school only calls Finch's mom, which means they only ever talk to Kate because Finch's mom never checks voicemail.

Everyone settles in the dining room for dinner. Finch studies his stepbrother, Josh Raymond. Josh Raymond is tiny, like Rosemarie, and isn't awkward like Finch was at that age. That makes Finch think that maybe Finch's dad *isn't* Josh Raymond's father. Rosemarie serves everyone burgers, but Finch asks for a veggie burger. Finch's dad tells him to be grateful for the food, but Finch explains that he's stopped eating red meat. Rosemarie offers to make Finch a potato salad sandwich and Finch lets her, even though it has bacon in it. When Kate points out the bacon issue, Dad says Finch can pick it out, and his Canadian accent slips through—an indicator that he's getting annoyed.

When the kids get home, Finch's mom asks if they had fun. Decca says that they didn't, and she stomps upstairs. Finch's mom looks relieved as she pours a glass of wine and goes after Decca. Finch and Kate pass a bag of chips back and forth and talk about how "stupid" it is that they have to visit Finch's dad every week and pretend to like each other. Kate suggests that she might go to college in the fall; she stayed home after the divorce to look after their mom. She's thinking of going to Denver. Finch knows she's going there to be with her "cheating high school boyfriend."

The way that Finch describes his dad's new house and family contrasts greatly with how he describes his siblings and his mom. Finch's dad seems to be better off financially than Finch's mom, hence the big house and the matching SUVs that seem much newer than Little Bastard. Given that Finch has already described his dad as difficult and mean, it's possible that Finch's dad's new family and relative success makes Finch feel resentful.



This passage illustrates just how disconnected Finch's family members are from one another—and to what's going on at Finch's school. Because of the disconnect, Finch is able to come up with all sorts of explanations for his whereabouts without ever having to prove anything. This is probably how he prefers things, given his desire to keep his mental health issues secret, but it also prevents his family from knowing the full extent of his problems.



Finch seems to imply here that there's some question as to Josh Raymond's paternity. He seems to suspect that his dad might be Josh Raymond's biological father (as opposed to his stepfather), meaning that his father had Josh Raymond with Rosemarie while he was still married to Finch's mom. Finch's dad's response when Finch asks for a veggie burger shows that he's not particularly interested in respecting his children's wishes. Instead, he expects his kids to be subservient—and, in this case, grateful.



Even though Finch's family isn't particularly close or connected, Finch and Kate nevertheless seem to have a pleasant relationship. And importantly, Finch wants her to be happy and healthy—the same as he wants for Violet. But although Finch is able to understand that other people should be happy and well, it's hard for him to understand that he also deserves the same.



Later, Finch puts on Johnny Cash in his room and lights a cigarette. Suddenly, he feels like the cigarette is polluting him, and he breaks all his other cigarettes in half. Then, he pulls out his computer. He writes about the statistics related to people killing themselves with poison. Finch thinks that poison is “a coward’s way out”; he’d want to feel something. Then, he walks to the bathroom and digs through the medicine cabinet. He finds some of Kate’s old sleeping pills and takes them back to his room.

Finch lines up the sleeping pills on his desk and logs onto Facebook, where a lot of people have liked someone else’s post about Violet saving Finch. He opens up his message to Violet and writes that “obligatory family meals suck.” He quotes Virginia Woolf’s suicide note to her husband: “*I feel we can’t go through another of those terrible times.*” After Finch sends the message, he plays with the pills and adds notes to his “Wall of Thoughts,” which is covered in scribbled notes. After an hour, he checks his messages and finds that Violet replied—with a Virginia Woolf quote. Finch knows he’s in trouble; he’s not actually very familiar with Virginia Woolf.

Finch does an internet search for Virginia Woolf quotes and chooses one that seems to be an appropriate reply. The quote gives him chills; it seems to describe his life of moving between the “Asleeps and Awakes.” As Finch and Violet exchange more quotes, Violet asks where “*When you consider things like the stars, our affairs don’t seem to matter very much, do they?*” came from. Finch looks it up; it came from Woolf’s novel *The Waves*. He types out more of the passage and is surprised at how sexual this feels.

Violet takes 20 minutes to reply, so Finch checks out EleanorandViolet.com. When Violet writes back, she adds more rules for wandering. She insists that they can’t drive or go far from Bartlett. Finch suggests that they write about their wanderings—and Violet should do the writing. Violet doesn’t write back. Finch writes songs all night and wonders if they actually have chemistry with each other. Finally, he picks up the sleeping pills and considers taking them, but he flushes them instead. Then, he reads every post on EleanorandViolet.com and finally falls asleep around four a.m. He dreams that he and Violet are on the belltower, naked, and Violet leaps off with a scream.

Even though Finch describes pills as “a coward’s way out,” it’s nevertheless ominous when he promptly tracks down some sleeping pills that could kill him if he took too many. But this may also connect back to what Finch said about standing on the belltower ledge: being that close to killing himself is about control, and about reminding himself to stay alive.



Finch seems to have Virginia Woolf’s suicide note memorized; he doesn’t have to look it up or refer to the exact wording. Especially later, when Violet responds with another Virginia Woolf quote that Finch doesn’t recognize, this shows that Finch focuses on suicide at the expense of everything else. He’s familiar with Virginia Woolf, for instance, only because she committed suicide—not because of her body of work.



Exchanging these quotes—especially once things start to seem sexual to Finch—shows how people can use others’ words to help make sense of their own experiences. The fact that Violet is so taken with this particular Virginia Woolf quote is, perhaps, unsurprising—it encapsulates how insignificant she feels her life is after Eleanor’s death.



As Finch becomes more interested in Violet, his interest in suicide seems to wane. Instead of playing with the pills, for instance, he flushes them after digging through the EleanorandViolet.com archives. With this, the novel begins to suggest that connecting with another person can be beneficial to a one’s mental health. Finch’s dream, however, suggests that he can’t entirely escape his fascination with death, even as he gets closer to Violet.



9. VIOLET: 151 DAYS TILL GRADUATION

In first period Monday morning, everyone is talking about the new post in the *Bartlett Dirt*, which is the school's "gossip rag." It's about how Violet saved Finch, and the picture of Violet in Eleanor's **glasses** looks "like a makeover 'before.'" Violet watches Jordan Gripenwaldt, the editor of the school paper, discuss the article with her friends in a disgusted voice. Those girls are "smart girls who speak their minds," and Violet thinks she should be friends with them and not Amanda. Last year, she would've agreed with Jordan and her friends. But now, Violet tells her teacher she has cramps and goes to sit and read in the belltower.

Given the way that Violet describes her picture in the Bartlett Dirt, it suggests that she's becoming less enamored with her new, Eleanor-inspired look. And at the same time, Violet also starts to realize who she wants to be (or, at least, who she thinks she should be): smart, engaged, and vocal about her thoughts. This is a significant first step for Violet, but skipping class to read alone suggests that she isn't actually ready to change herself yet.



10. FINCH: DAY 9

Finch decides on Monday morning that 80s Finch has to go, mostly because the picture of him in the *Bartlett Dirt* is "unnervingly wholesome." Finch also doesn't trust this version of him to not mess up with Violet. So, during third period, Finch meets Charlie and Brenda at Goodwill. As Finch and Brenda browse the racks, Brenda tells Finch about making out with Roamer at a party over the weekend. (Though Roamer is Amanda Monk's boyfriend, he's also a jerk, and Brenda has loved him for years.) Then, they discuss what Finch is looking for. Finch wants to look sexier—and both Charlie and Brenda realize that this is because Finch has a crush on Violet.

Just like Violet, the experience of seeing his picture in the Bartlett Dirt causes Finch to rethink his identity. But while Violet simply focuses on who she'd like to be, Finch seems mired in self-loathing about his current identity as 80s Finch. The way he perceives and treats himself, in other words, isn't always kind. Meanwhile, Charlie and Brenda skip class to meet Finch at Goodwill, which shows that they're supportive of him in their own ways.



Brenda insists that Finch can't dress to please a girl; he needs to be himself. Finch thinks that would be a great idea if he knew who he was. Brenda continues to talk about Violet in a scathing tone. Finch doesn't really want to hear it, so he interjects that Violet was in the accident on the A Street Bridge last year, and Violet's sister died. At this, Brenda looks thoughtful and suggests that Finch dress more like Ryan Cross, which would mean a trip to Old Navy. Finch decides that his new self curses, so he says, "fuck Ryan Cross." Charlie finds him a "badass" leather jacket, and Brenda comes over with a big pair of boots.

Brenda suggests that Finch should think about his identity as something that should give him pleasure. Finch, however, seems far more interested in shaping himself to please others. This shows how compassionate Finch is (especially to people like his mom and Kate). As he starts to experiment with this new identity, he discovers that it gives him more freedom than 80s Finch did.



By lunchtime, Finch loves "Badass Finch"—girls like him now. When one freshman girl asks him if he's from London, Finch adopts a British accent for the rest of the day. When he joins Brenda and Charlie for lunch, he tells them all about his life in London and his Irish girlfriend. Walking to class afterwards, Finch almost believes in the story. But when he sees Ryan Cross smiling and talking to Violet in U.S. Geography, Finch comes back down to earth. Violet is too busy talking to Ryan to acknowledge Finch, and Roamer insults Finch for good measure.

For Finch, it's freeing to invent a life that's totally different from the one he actually lives. It helps him conceptualize who and what he wants to be: cool, British, and likeable. But because of how cruel Finch's peers are, it's impossible for this new identity to be anything more than a fantasy. It doesn't seem to interest Violet, for one, and Roamer ensures that Finch knows he isn't welcome by insulting him.



Class is boring, but Violet is the only one who laughs when Finch makes a joke in his British accent. After class, Finch comes up right behind Violet. In his new persona, he's not afraid of Ryan Cross or Roamer. He says in his normal voice that it's time to start wandering. Finch suggests they go to Hoosier Hill—now. Roamer mumbles that Finch should try jumping off the belltower again, but Finch ignores him. Violet insists that she can't miss class, but she agrees to go after school.

Finch's new identity does have some positive effects: now he's not afraid of Roamer. This, of course, implies that prior to becoming "Badass Finch," Finch was afraid of Roamer. This speaks to how much influence Roamer has over Finch's feelings—his bullying, in other words, is intense and damaging enough to scare Finch and alienate him from his classmates.



11. VIOLET: 151 DAYS TILL GRADUATION

Violet is in the parking lot after school with Eleanor's old bike, which Eleanor named Leroy. Brenda saunters past and points out Finch. She also warns Violet that she'll beat her up if she breaks Finch's heart and offers her condolences for Eleanor. Violet approaches Finch, thinking about *The Waves*. He forgot his bike at home, so Violet follows him in his car to his house. He says that Violet can put her bag in his bedroom. She's surprised that the inside of the house looks totally normal—but she's shocked when she sees the inside of Finch's room, which is painted red. Everything else is black, and there are concert posters and pieces of paper on the wall.

Because of Finch's reputation, Violet seems to expect something more interesting than a normal-looking house. The fact that Violet made assumptions about this suggests that she's using Finch's reputation at school to extrapolate more about him. But seeing how normal Finch's home shows her that Finch might not be so different from her, despite what others say about him.



Finch explains that the wall of notes is just that—ideas. Violet studies them and wonders about one, which reads "Is today a good day to?" She asks about another that reads "obelisk," and Finch explains that it's his favorite word. Violet says nothing. She used to love words, but now they all frustrate her. Back outside, they mount their bikes. Finch's shirt rides up to reveal a huge scar; he says he drew it on because girls like scars. When they discuss that Violet hasn't been in a car since the accident, Finch insists that's ridiculous, and Violet threatens to head home.

The "Is it a good day to?" note is presumably the first part of the novel's first line: "Is today a good day to die?" The fact that Finch didn't finish it suggests he doesn't want to alarm anyone by putting in writing that he's thinking about suicide, at least where people might see it. (He does have the documents on his computer about suicide, but the novel implies that he expects those to stay private.)



As Finch and Violet pass cornfields, Violet almost feels like her old self. Finch says he likes driving because of its "forward motion," "like you might go anywhere." He remarks that he'd expect Violet to wear a helmet or body armor for safety, and he asks what she'd do if Bartlett was affected by a zombie apocalypse. She stays silent, so Finch asks where she'd go if she could go anywhere. Violet thinks she'd go to New York, but she says she'd go to California. Privately, she thinks she'd go to the California of four years ago, where Eleanor is still alive. Violet says that California is warm and doesn't snow. Finch says that he'd go to the top of Hoosier Hill with a pretty girl.

On some level, it seems that Violet truly does want to get back to being who she was before Eleanor died. Wanting to go to New York suggests that Violet is still dreaming about attending NYU, even if she hasn't applied. However, these desires for the future conflict with desires that are driven more by her grief. Wanting to go back to her old life in California is, of course, impossible, but dreaming about it is one way that Violet can process her grief.



When they reach the spot, Finch and Violet leave their bikes. Some kids on a fence point them in the right direction. Finch puts on an Australian accent and asks if they can scale the summit, but the kids just shrug. Finch leads Violet along a narrow dirt path. Suddenly, they come out into a brown circle, with a marker saying they're 1,257 feet high. There's a stone pile to mark the spot and a picnic table; it's wildly underwhelming. Finch takes Violet's hand and pulls her onto the stones. Violet feels an electric shock in her hand and tells herself it's just from touching someone new, but she also can't concentrate as Finch talks about the view in various accents.

Violet notices how blue Finch's eyes are as he says that standing next to Violet makes him feel like he's on Mt. Everest. Violet rips her hand away but can still feel the electrical current. They wander the brown circle, and Violet thinks that 10 months ago, she could've written something amazing about Hoosier Hill. She then insists this place is ugly. Finch says he used to think the same, but he tries to remember that it's beautiful to someone—some people chose to live here. He smiles. Violet wishes he had glasses she could borrow, so that she could see the same thing.

Finch makes jokes as they discuss their project, and Violet stops herself from laughing. He tells her that it's okay to laugh—even if she ends up in hell, they'll be too busy with him to bother with her. Violet wants to know everything about Finch; there are so many rumors. She asks if the stories are true, and he says they probably are. He looks at Violet as though he wants to kiss her. For a second, she wants him to—but then she asks where they're going next. Finch makes no move to get the map out of his backpack and then suggests they jump off the rock mound.

Violet pulls out her phone to take some pictures, and Finch shoves a notebook at her. Though she'd rather do anything than write, she scribbles a few notes. Then, they sit at the picnic table to study the map. Finch insists they need to see more than two sites—ideally, they'd see them all. Violet protests, but Finch draws red circles around a bunch of different landmarks. Violet insists that there are too many.

Violet and Finch get back to Bartlett in the evening, and Violet waits outside Finch's house as he fetches her bag. When he gets back to the driveway, Violet remembers Suze saying that Finch knows what to do with a girl—and suddenly, Violet feels shy. She puts on Eleanor's **glasses**. Finch says he wanted to do this project with Violet because she smiled a genuine smile at him.

Hoosier Hill might not seem like much, yet someone still thought it was worth it to mark this spot and market it as a local attraction. Hoosier Hill's outward appearance, in other words, doesn't mean that it's not meaningful—a lesson that both Violet and Finch could take to heart. Moreover, this also becomes the place where the chemistry between them starts to intensify, thereby imbuing the place and this trip with more significance.



Again, Finch suggests that what makes a place special is the people in it, not necessarily the place itself. And Finch also insists that perspective largely determines what people find beautiful or not. When Violet wishes for glasses so that she could see what Finch sees, it shows that she's starting to take this idea to heart.



Finch seems to suspect that Violet feels guilty about enjoying life after Eleanor's death. But he also suggests to her that she shouldn't worry so much, since life does—and indeed, should—go on after a loss. As the chemistry and flirtation intensifies between Violet and Finch, Violet also starts to see that her life will indeed go on. She just has to be open to connecting with someone else.



It's significant that Finch is able to convince Violet to write, even just a little bit. Finch is uniquely able to show Violet that it's necessary to overcome her aversion to writing, if only so that she can complete her schoolwork.



Violet's gesture of putting on Eleanor's glasses implies that Violet didn't wear them on their trip to Hoosier Hill. Given that the glasses symbolize her grief and desire to keep Eleanor's memory alive by looking and acting like her, this perhaps suggests that Violet was more herself while on that trip with Finch. But as spending time with Finch starts to seem more intimidating, Violet retreats back into where she's comfortable: with Eleanor's memory.



Violet's dad makes chicken piccata that night. Violet joins her dad and Violet's mom at the table and tells them about the project. Her dad offers to help, but both Violet and her mom cut him off (he's notorious for taking over projects). Violet's mom starts to ask about Finch, so Violet changes the subject by asking her dad to explain the history of chicken piccata—he can't resist explaining the history of things. After dinner, Violet goes upstairs and checks Facebook. Finch messages her that he feels like he just walked into Narnia. Violet researches quotes from *The Chronicles of Narnia*, but instead of sending one, she marks the day off on her calendar. She thinks about graduation and about Finch. This is the best day she's had in months.

Finch saying that he feels like he walked into Narnia suggests that whatever's brewing in his relationship with Violet is wholly new to him. It feels so different as to be fictional and fantastical. As Violet considers Finch alongside her impending graduation, she starts to see the value in focusing on the time between now and then. These days, after all, could be filled with fun, meaningful experiences with Finch—they don't have to just be days on the calendar. As Violet starts to make this shift, her outlook on life begins to improve.



12. FINCH: THE NIGHT OF THE DAY MY LIFE CHANGED

It's dinnertime at Finch's house. Though Finch's mom asks Decca what she learned first, Finch asks if he can go first. His mom looks nervous. Finch says he learned that there's good in the world, that not everyone is disappointing, and a "bump in the ground" can feel taller than anything if you're with the right person. Finch's mom says that's interesting. After dinner, Finch observes that his mom looks "dazed and disconcerted," as usual. He feels bad for her since Finch's dad broke her heart and destroyed her self-worth, so he offers to do the dishes. She's always tired now that she's working two jobs.

Just like Violet, Finch's outlook is beginning to change as a result of their budding relationship. Finch, for once, isn't thinking about dying—rather, he seems to imply that life seems worth living. But when Finch mentions that not everyone is disappointing, this suggests that he feels so hopeless sometimes because he doesn't have the support he craves. Given his mom's half-hearted, confused response, readers can infer that she's probably one of the people he finds disappointing, even though he loves her.



Just as Finch puts on his shoes to go for a run, icy sleet starts to fall. He decides to take a bath instead. It's hard to squeeze into the tub since he's twice as long as it is, but he puts his feet up the wall until his head is totally underwater. He pretends he's in a lake. For Finch, **water** is peaceful and safe. Everything—including his racing thoughts—slows down. Finch's mind drifts to Virginia Woolf. In 1941, after her third breakdown, she wrote a note to her husband, filled her pockets with rocks, and drowned in the river.

Finch's relationship to water is complex. It's peaceful, it helps him feel more in control, and he seems to genuinely enjoy swimming and water. But he also shows here that he likes water in part for the fact that it could kill him, just as it killed Virginia Woolf. Importantly, Finch also seems intrigued by Woolf's suicide note in particular—it's the same one that Finch quoted to Violet on Facebook in Chapter 8.



Finch's lungs begin to burn. He's not sure how long he's been underwater, but it's been several minutes at least. He thinks about the man who holds the world record for holding his breath the longest (22 minutes and 22 seconds). As he thinks about Woolf's suicide note to her husband, particularly the part where she says that if anyone could've saved her it would've been him, Finch sits up out of the **water**. He's glad no one can see him. He doesn't feel a rush that he survived—he's just empty and out of breath.

The way that Finch describes feeling after coming up out of the water implies that he expected to feel powerful and in-control after this experience. Instead, he finds himself exhausted and struggling to breathe so he can stay alive. With this, Finch has to confront that water might make him feel powerful sometimes—but it also has the ability to make him feel powerless and meaningless.



13. VIOLET: 148 DAYS TILL GRADUATION

In U.S. Geography on Thursday, Violet's phone buzzes repeatedly. The *Bartlett Dirt* just published an article of the top 10 suicidal students in school (Finch is the top of the list). Jordan Gripenwaldt put resources on the front page of the official school paper, but nobody is paying any attention. To distract herself from the articles, Violet asks Ryan about his Indiana project. Amanda is the only other person in class ignoring her phone, and she asks Violet if working with Finch is awful. When Violet says it isn't, Amanda shrieks that Violet must like Finch.

Fortunately, the bell rings, and Mr. Black calls the class to attention. Ryan slips Violet a note asking her to the drive-in on Saturday as Mr. Black writes pop quiz questions on the board. Finch saunters into the room five minutes later. Violet thinks that he's the person who knows her worst secret. Finch apologizes to Mr. Black in his Australian accent, plops a big rock on Violet's desk, and gives Mr. Black an apple. Roamer mimes hanging himself, and the class finally quiets down. When Violet is done with her quiz, she flips the rock over: it reads "Your turn."

When class ends, Finch slips out before Violet can talk to him. Ryan walks Violet to Spanish class and jealously asks if the rock is a thank-you for saving Finch's life. Violet tells Ryan to not be "that guy," the one who's jealous that his ex-girlfriend is doing a project with someone else. Ryan insists they should get back together and smiles. Without thinking, Violet kisses his cheek, surprising both of them.

At dinner that evening, Violet's mom asks if she was on the belltower at school last week. Violet chokes on her food. When she's able to talk again, Violet's mom explains that a reporter called, and she asks why Violet didn't tell them. Violet insists people are making a big deal out of it. Violet's dad wants to know who the boy is that she saved. He and Violet's mom exchange a look, and Violet knows that now they're going to expect more of her. Casually, Violet's mom suggests that they take a spring break trip to New York. The family hasn't gone on a trip since Eleanor died. Violet says that sounds great, but her parents know she's lying.

That night, Violet has her recurring nightmare again: someone comes up behind her and strangles her. She wakes up and reaches for her laptop. "Before," she would've written something. Violet writes a few words and then erases them. Writing without Eleanor here feels like cheating on her—but in a way, *living* when Eleanor isn't feels like cheating on Eleanor.

Drawing attention to Finch's suicidal thoughts through this article speaks to how callous and cruel some of Violet and Finch's peers are. They don't show Finch much compassion—they still treat him like a curiosity instead of someone who needs help. The fact that Amanda is, like Violet, ignoring her phone suggests that there may be more to Amanda than meets the eye. She, perhaps, is also struggling with a mental health issue and doesn't find the Bartlett Dirt article funny.



Violet conceptualizes her suicidality as her "worst secret"—to her, it's shameful and horrifying. This is perhaps unsurprising, given how Roamer mimes hanging himself in a clear attempt to upset Finch. To many of Violet and Finch's classmates, suicide seems to be a joke that deserves to be mocked. Violet might fear that she'd receive the same treatment if people knew about her mental health struggles.



Though Violet thinks of herself as totally different from the person that Ryan used to date, Ryan doesn't seem to see things the same way. This suggests that for all her inner turmoil, Violet is successfully acting like everything is normal and convincing people that she's okay.



Violet implies that one of the reasons she doesn't want people to find out that she "saved" Finch is because people are going to think she's no longer grieving Eleanor. She seems to believe that her parents only suggest the spring break trip after hearing about this because they see this as proof that Violet is improving. In Violet's mind, however, she's not actually better yet. She's still reeling from Eleanor's death, even as life is beginning to seem more meaningful thanks to Finch.



Violet's guilt and grief make it difficult, if not impossible, for her to feel like she deserves to keep living. At this point, her grief is keeping her from doing the one thing the novel suggests might help her start to recover: writing.



Violet signs into Facebook. Forty minutes ago, just after one a.m., Finch messaged her that the world's tallest woman and one of the tallest men came from Indiana—what does that say about the state? Violet responds and thinks she should get some sleep, but Finch writes back a few minutes later. They discuss what Finch will do if he never stops growing, and Violet mentions that she's awake after a nightmare. Finch says he's awake to keep Violet company and that he'll meet Violet at her house.

Messaging with Finch on Facebook reminds Violet that there's more to life than her sorrows. There are silly, perhaps unanswerable questions to think about, like why Indiana seems to produce so many tall people. With this, Violet starts to see that continuing to live is worthwhile. These chats with Finch show her what's possible if she's willing to put aside her grief and accept help and connection.



14. FINCH: DAY 13

Finch throws rocks at Violet's window and then waits for a while, but she doesn't come out. Finally, he heads home. Back in his bedroom, he writes a list of strategies for staying awake. These include running, writing (even the bad thoughts, so he can get them out of his mind), and driving. He writes that he needs to do "whatever it takes" to remind himself that he's here and is in control. His final strategy is one word: Violet.

Finch may be romantically interested in Violet, but he reveals here that she's more to him than just a love interest. She's an important person who, he believes, might be able to keep his mental health issues at bay. Again, writing all of this down allows Finch to put his thoughts into words so that he can better make sense of them.



15. VIOLET: 147-146 DAYS TILL FREEDOM

Violet walks out the front door in the morning and finds Finch lying in her lawn. His bike is in the street. He grouses about Violet ignoring him as Violet grabs Leroy. Finch asks where they're going wandering tomorrow, but Violet thinks about her invitation to go with Ryan to the drive-in. She says she's not free tomorrow. After riding for a bit in silence, Finch says that since he saved Violet's life, he should know what happened during the accident. Violet wobbles, and Finch reaches out to steady her bike.

Given what Finch revealed in the previous chapter (that he intends on using his relationship with Violet to stave off another mental health decline), it seems likely that Finch is in Violet's yard for this reason. But because Finch is so unwilling to vocalize what exactly he's struggling with, Violet has no way of knowing that, and Finch's behavior is confusing.



After another minute of riding in silence, Finch asks what happened and offers to tell Violet how he got his scar. He says he wants to know because he likes Violet as a friend—and talking might help her. He agrees to go first and says he was playing a show in Chicago. Some guy got upset that he played so well and cut him with his guitar pick. Violet can't tell if he's lying or not, so she says she'll only tell him if he tells her the truth. Violet speeds ahead to the bike rack and Finch pulls in behind her, laughing. Just then, Violet gets a text message from Suze that reads, "Theodore Freak?! WTF?!" She tells Finch she has plans tomorrow night, and he calls her "Ultraviolet" as he walks away.

Violet's uncertainty about whether Finch is telling the truth about his scar or not suggests that Finch's attempts to keep people guessing about him have worked. Even if a story seems outlandish, Violet realizes that she has to at least consider the possibility that it's true. Meanwhile, the text from Suze forces Violet to confront that while she may be having fun with Finch, her friends have different ideas about who she should be hanging out with. In this way, they pressure her to maintain a certain identity that may not match up with how she feels inside.



On Saturday, Violet agrees to talk on the phone with the reporter. But when the reporter asks if Violet got closure since she could save Finch but not Eleanor, Violet hangs up. She's seething when Ryan shows up. They walk to the drive-in, find Amanda and Roamer, and climb into Roamer's Impala. As the movie starts, Ryan, Roamer, and Amanda talk about their plans for Indiana University in the fall. Violet thinks about how rude she's being to Finch when he saved her life. Wandering with him would be more fun than this.

When the second movie starts, Roamer and Amanda go to the front seat. Violet tries not to listen to their slurping sounds. She tries to talk to Ryan, but he tries to put his hand up her shirt. Unwilling to have sex in the back of a car, Violet gets out. She wonders what Finch is doing and thinks she owes him a wander. Ryan kisses Violet and for a while, she lets him. She imagines it's last year, when she, Eleanor, Ryan, and Ryan's older brother were here at the drive-in. Violet pulls away and says she has a curfew. Ryan walks her home, but Violet doesn't let him kiss her goodnight.

16. FINCH: DAY 15 (I AM STILL AWAKE)

Finch shows up at Violet's house early and introduces himself to her parents. They invite him for breakfast and tell him about Violet before the accident. When Violet comes downstairs, they've just told Finch about how Violet and Eleanor once chased the band Boy Parade across three states for an interview. Violet looks mortified.

Violet and Finch go outside, and Violet tells Finch where they're going. As she goes to get her bike, Finch says he didn't bring his—and he promises to drive slowly and stop if she wants to. He points out that they've seen all they can bike to and asks her to at least sit in the car. Violet snaps that Finch is selfish and can't make people do things, but Finch says that he just got a good picture from Violet's parents of how she used to be. No one, he says, is willing to push her and upset her, but she needs a shove. Angry, Violet pushes past Finch and climbs into the passenger seat of Little Bastard.

The reporter suggests that closure and grief are neat and tidy: Violet will feel better because she saved Finch, thereby making up for not being able to save Eleanor. Sentiments like these contribute to Violet's sense that nobody understands her. For one, people don't know that Finch was the one who saved her. They also don't seem to grasp that Violet's grief is complex and nuanced than this—it's not something she can easily move past.



After spending a bit of time with Finch, Violet's other friends don't seem nearly as interesting or fun anymore. This makes it clear that Violet is starting to reconsider the kind of person she'd like to be. While she can't escape her memories of a happier past, she nevertheless realizes that the activities she used to do and the relationships she used to have are no longer fulfilling.



Talking to Violet's parents like this is a deliberate move on Finch's part. He realizes that he's not going to get much information out of Violet about what she was like before Eleanor's death. But her parents, who desperately want to see their daughter return to normal, seem more than willing to share.



Violet's anger at being talked into getting into Little Bastard shows that healing isn't always comfortable and natural. Rather, moving on from one's grief sometimes requires making choices that are difficult and uncomfortable. And while it's possible to take issue with Finch's pushiness, Finch also seems to recognize that he's in a unique position to be able to help Violet. The rest of her support network, he suggests, would never dream of pushing her this hard to move on out of fear of losing Violet's trust.



Violet notices the blanket and pillow in the backseat, but Finch promises he's not trying to seduce her. From the lawn, Finch tells her to put on her seatbelt and close the door. Then, he walks around and leans in the driver's side door. Violet sighs, "okay." Finch drives slowly and asks Violet if she's okay at each block. When they get onto the main drag, Finch speeds up a little—but he's still driving slowly enough to anger other drivers. To keep himself from trying to race them, he talks about how, as a kid, he'd run in circles until he wore a ring into the carpet.

Finch is feeling fantastic—he got Violet into the car, and Finch's dad is out of town for business. He asks her about the accident. Surprisingly, she says that Eleanor was upset but wouldn't let Violet drive. Violet had suggested the A Street Bridge, and she remembers Eleanor screaming and flying through the air—and then she woke up in the hospital. Finch asks Violet about Eleanor, and she says that Eleanor was funny, sweet, and stubborn. She was her best friend. Finch has never had a best friend, and he asks what it's like. Violet says it means you can be yourself, and fights aren't so scary. She apologizes about Roamer. Finch says that "sorry wastes time." It's essential to live life like you'll never have to be sorry.

Finch and Violet pull in at the Bookmobile Park, a stretch of flat land with parked trailers. Violet explains that she and her family used to go on bookstore hunts and go looking for copies of specific books. As soon as the car stops, Violet heads for the first bookmobile. There, a woman introduces herself to Finch and explains the history of the bookmobiles (they used to tour the state until the 1980s, when she and her husband bought and parked them). The woman leads Finch through the trailers and Violet finds an armful of books she'd like to buy.

Finch gives the woman cash for the books, and while she goes to get change, Finch and Violet peruse the other trailers and choose a few more books. When the woman gets back, she insists that Finch keep the change, so he hides a \$20 bill in a trailer. Then, Finch and Violet head back toward the car. Violet says they're done with their project now, but Finch says they need to get Violet out of her safe zone. Violet walks ahead and ignores Finch, but this doesn't bother him. Most people ignore him. He takes off running and pictures himself dead. Violet passes him and wins their race to the car. Finch gives her the notebook and says that they're going to one more place today.

Finch and Violet's relationship may be new, but Violet nevertheless shows that she trusts Finch by agreeing to ride as a passenger in his car. And Finch shows how much he cares for Violet by driving slowly to make sure she stays comfortable. His desire to please Violet shines through here, as it seems to take a lot of effort for him to not race the other, faster cars—and he resists for Violet's sake.



It's unclear if Violet has told anyone else (like Mrs. Kresney, her counselor) exactly what happened during the accident. But it's nevertheless telling that she chooses to tell Finch now, as this shows how much she trusts him. Especially considered alongside the fact that Finch got Violet into a car again, this suggests that Violet and Finch's relationship is helping Violet to heal. Finch is providing her a space where she feels safe, and as though she can talk about these difficult experiences without people accusing her of being unwilling to move on.



This trip to the Bookmobile Park allows Violet to remember the past while, at the same time, making new, happy memories with Finch. This suggests that Violet is starting to realize that she doesn't have to forget the past or Eleanor in order to move on. She can, through activities like this, honor Eleanor while also living and enjoying her life.



It's no doubt uncomfortable for Violet to hear Finch talking about getting her out of her comfort zone, and Finch seems uniquely able to pressure her to try new things. This is, in part, because it doesn't bother him when she ignores him, since people often ignore him anyway. So, any of Violet's protests might not affect Finch as much as they would someone else.



17. VIOLET: 145 DAYS TILL LIBERATION

Finch misses the turnoff, so he drives right over the median to fix his mistake. In a tiny town, Finch parks and leads Violet to an abandoned factory. When they get close, Violet sees that someone wrote “Before I die…” on the wall. After that, there are columns of “Before I die I want to ___” with people’s desires filled in. Finch and Violet read what people have written, and then Finch gives Violet a piece of chalk. He says that they’re going to fill a lot of lines so they can figure out why they’re here. He starts writing about wanting to “find the Great Manifesto,” “count for something,” and “matter.” Violet writes that she wants to drive, write, breathe, and stop being afraid.

Finch leans over Violet’s shoulder and writes that he’d like to kiss her. Violet kind of wants him to; she hasn’t kissed many boys. But Finch says he’s not going to kiss her here, and he doesn’t like her like that anyway. Once they’re back on the road, Violet’s mind races. She keeps thinking about kissing Finch and wonders if she *does* like him. Back in Bartlett, Finch drives to the Quarry, where the bouncer lets them in without checking their IDs. Finch leads Violet to the dance floor, and Violet shouts at him that she doesn’t like him, either. Finch laughs.

18. FINCH: DAY 15 (STILL)

On the way to Violet’s house, Finch suggests epitaphs for people they know, like Amanda and Roamer. He asks what Violet’s epitaph would say. She says she doesn’t know, but her voice sounds faraway. She asks what Finch’s would be, and Finch says, “Theodore Finch, in search of the Great Manifesto.” He explains that this means he wants to count for something and “remain a memory.” Violet asks why he wasn’t in school on Friday, and Finch claims that he had a headache, which isn’t a total lie. His headaches aren’t normal headaches—his brain seems to go too fast, and he can see, hear, and feel everything. When he tried to tell Kate about it once, she suggested it was Finch’s dad’s fault for hitting him. Finch knows this isn’t true: his headaches are all part of his “godlike brain.”

Violet asks if Finch is okay now, and Finch studies her. He knows it’s impossible to keep people from going away or dying, and he knows that no one can keep him awake or stop him from sleeping. But he likes her. He says he thinks he’s okay.

Finch doesn’t say so outright, but bringing Violet to this spot is an attempt to get her to focus on all the reasons her life is worth living. Asking her to think about and write down all the things she’d like to do someday essentially gives Violet a goal—she has to stay alive so she can accomplish these things, at the very least. Writing these things down and sharing them with Finch also makes them seem realer than they would if Violet kept them to herself.



As Violet’s thoughts start to shift from grieving Eleanor to being excited about her budding relationship with Finch, her desire to live increases. Further, Finch writing that he’d like to kiss Violet gives them both something to look forward to. It increases the tension between them, and it also ensures that Violet is going to agree to see Finch again.



Because readers know that Finch is still seriously considering suicide, his insistence that he wants to matter and “remain a memory” may alarm readers. It suggests that Finch might act out at school in part so that people won’t forget him when he’s gone. Furthermore, Kate seems to imply that Finch’s headaches are the result of physical trauma, like a concussion. But Finch says the headaches are part of his “godlike brain,” which suggests that he thinks of his headaches as an asset and something that makes him special.



Again, there’s a major disconnect here because readers know that Finch could go back into a period of being “asleep” (depressed) any time—but Violet doesn’t. Not confiding in her means that Violet doesn’t have all the information she might need to help him.



When Finch gets home, he checks the landline voicemail. There's a message from Mr. Embry informing Finch's mom that Finch missed his Friday counseling session—and he's concerned because he saw the *Bartlett Dirt*. Finch erases the message and then goes to his room to contemplate hanging. He's too tall, unless he hangs himself in the basement—but then it might be months before his mom or sisters find him. Finch shares that hanging is a popular suicide method in the UK, since people think it's quick and easy. But this isn't actually true: if the rope isn't the right length, it's horrible. A judicial hanging, meanwhile, is known as “the Long Drop.”

Finch thinks a long drop is what it feels like to “Sleep.” He goes from Awake to Asleep all at once; everything stops. Sometimes there are warnings, like the headaches. Space starts to feel weird and loud. A few years ago, Finch asked his then-best friend Gabe Romero if he ever felt sound or saw headaches, or if he ever thought jumping in front of a car would make it stop. Finch had asked Roamer to try it with him because he thought he wasn't real and was therefore invincible. But Roamer told his parents, and before long, everyone knew. Finch became Theodore Freak, and he's never going to grow out of that label.

This is why Finch pretends to be normal, even though he knows he's different. He tells himself it's his own fault that he can't be normal, like Roamer or Ryan. Finch stands on a chair, imagining the Asleep coming. He decides that his room is too big; small spaces are better. He moves furniture around to cut his room in half and make it smaller. Though Finch's mom, Decca, and Kate are all home, nobody asks what he's doing. The last time any of them were in Finch's room was four years ago. He had the flu, and Kate took care of him.

19. FINCH: DAYS 16 AND 17

Since Finch missed his Friday session, he decides to make it up to Mr. Embry by telling him about Violet. First, as usual, Mr. Embry asks Finch if he's thought about or tried to hurt himself. Finch says he hasn't, but he also knows the best thing is to say nothing. Then, Mr. Embry startles Finch by saying he read the *Bartlett Dirt* article. The article bothers Finch, though he tries not to let Mr. Embry see that.

Erasing the message from Mr. Embry is a way of Finch manipulating his support network to make it less effective. Though Finch has already called his mom's willingness or ability to intervene into question, making sure she doesn't get Mr. Embry's messages is a surefire way to keep her from even trying to help. Contemplating hanging, meanwhile, reminds readers that Finch isn't becoming any less interested in suicide just because he's spending time with Violet.



As Finch talks about the clues that another period of “Asleep” (depression) is coming, he gives readers important warning signs to look out for going forward—since he's experiencing headaches now, it suggests that Finch is starting to decline and get closer to the Asleep. Then, Finch reveals why he and Roamer are sworn enemies: Roamer was the one who first made Finch feel like his mental health issues made him weird and lesser.



The stigma surrounding mental health issues makes Finch feel like it is his fault for not being “normal”—though it's clear that he has no fault in or control over his illness. Again, the consequence of this stigma is that Finch feels unable to get help. And when he talks about how disinterested his sisters and mom are, he also implies that even if he were to ask for help, he may not receive it.



It's significant that Finch feels the need to “make up” his missed session to Mr. Embry. This suggests that Finch truly likes and doesn't want to worry Mr. Embry, offering some hope that Finch may, at some point, be willing to accept Mr. Embry's help instead of brushing him off and making jokes.



Then, Finch decides to show Mr. Embry how much he has to live for by talking about a girl named Lizzy (so that he doesn't have to reveal Violet's name). After a while, Mr. Embry tells Finch to be careful. Finch is annoyed, since Mr. Embry is implying that this relationship will end. He'd like to just be congratulated. Finch starts to think of all the ways Violet might break his heart, so he picks at his chair and thinks up more epitaphs. Mr. Embry brings Finch's attention back by asking where he's going to college—his SAT scores are amazing—but Finch isn't sure. Then, the session ends.

The high school is huge, so Finch doesn't see Violet much. On Tuesday, he decides to walk Violet to every one of her classes. He spends his day running all over and unfortunately runs into Principal Wertz. Wertz reminds Finch that he's on probation, so Finch walks until he's out of the principal's sight. But as Finch runs up the stairs, he crashes into Roamer, who then bumps into Amanda. Finch continues to run until he gets to Violet. She's angry and says he's driving her crazy. Finch leans in close, angry now as well. But then the baseball coach, Mr. Kappel, yanks Finch back and gives both him and Violet detention.

20. VIOLET: 142 DAYS TO GO

At two a.m. on Wednesday, Violet wakes up to rocks hitting her window—Finch is outside. She opens her window and tells him to go away; she's still angry at him for getting her detention. But Finch threatens to climb the tree if she doesn't come out, so Violet meets him on the porch. Finch tells Violet to put on some shoes, get a coat, and leave her parents a note. She complies. Then, Finch drives them into Bartlett's downtown and parks. He explains that he does his best thinking at night, when there's no one else awake to disturb him. Violet wonders if he ever sleeps.

Finch then leads Violet into the local bookstore, where Finch's mom works when she's not selling houses. He pulls muffins and sodas out of a fridge and leads Violet to the beanbags in the children's area. Violet watches him search the shelves. Finch admits that he's looking for something, but the store doesn't have it. Then, he sits down and immerses himself in a kids' book. Violet says she's still mad about detention. But Finch reaches out to take Violet's hand. It feels like an apology.

It's important that although Finch tries to make it seem like he has a lot to live for, he's still considering suicide. Put another way, even Finch thinks of his relationship with Violet as a reason to live, this isn't enough to save him. The revelation that Finch has exceptional SAT scores drives home how alienated he feels because of his mental illness. High SAT scores offer him a way to succeed, as he could get into a good college and set himself up for a successful future—but instead of taking that opportunity, Finch is unmoored and noncommittal.



Thanks to the first-person narration, readers know exactly why Finch chooses to walk Violet to class: he's falling for her, and he wants to spend as much time with her as possible so that he can impress her. But this isn't something that his classmates see. Instead, Principal Wertz and Mr. Kappel see Finch as a troublemaker, while Roamer and Amanda become even more entrenched in their perception of Finch as weird and unpredictable.



Violet is upset about the detention in part because people see her as popular and perfect, and getting detention messes up this image. It's also telling that, thus far, Violet is the only person who seems to question if Finch's sleeping habits are normal. Readers are aware that Finch doesn't sleep when he's in a period of "Awake" (heightened mood and energy) between his depressive episodes. This is a part of his mental illness—so it's concerning that only one person seems to notice that something might be amiss.



Reading children's books allows Finch and Violet to see the world from a different perspective. They can experiment with a simpler, more aspirational vision of the future—and perhaps of the past as well. And when Finch and Violet make up while reading these books, it suggests that being exposed to these new ways of thinking can help people form healthier relationships.



After a while, Finch and Violet start to read Dr. Seuss's *Oh, the Places You'll Go!* aloud. They take turns reading stanzas, and after a while, Finch gets up and starts acting it out. Watching him is more fun than anything else as he makes his voice sad and then light again. Near the end, he pulls Violet to her feet, and they dance around before collapsing, laughing.

Finch and Violet go to the Purina Tower, which is only accessible by a steel ladder. Finch brings up the blanket, and he and Violet huddle under it. From this high up, it's hard to tell which lights are stars, and which are houses. Violet says that it's lovely, and Finch takes her hand. He says she should use the word "lovely" more often. Suddenly, Violet is jealous of Finch's brain and his way with words.

Finch notes that everyone would be happier if they celebrated the small things and remembered that there are places like the Purina Tower. Violet says that she likes writing, but maybe that part of her is over. Finch suggests that everything has "a built-in ending," like lightbulbs that are only supposed to burn for so many hours. Most people live a long time, but Eleanor only lived to 18. Finch says that Violet gets to decide if she's reached the end of her writing time and hands her the pen and notebook. He goes to the guardrail and shouts all the things he hates and wants to change.

Finch calls for Violet to do the same. Instead, she stands a little behind Finch, holding his shirt, and wonders why Eleanor left her. Finch starts singing Dr. Seuss. Later, when Finch drops Violet at home, Violet wants him to kiss her. He doesn't, but he says that he's certain she's not a bad writer.

21. FINCH: DAY 22 AND I'M STILL HERE

Finch knows something is wrong the moment he walks into Finch's dad and Rosemarie's house on Sunday. Rosemarie explains that Finch's dad is in the basement, and Finch tells Kate that he'll talk to their dad. They all know their dad must be in one of "his moods." Finch finds his dad watching sports, surrounded by his hockey trophies. He walks into his dad's line of sight, startling him, and says that his original family is here—and they don't want to hang out with his new wife and kid. For once, Finch isn't afraid of his dad. Finch's dad slams his beer down hard enough to shatter the bottle, flies off the couch, and slams Finch into the wall. The room spins, and Finch runs upstairs. Later, when Finch's dad joins everyone for dinner, he acts like nothing is wrong.

Oh, the Places You'll Go! encourages young readers to understand that life is worth living even though it's hard. The fact that Finch throws himself so fully into acting the book out suggests that he's trying to take its message to heart.



Finch seems to be trying to show Violet that it is possible for her to regain some semblance of her former self, if only she makes an effort to notice how beautiful and interesting words can be. Violet's jealousy likely stems from her feelings of being stuck—she's not quite ready to take his advice to heart.



Readers know that Finch regularly considers suicide, so it's especially significant that Finch seems to seek out "the small things" and "lovely" places like the Purina Tower. He seems to be trying to convince himself of what he's telling Violet: that life is worth living, and that there are many things in life that are worth celebrating. The idea of "built-in endings," meanwhile, offers Violet and Finch a framework to think about their identities. Everything in their lives—including aspects of their identities—might change or disappear at some point, and that's normal and expected.



Again, Violet is still grieving Eleanor, so she isn't on board with joining Finch in shouting what she wants to change. She's still stuck in the past to some degree, and she wants that happy time back.



This passage characterizes Finch's dad as violent, dangerous, and perhaps mired in grief over his former hockey career. In the last chapter Finch proposed the idea of "built-in endings" for things, which suggests that Finch may have come up with that idea after seeing his father cope poorly with life changes. Though Finch is struggling to live happily, he nevertheless seems to be trying to adapt and cope in healthier ways than his parents have.



When Finch, Kate, and Decca get back home, Finch kisses Finch's mom and says he's going out. He gets into Little Bastard and starts the engine but doesn't open the garage door. His hands are shaking. Finch has wanted to kill Finch's dad since his dad first sent his mom to the hospital. A year after that, Finch ended up in the hospital after one of his dad's "moods."

Here, the novel confirms that Finch's dad is violent to the point of being dangerous to those around him. This also starts to explain why Finch feels so compelled to protect his mom from his own mental health issues: he doesn't want to hurt her the way his dad hurt them.



Car exhaust suicide used to be common in the U.S., but it's gotten rarer in recent years. Finch forces his mind to go blank, but he remembers how one man who tried to kill himself this way unwittingly killed his family members when they tried to save him. He thinks of his mom and sisters, opens the garage door, and drives, feeling like a hero. But a voice inside tells Finch he's actually just a coward.

Finch cares deeply about the people around him. Here, he starts to realize that killing himself could put his family members in danger—this is the last thing Finch wants. His struggle to decide whether he's a hero or a coward for not killing himself shows just how much Finch struggles to understand his own thoughts on suicide. On one hand, he thinks suicide is noble—but he also seems to realize that killing himself would have major consequences for his loved ones.



A few months ago, when things got really bad, Finch drove to French Lick, a resort with a healing spring. He drank the spring **water** to "fix the dark, slow churning" in his mind and felt great until he woke up in the morning. When Finch asked an employee about it, the employee told him to try Mudlavia, a shuttered resort and spring that's supposedly "the real deal." Presently, Finch heads for Mudlavia, two and a half hours away, and traipses through the crumbling hotel. It doesn't feel healing. Then, he follows the sound of water until he gets to a rushing stream that looks more alive than anything else. Finch wades in and drinks. He fills a water bottle and then floats in the stream.

Finch sees water as representing both life and death. He fixates on Virginia Woolf's suicide in part because she drowned—proof that water can kill. But here, he describes the stream as "alive" and the water as "healing," suggesting that water—like Finch himself—is multifaceted and contains both good and bad elements. And at this point, the fact that Finch is looking for a healing spring suggests that he's trying to improve his mental health in one of the few ways that makes sense to him.



When Finch gets home, Kate is on her way out. She asks Finch if he's been with Violet and then says that Decca is upset, probably about Josh Raymond since they're so close in age. Kate wonders if Josh Raymond is actually Finch's dad's son and points out that when Finch was that age, he was also small. As she heads out the door, she tells Finch to be careful with his heart.

Again, the question of whether Finch's dad is Josh Raymond's father seems to cause the family a great deal of distress. Though Finch seemed to conclude earlier that Josh Raymond isn't his half-brother, Kate suggests that she's not so sure. Having to think of Josh Raymond like this forces Finch to think of what he was like at eight years old, something that's uncomfortable for him.



Finch lets himself into Decca's room to make sure she's okay. She's sitting on the floor, cutting words out of various books from around the house. Finch notices her collection of scissors and asks what the rules are. She hands him a book and tells him to cut out "the mean parts and the bad words." As Finch cuts, he tells Decca that life will get better. She tells him to be quiet. After a while, Finch asks about the stuff that's just unpleasant but not totally mean. Decca says to cut those parts out too. She explains that the bad stuff shouldn't be mixed in with the good. Finch gets it—it's better to keep the unhappy stuff separate so it's easier to keep an eye on it.

Decca is trying to make sense of all the confusing things in her life by controlling whether she sees words that are mean or nice. Her disinterest in Finch's pep talk suggests that Decca doesn't want to deal with the possibility that life contains both good and bad elements—for her to feel in control, things need to be either good or bad. Finch understands this because he separates words into good and bad in his mind as well. Previously, he imagined himself running from words like "worthless" and "freak" to stay awake—he was essentially doing the same thing that Decca does here.



Decca gets up to look for more books, and while she's gone, Finch cuts out words and leaves "MAKE IT LOVELY" on Decca's pillow. Then he takes the books to his room. Finch stops in the doorway—something feels different, though nothing seems to have changed. He tells himself he's fine, takes a hot shower, and returns to his room. Finch decides that maybe *he's* different. He returns to the bathroom, throws on some clothes, and studies his face in the mirror. It's not his face. Back in his room, Finch flips through the books that are now exclusively happy. He pulls his comforter around him, reading the books. Finch wants to do this with Violet: give her only the good and get rid of the bad.

It's significant that Finch chooses to leave "make it lovely" on Decca's pillow. Telling her to make it in particular suggests that Decca has control over how "it"—that is, her life—turns out. In other words, Finch purposefully chooses words that show Decca that she has control over how she sees and responds to events in her life. But Finch struggles to take his own advice: though he wants to give Violet only happiness, he seems unsure of how to "make it lovely" for them. And the growing sense that something is wrong also ominously suggests that Finch's mental health is starting to decline.



22. VIOLET: 138 DAYS TO GO

It's Sunday night. Violet is in her bedroom, flipping through her and Finch's notebook so she can write about the bookstore and the Purina Tower. Suddenly, she gets an idea: on a sticky note, she writes "lovely." She tacks it to her bulletin board and then does the same with other words and phrases. Violet designates a section for "new nameless web magazine" and puts "Lit. Love. Life." in that section. She's not sure what she's doing, but she sends a picture to Finch. He doesn't write back.

Though Finch's mental health may be starting to suffer, Violet's is improving. As she takes Finch's advice to heart and experiments with writing again, she begins to see that she can find happiness and purpose again. Starting a new web magazine could also allow her to help other people discover the power of the written word.



23. FINCH: DAYS 23, 24, 25...

Finch feels like last night is a "puzzle," but one that isn't put together. His heart beats too fast. Finch tries to read the books Decca cut words out of, but the words blur. He starts to organize his room and decides he needs a change. He drives to the hardware store and buys 10 gallons of blue paint. After several coats, the red is still showing through the blue paint, "like the walls are bleeding." Finch sleeps in the middle of his room with an old blue comforter of Kate's. After two days, the walls are blue like a **swimming pool**. Finch can catch his breath. He leaves the ceiling white, since white contains the wavelengths of all colors. Finch messages Violet that she's all the colors, "at full brightness."

Finch is starting to lose his ability to make sense of the written word. Even Decca's exclusively happy books don't make sense anymore, which suggests that it's becoming more difficult for Finch to latch onto happy moments. Painting his room blue, like a swimming pool, is his attempt to connect himself to water. He wants to see water as healing and as someplace where he can "catch his breath." But water is also destructive and dangerous—so Finch's bedroom color may also ominously foreshadow a severe depressive episode.



24. VIOLET: 135, 134, 133 DAYS TO GO

Finch is out of school for a week. People talk about him (Principal Wertz shut down the *Bartlett Dirt*), and on Wednesday, someone asks Violet if she should be on “suicide watch” for her boyfriend. The next day, Violet seeks out Charlie and asks about Finch. Charlie says that this is just what Finch does. Brenda compliments Violet’s **glasses**, and Violet says that they were Eleanor’s. Finch is at school on Friday morning, but now he’s wearing a ratty knit cap and fingerless gloves. He looks like “Slacker Finch,” and he ignores Violet.

The fire alarm goes off at the beginning of third period. As Violet follows everyone outside, Finch comes up behind her, tells her to meet him in the student parking lot, and walks away. Violet races after him and feels free. No one is chasing them or yelling at them. When they get to the trees near the **river**, Finch tells Violet to be quiet—the first one to make a noise has to streak back to school. He leads her down the embankment and points to a huge bird, explaining that it’s a hooded crane. It’s native to Asia, but Finch says it isn’t lost—it’s wandering.

Finch steps on a twig and curses. Violet laughs and reminds him that he has to streak back to school now. Sighing, Finch strips totally naked. Violet is shocked; she’s never seen a boy naked, and she didn’t think he’d actually do it. He says that this would be more fun if Violet was naked too, and then he dives into the **river**. Violet sits on the bank and watches him, and then she pulls out their notebook to write. Finch swims back toward her. When she asks why he was gone, he says he was remodeling. He also says that unfortunately, Finch’s dad is back in town.

The fire alarm isn’t going off anymore, but Violet isn’t worried about being counted absent. Finch gets out of the river, dresses, and starts to tell Violet what they should do next. But then, Roamer, Ryan, and another boy come down the embankment. Ryan says that they came to check on Violet, but Roamer implies that Violet and Finch have been having sex. Roamer and Finch exchange insults, and then Roamer jumps Finch. They roll into the **water**. At first, Finch doesn’t fight back—but then he grabs Roamer and holds his head underwater. Violet tells Finch to let Roamer go as Ryan pulls on Finch’s collar. Finally, Finch drops Roamer and stalks up the hill.

Suicide is still a joke at Bartlett High—the novel implies that Violet’s classmate asks her about “suicide watch” as a joke, not because this person is actually concerned. Indeed, the fact that Charlie insists that Finch is liable to disappear without warning makes it clear that not even his friends are concerned about him—even though his narration shows readers that people should be concerned. He’s struggling, and Violet is seemingly the only person who’s aware of that.



Finch shows Violet that it can be freeing to be rebellious and spontaneous. Violet may never have thought to skip out on a fire drill, but thanks to Finch, she gets to see a sight that the novel suggests is truly spectacular. As Finch insists that the bird is “wandering,” moreover, he reminds Violet that the life is worth living because there’s so much to see and experience.



Violet pulls out the notebook of her own volition, which implies that she’s starting to heal and feel a bit more in control of her life. By choosing to write, she’s reconnecting with an aspect of her identity that she thought she lost. When Finch refers to what he did last week as “remodeling,” it’s a way for him to take control of the narrative. Remodeling won’t make Violet suspicious or concerned, whereas hearing that he suddenly found his red room suffocating might.



Violet is still part of the popular crowd, which seems to be why the boys came down to check on her. But in reality, Violet doesn’t feel like she fits in with the popular anymore—she feels more comfortable with Finch. Finch and Roamer’s fight, though, suggests that changing her identity in this way might not be easy. Roamer and Finch have history that means their relationship is adversarial, and the way Roamer treats Finch also shows that the popular crowd punishes difference.



Figuring she's already in trouble for skipping class, Violet heads across town to Finch's house. Kate answers the door and says she's sure Finch is around somewhere. She lets Violet go upstairs to Finch's room. Violet knocks, but no one answers. The door is locked. She considers picking it but decides Finch would let her in if he wanted to see her. Back downstairs, Kate seems unconcerned that Finch is gone. She thinks he might be running, which he does "about fifteen times a day." She says it's impossible to tell what Finch is going to do.

Violet realizes that the only way to keep Finch's trust is to treat him with compassion and respect. So, even though she's worried about him, it's more important to her at this point to respect his privacy. Kate's lack of concern again shows that Finch doesn't have much support at home. His family members just think of him as being unpredictable and not worth wondering about. But readers know that Finch runs to escape the negative thoughts in his head, so his family is missing out on a lot of important information by not being curious.



25. FINCH: DAY 27 (I AM STILL HERE)

Finch watches Violet leave and then sits on the floor of the **shower**. He can't look at himself in the mirror. Then, Finch turns on his computer, even though the bright screen hurts his eyes. He reads his past messages with Violet, but the words don't make sense. Finch then tries to read a downloaded version of *The Waves*. When that doesn't make sense either, he tells himself it's the computer, not him—but he can't even read the print book he finds. Finch vows to stay awake, and he even considers calling Mr. Embry.

Finch's mental health is clearly deteriorating. He feels increasingly lost as he realizes that he can't read or make sense of language, no matter how he tries. In particular, reading his messages with Violet shows just how important Violet is to Finch, as he believes she's worth staying awake for. But something stops Finch from asking Mr. Embry for help—presumably, his shame and unwillingness to admit that something is wrong.



Finch knows he could tell Finch's mom how he's feeling, but she'd tell him to take Advil and relax. In Finch's family, sickness doesn't exist unless there's a fever. Finch's mom always tells him he's too sensitive and reminds him of the story of the **cardinal**. The cardinal kept flying into the living room windows and little Finch begged his parents to bring it inside. When the cardinal died, Finch said that it wouldn't have happened if his parents had let the bird inside. Finch doesn't want to hear about the cardinal again. He knows the bird would've died if it came inside too, because everything good dies in the Finch family. Finch goes for a run, and when he gets back, he paints his ceiling blue.

Here, the novel explains the roots of Finch's shame. His family doesn't believe that mental illness is real, since it's not measurable in the same way a physical illness is. And in addition, they also explain away anything concerning about Finch by insisting that he's just sensitive. As a result, Finch has learned that he can't trust his family. Especially after what happened to the cardinal, Finch believes that it's normal for bad things to happen in his family—another statement that foreshadows tragic events to come.



26. VIOLET: 133 DAYS TO GO

Since Principal Wertz called Violet's parents when she didn't show up to school, Violet is now sitting across from Violet's mom and Violet's dad. She explains that she was across the street from the school with Finch, the boy she's doing the project with. Violet's mom says she's disappointed, and Violet's dad says that Violet can't keep using Eleanor as an excuse to misbehave. Violet says she's not misbehaving, she's just tired of trying to keep up with everyone else. She wishes her parents would just send her to her room. When they don't, she leaves them in the living room and goes herself.

To Violet's parents, it's unthinkable that "misbehaving" is actually how Violet is starting to heal. Finch has shown Violet that she can write again, that she doesn't have to play by the rules, and that life is worth living. So, it's especially insulting to Violet when her parents refuse to see how much she's changing for the better. Now, Violet realizes that making her own choices, rather than trying to live up to other people's expectations, is what's going to make her happy.



Violet eats dinner with her parents in silence, and afterward, Violet's mom follows Violet upstairs. She studies the bulletin board and asks Violet about what this project is. Then, Violet's mom takes a seat and starts asking questions about this new web magazine. Violet wants to create a place where teenagers can get advice and help, and where they can feel safe. But this, she explains, is just a "germ of an idea." For the next two hours, Violet and her mom come up with an outline for a web magazine. As Violet's mom leaves the room, she asks Violet if she can trust Finch. Violet says she can—Finch is her only friend.

Violet knows she can't create all this content herself, so she writes a list of people she thinks might want to contribute, like Kate, Brenda, and Jordan Gripenwaldt. She discovers that germmagazine.com is available and registers the site. Then she gets onto Facebook and messages Finch. She says that her parents are upset, and that she and Finch might have to stop wandering together.

As Violet lies in bed, she realizes she forgot to cross off the day on the calendar. Though she gets up and uncaps her marker, she decides she can't do it. She throws the calendar into her closet and slips down the hall to Eleanor's room. Violet sets Eleanor's [glasses](#) on the desk and thanks Eleanor for the loan—but she says the glasses are ugly and make her head hurt.

Here, Violet's mom demonstrates how supportive she is of her daughter. Even though she's perplexed and annoyed with Violet's behavior, she nevertheless wants to see Violet happy and able to throw herself into something fulfilling. And Violet's goal also suggests that she wants to help kids who are struggling with some of the same problems she and Finch are, which would allow her to pay forward Finch's help.



As Violet reconnects with herself as a writer, she also takes steps to connect with other people. Registering the domain is the first step toward creating a wider online community, while considering which classmates might help also shows that Violet is starting to look outside of her usual friend group for connection.



Violet's is starting to realize that she was marking time in a way that was unhealthy, as she was fixating on the future rather than enjoying the present moment. Meanwhile, by giving Eleanor her glasses back, Violet shows that she's now going to try to be herself rather than trying to be like Eleanor in an effort to keep her sister's memory alive.



27. VIOLET: SATURDAY

When Violet comes downstairs in the morning, Finch is eating breakfast with Violet's dad. He tells Violet she looks better without the [glasses](#) and then explains that he came to talk to Violet's parents about skipping school yesterday. Violet's dad says they have an understanding; they just need contact information for Finch's parents. He asks if Finch's dad is the Ted Finch of Finch Storage. Finch says he is, but his dad left when Finch was 10. Violet knows this is a lie. She watches Finch write out his and his mom's numbers in neat letters. This isn't his handwriting, but she doesn't tell her dad that.

The way Violet's chapters are titled has changed. She's not counting down to graduation anymore—it seems like Violet is now ready to focus on enjoying her life in the present. Finch shows here that he knows how to modulate his identity to please protective parents like Violet's. He can change his handwriting and convince Violet's parents that he's trustworthy—but Violet, because she knows Finch, knows this is a front.



With that out of the way, Violet's mom asks Finch where he's going to college. Finch asks if she's read [For Whom the Bell Tolls](#) and says that, like the protagonist, he's trying to live as if he only has two days left. Violet's dad launches into an explanation of Hindu theology, and as he quotes an ancient Vedic hymn, Finch finishes it. The last line is about **water**, and Finch says he "ha[s] this thing about water." For the rest of breakfast, Finch and Violet tell her parents about their project. By the end of breakfast, Finch is on a first-name basis with Violet's parents. Afterward, Violet asks how Finch could lie to her parents. He says it's not a lie if it's how he actually feels. Violet is incensed—what else is he lying about?

28. FINCH: DAY 28

John Ivers, an old man who lives out in the country, greets Finch and Violet when they pull into his yard. He leads them to the two roller coasters he built in his backyard, the Blue Flash and the Blue Too, and explains that he's an "adrenaline junkie." John says he loves "the thrill of impending, weightless doom." Finch likes and understands that phrase—and he thinks that Violet makes him feel that way all the time. The roller coasters are built into the side of a shed. They only go 25 miles per hour, and the Flash is only a 10-second ride, but Finch is itching to ride it.

Finch climbs into the bucket seat, and John straps him in and tells him to hold on. Finch screams as the coaster goes and rides it five more times. Then, Violet takes her turn. She screams and rides it several times, taking turns with Finch. When Finch climbs out the last time, he reaches for Violet to steady himself. It feels natural. John asks if they want to ride the Blue Too. Finch doesn't—he wants to be alone with Violet—but Violet runs for the roller coaster. The Blue Too isn't as much fun, so they ride the Flash a few more times.

As they head for the car, Violet notes that this is the end of their wandering. But Finch suggests that they keep wandering, especially since Violet's parents are on board. On the drive home, Violet rolls down the window and writes in their notebook. She explains that she started out making notes on the roller coasters, but now she just has ideas she's trying to get out. After a few more miles of silent writing, Violet says she likes Finch because he's interesting and different, and she can talk to him.

Though Violet's mom and dad seem to take Finch's explanation as proof that he's trying to live every day to the fullest, the fact that Finch is trying to live like he has two days left is ominous. He's almost constantly thinking about suicide, which implies that a two-day countdown could start at any time. While Violet sees Finch's lies as a betrayal, Finch suggests that lies can actually give important information about who a person is.



Finch likes to take risks—he pushes Little Bastard as fast as the car can go, for instance. These roller coasters seem to be the exact sort of thing he'd like—in part because experiencing thrills like roller coasters helps Finch stay "awake." When Finch says that Violet causes him to feel "the thrill of impending, weightless doom," it suggests that she's also helping him stay "awake." But it nevertheless suggests that this happy period will come to an end, given how sinister the "doom" makes it seem.



Being with Violet in such a high-adrenaline situation makes this experience even more emotionally intense for Finch. Moreover, riding these roller coasters doesn't make him look any different from anyone else—plenty of people enjoy roller coasters. So, this experience helps Finch feel normal.



Violet is comfortable in the car with Finch—she's clearly decided that it's okay to trust him and take steps to cope with the trauma she experienced in the accident that killed Eleanor. Telling Finch that she can talk to him shows that Violet and Finch are growing close, but it also suggests that Violet sees Finch as a person like any other—not a dangerous "freak."



Suddenly, the air feels electric. Finch tells Violet he likes everything about her, and he takes the first exit off the highway. He pulls into a library parking lot, gets out and goes around to her door, and says he can't wait anymore. Finch pulls Violet out of the car and kisses her, and Violet kisses him back. Then, Finch picks Violet up and puts her in the backseat of Little Bastard, where they start to undress. Violet laughs until Finch starts to slide his hand into her pants. When she pulls away, Finch realizes that she's a virgin. He can't believe she never had sex with Ryan Cross of all people, and he tells her, "someday."

Later, in his room, Finch is "overcome by words." He writes songs and then writes that he wasn't even close to killing himself today. He writes about the theoretical Euthanasia Coaster, which is a three-minute ride that kills people with centrifugal force. Suddenly, "time folds," and Finch comes to in the next town over, exhausted from his run. He walks the whole way home. On his walk, he thinks about the man who thought up the Euthanasia Coaster. The coaster would kill people "humanely—with elegance and euphoria." Finch thinks "elegance and euphoria" describes how he feels about Violet. He suddenly wants to be the person Violet sees. This boy belongs in the world and "in his own skin."

29. FINCH: DAY 30 (AND I AM AWAKE)

Finch and Charlie are in gym class, standing beyond third base. Charlie is great at sports, and all the coaches want him on their teams—but he refuses to be a Black stereotype, so he joined the chess club instead. They discuss Finch almost drowning Roamer, and Charlie asks if Finch has had sex with Violet yet. Roamer comes up to bat and, as expected, hits the ball right at them. Charlie nonchalantly catches it and throws it back. Finch notes that Roamer and Mr. Kappel (the gym teacher and baseball coach) "die just a little" when Charlie does that.

Later, Roamer corners Finch in the locker room once most of the other kids are gone. Roamer tells Finch that he's dead, and Finch vows to himself to not hurt Roamer. He's not worth it, and he remembers Violet's look when he tried to drown Roamer at the **river**. Finch starts to count as Roamer slams Finch into a locker and punches him in the face. As Finch takes the beating, he wonders if counting might take him back to eighth grade, before he was a "freak" and when he was "awake" all the time. He wishes he could take Violet back with him so they could have more time together. Finch is afraid of time—and of himself. Finally, Kappel breaks up the fight. But rather than send Finch to the office, Kappel appears ready to punish Roamer.

Violet's openness makes Finch feel as though life is worth living again—she sees him as a person, and that's intoxicating after being treated so poorly by everyone else. Noting that they're going to have sex "someday" suggests that Finch is going to do what he can to keep their relationship alive for a while yet—now, he has even more to look forward to as he tries to stay "awake."



Though Finch has some control over language when he writes songs and writes about the Euthanasia Coaster, he still seems to be struggling (as when "time folds" and he blacks out and comes to on his run). He's happy—euphoric, even—but he also can't separate his happiness from his thoughts about death. And he confirms here that Violet saying he's easy to talk to makes him feel like someone sees him as a person, not someone odd and unknowable. And this, too, gives Finch something to work toward, since he wants to be the only boy Violet sees.



Charlie, like Finch, enjoys annoying people by not doing what they expect him to do. He exerts control over his life and his identity by not letting the racist stereotype that all Black men are athletic dictate what he does. In this moment, Charlie and Finch also seem to be speaking more openly and honestly with each other—offering hope that after getting so close to Violet, Finch might be more willing to reach out to other people.



Finch supposedly has "anger issues," but his relationship with Violet seems to be motivating him to suppress his urges to fight back. But even as Finch seems to be making progress here by not fighting Roamer, his inner monologue nevertheless makes it clear that Finch is afraid and still in trouble. He seems to imply that his relationship with Violet, great as it may be, won't last forever. Finch also implies that he himself (or, more accurately, his mental illness) is his own worst enemy.



When Finch gets to his locker, he discovers the rock he gave Violet sitting on his books. Brenda comes up behind Finch and asks what the rock is for and what happened to Finch's face. They discuss Roamer for a moment and then walk to class together. Finch pretends to listen and answer Brenda's questions, but he can't stop thinking about Violet.

Getting out of gym class and seeing the rock from Violet shows Finch that he did the right thing by not fighting Roamer. Now, he's acting more like the boy Violet sees, which is gratifying for him.



30. VIOLET: FEBRUARY 2

In Violet's counseling session with Mrs. Kresney, she's telling the truth when she says she's been doing well, riding in a car, and sleeping just fine. Later, in Russian Literature class, Violet writes down an assignment for a five-page paper like everyone else. After class, Ryan walks with Violet and tells her that he asked Suze out. Violet considers telling Ryan something about Finch in return, but she isn't sure what she and Finch are. Then, Ryan says that Roamer "went after" Finch in gym, and Finch just stood there.

Violet is clearly improving as she now feels able to complete her writing assignments, and she's sleeping well and able to ride in cars again. In all ways, Violet seems to be making progress on her mental health. Her friends also notice that she's changing—Ryan, for instance, now seems to accept that Finch and Violet are friends, though he didn't before.



At lunch, Violet walks past Amanda and Roamer's table in the cafeteria. Violet turns and asks to join Brenda, the three Brianas, and a girl named Lara. As the other girls talk about boys and life after high school, Violet just listens. At one point, Brenda leans over and whispers to Violet that "Gabe Romero is poison." They toast to that.

Even though Violet is feeling more at ease around her old friends, she's starting to suspect that she'd have more fun spending time with different people. Notably, Brenda was on Violet's list of possible contributors for Germ, suggesting that befriending the girls at this lunch table might be part of Violet's way forward.



31. VIOLET: THE WEEKEND

By this point, wandering is just an excuse to drive somewhere and kiss. Violet keeps telling herself she's not ready for sex, but she also feels like she can't get enough of Finch. She adds a "sex life" session to her board for *Germ* and writes in their wandering notebook. She writes about hearing Amanda's older brothers talk about girls—they said that girls who have sex are "sluts," but those that don't are "teases." Amanda insisted that the only way around that dichotomy was to stay with one guy forever.

Violet addition of a "sex life" section to her Germ board makes it clear that this is one area where Violet herself needs some guidance—and that once she gets more knowledge, she'd like to help others do the same. Her desire to figure out what it'll mean to have sex with Finch also shows how close the two are getting to each other.



On Saturday morning, Finch picks Violet up and they go to the Arboretum. Violet asks about the fight with Roamer, but Finch says that Roamer was just being a jerk, and he pulls her into the backseat. They kiss for a long time, and it's hard to stop. When Finch gets home after dropping Violet off, he messages her that he's "thinking rather consistently of Someday." Violet replies that someday will come soon.

If Finch doesn't talk about the fight with Roamer in any detail, he doesn't have to tell Violet about what he was thinking while Roamer beat him (that he's afraid of himself and of not having enough time). Brushing her off is a way to avoid uncomfortable truths.



When Violet gets up on Sunday, Violet's mom says someone left a package for her on the front porch. It says, "Ultraviolet." Violet hopes it's not embarrassing as she opens it, but it's just a pair of goggles. She knows they're from Finch, but she has no idea what they're for. Noticing her mom's hopeful look, Violet says that Finch is just a friend. A bit later, Violet messages Finch to ask what the goggles are for. He says that they're waiting for the first warm day.

Finch clearly understands the power of having something to look forward to. The goggles and his cryptic note that they're waiting for the first warm day of the year ensures that Violet is going to look forward to whatever's coming. At the same time, this may be a way for Finch to give himself something to look forward to, something that might help him stay "awake" longer.



32. FINCH: THE FIRST WARM DAY

There's a blizzard the second week of February. As it passes, Finch and Violet visit some nearby sights and build a huge snowman. On Valentine's Day, Finch takes Violet to his favorite Chinese restaurant 15 miles away. The first warm day arrives on a Saturday, so Finch picks Violet up and takes her to the **Blue Hole** in Prairieton. He leads her over a hill to a round pool of water surrounded by trees. Finch explains that supposedly, the Blue Hole is either bottomless or has quicksand for a bottom. It's supposed to suck people into an underground river or to another world. Lots of people have disappeared here.

Given what readers know about Finch's relationship with water, it's perhaps unsurprising that he's so taken with the idea of a bottomless blue hole. Indeed, it encapsulates water's symbolism in the novel: on the surface, it looks like a gorgeous place where he and Violet are going to connect and swim. But underneath, it represents danger and death. Here, life and death coexist in the same body of water.



As Finch takes his shirt off, he says that bottomless blue holes like this exist worldwide and there are always myths associated with them. Violet agrees that it's awesome they have one in Indiana, and she undresses to her bra and underwear. Finch is speechless, but he takes his pants off and leads Violet to a rock ledge. He asks what she's afraid of. Violet is afraid of dying, losing her parents, and losing everyone she loves. She asks what Finch is afraid of. Finch thinks he's afraid of the "just be careful" he's gotten from people. He's afraid of "Asleep" and himself. But he tells Violet he's not afraid and leaps into the **water** with her.

Finch implies here that he might not be so odd for being attracted to the idea of the Blue Hole—lots of people are interested in the interconnectedness between life, death, and bodies of water. Telling Violet that he's not afraid of anything while telling readers he is shows how nervous Finch is to show weakness. Given how others have ostracized him, it's perhaps unsurprising that he doesn't feel comfortable telling Violet the truth. But this also means that Violet doesn't have enough information to know Finch is struggling.



Finch leads Violet in a dive toward the center of the **Blue Hole**. They return to the surface when Violet tugs on Finch's hand, and she comments on how long Finch can hold his breath. He says he practices but then thinks that sounds better in his head. They swim around a bit and play a lazy game of Marco Polo. Violet asks Finch about his parents' divorce, Finch's dad, and Josh Raymond. Finch explains that his dad has made it clear that the divorce was everyone else's fault. But he doesn't want to really talk about it, so he says he's going to dive again.

It's significant that Finch is willing to talk to Violet about his parents' divorce and his family situation. He says enough to make it clear that he has a poor relationship with his dad and that his family in general isn't very connected. And Finch's love of diving makes for a convenient excuse to stop talking when he decides he doesn't want to share any more—in this way, Finch only tells Violet as much as he wants her to know.



Leaving Violet at the surface, Finch dives as though he's escaping everyone in his life but Violet. He enjoys the way his lungs strain, and though he reminds himself that Violet is waiting for him, he likes the feeling of "darkness" grabbing him. He reminds himself not to panic and thinks that drowning isn't a common method of committing suicide. **Water** is Finch's favorite way to "cheat the Asleep." He wants to keep going, but he stops and thinks of Violet. His lungs are burning. Finch struggles to return to the surface, mentally apologizing to Violet.

Violet is sobbing when Finch reaches the surface. She calls him an "asshole" twice, louder each time. Finch is afraid he's frightened her too much as he comes out of the **water**. When he's next to her, Violet pushes him and slaps him. Finch reminds himself this isn't about him and tells Violet to let it all out—he knows she's angry. She survived something awful, but right now, she's just existing. Suddenly, Violet stops hitting Finch and says she feels like she has an angry person growing inside her, trying to get out. She hates that person and just wants to punch someone. Finch tells her to yell and throw something and demonstrates, hurling a rock into the ground.

After a minute, Violet joins Finch and starts throwing rocks and shouting. Suddenly, she stops and asks what exactly they're doing. Finch can't help himself—he kisses Violet, and she kisses him back. Then, he thinks of lines from *The Waves* and pushes Violet away. She looks enraged, but Finch says she deserves better—and he can't promise he'll stay around or won't hurt her again and again. Violet says that they're already involved and asks again where Finch's scar came from.

Finch says the story's boring: Finch's dad gets in "black moods," and Finch used to be small and not know how to get out of the way. He says he can't promise Violet perfect days, and he'll never be Ryan Cross. Violet says she doesn't want Ryan, kisses Finch again, and then says Ryan is a kleptomaniac—he's not perfect. Finch tells Violet that he loves her, and they kiss again. He doesn't want to mess this up.

This passage makes it clear that Finch loves water because it has the power to kill him—and because he can hold his breath for so long, it wouldn't be hard to dive too deep to be able to return to the surface. But at this point, the thought of killing himself with Violet waiting for him on the surface is too much. Finch starts to see here that his death would seriously hurt the people around him—and for now, that's too much for him to bear.



Having already lost Eleanor, Violet was probably terrified when Finch disappeared under the water for so long. But Finch, to his credit, is able to turn this moment into one in which Violet is able to start getting in touch with her raw emotions. Letting them out, he suggests, is the only way that Violet is ever going to be able to move past them. This may also explain Finch's own anger issues—he may be trying to do the same thing.



*Thinking of *The Waves* means thinking of Virginia Woolf, which for Finch seems to mean thinking about Woolf's suicide note and mental illness. So, in this moment, it seems like Finch is trying to impress upon Violet that he's not going to be a reliable partner. Because of his mental illness, he might hurt her and might not even be able to stick around—a possible allusion to suicide.*



Here, Violet suggests that everyone, even people who seem perfect, have embarrassing secrets. It's silly, she suggests, that people idolize Ryan when Ryan compulsively steals things. And she also implies that this means she and Finch shouldn't feel so bad about their own flaws, since no one is perfect.



33. VIOLET: THE DAY OF

Finch and Violet drive back to Finch's house in the afternoon. His bedroom is now blue, and Violet feels like she's in a **swimming pool**. She showers first, and then Finch showers quickly. He returns to his bedroom in his towel and says that Violet never asked what he was doing on the belltower ledge. She asks him in a whisper. Finch says that he was doing exactly what Violet was: he wanted to imagine jumping off, but he didn't like what he saw. And then he saw Violet. Finch spins Violet around and then pulls her close. She realizes that his towel fell, and she allows her own towel to fall and kisses him.

This passage heavily implies that Finch and Violet are going to have sex. It's telling that this happens after Finch and Violet finally put into words that they were both considering suicide on the belltower. Speaking truthfully and putting their dark, scary thoughts into words brings them closer together and takes their relationship to a new level.



34. FINCH: THE DAY OF

Finch knows that Violet is made of the exact same stuff as everyone else, but she seems to be made of something more. He makes himself concentrate on Violet instead of his racing thoughts and song ideas. After they have sex, Finch drives Violet home. He takes a detour, though. At the bottom of the Purina Tower, he says he wants to tell Violet a story up there. At the top, wrapped in a blanket, Finch tells her about Sir Patrick Moore, who used to host a nighttime BBC program called Sky. On April 1, 1976, Sir Patrick Moore told viewers that Pluto, Jupiter, and Earth would align—and gravity would temporarily lessen on Earth. He called this phenomenon the Jovian-Plutonian gravitational effect.

The novel implies that, for the most part, Finch is successful in suppressing his thoughts to focus on Violet. This shows how beneficial it can be to connect with another person: Finch now has more impetus and more tools to control his inner monologue. Returning to the Purina Tower afterwards suggests that Finch wants to revisit the idea that the little things matter most (which is what he proposed to her the last time they visited the tower).



Sir Patrick Moore told people they could jump in the air and experience the effect. Sure enough, hundreds of people called into the show. Violet asks if this is real, and Finch reveals that it was just an April Fool's joke. Violet scolds Finch for telling her something that sounded real, but Finch says he mentions it because he feels like he's floating now.

The fact that Finch feels like he's floating now, even though he's not, recalls his earlier assertion that lies aren't really lies if they feel true. It doesn't matter, in other words, what's actually true. A person's lived experience is, much of the time, going to be more important to them—even if their perceptions aren't technically correct.



35. VIOLET: THE MORNING AFTER

Violet wakes up before Finch and marvels at how quiet he is. He wakes up a bit after and pulls Violet closer, but then Violet realizes it's morning—she's been on the tower all night and hasn't contacted her parents. Violet and Finch scurry down the steps, and at the bottom, Violet calls Violet's mom, who's in tears. Finch speeds to Violet's house, and they both jump out in the driveway. Violet's dad comes outside and tells Finch to go home. Violet and her mom have to shove Violet's dad inside.

Violet's parents' reactions drive home how different Violet's support network is from Finch's. None of Finch's friends (or family, for that matter) seem to care when he comes and goes—but Violet's parents are in tears because she was gone overnight without checking in. And Violet, notably, seems to see this as a neutral or positive thing, even if she's upset in this moment.



Once Violet and her parents have calmed down, Violet's dad says that Finch is trouble: he's had anger issues since he was a kid. Violet realizes her parents called Finch's. Violet's dad says that Finch lied about Finch's dad: his parents divorced last year. Violet remembers Finch saying that lies aren't really lies if they feel true as her dad asks about Finch and the belltower. He says they called Amanda, and she mentioned that Violet saved Finch on the belltower. Violet's mom says that they're trying to do what's best. Violet feels her palms get itchy as her dad says she can't see Finch anymore. Upstairs in her room, she wishes Finch were outside; she'd climb out, get in the car, and tell him to drive. But he doesn't come.

Because Violet and Finch's relationship is so close, she's far more sympathetic to Finch's version of events. Finch wants nothing to do with his dad if he can't help it—so it helps him act like he doesn't have to see his dad. But to Violet's dad, who seems unwilling to be understanding of Finch's unhealthy family dynamic, this is just a lie. Violet's mom also frames forbidding Violet from seeing Finch as what's best for her daughter—though they're making Violet angry, they're nevertheless trying to look out for her.



37. FINCH: WHAT FOLLOWS

When Finch sees Finch's dad's car in the drive, he almost keeps driving. But instead, he stops, enters the house, and yells, "Come and get me." Finch's dad comes running, followed by Finch's mom and Rosemarie, and he hurls Finch across the kitchen. Finch laughs and tells his dad he doesn't feel the beatings anymore. When his dad reaches to punch Finch again, Finch grabs his dad's wrist and tells him not to do that again. Surprisingly, this works. Finch goes to his room and leaves his door open, but no one comes to check on him or beat him. He types Violet an apology but says he doesn't regret anything. Violet replies that she doesn't regret it either, and Finch writes that Violet showed him a perfect day.

Seeing Finch's dad lash out violently like this shows readers what Finch has presumably been dealing with his entire life. Being punished physically like this for his transgression also starts to explain why Finch doesn't feel comfortable confiding in his family or being open with them. If telling them something they don't want to hear will only result in violence, it's no wonder that Finch tends to keep to himself. Finch does, however, learn that he can advocate for himself and gain control over some aspects of his life, since his dad leaves him alone after Finch speaks up.



The next morning, Finch rings the doorbell at Violet's house. Violet's mom answers and apologetically asks if he's okay, but she doesn't move to let him in. Finch asks to come in and speak to them as Violet's dad appears in the door and tells Finch to leave. At home a bit later, Finch searches for EleanorandViolet.com, but the site is gone—just like Violet. He messages Violet on Facebook, and they discuss how angry her parents are. Violet says it's her fault, but her parents just need time. Finch writes that he doesn't have time, but he erases the message without sending it.

Finch tries to continue to create the world he wants by speaking to Violet's parents. But in their minds, the best way to support their daughter is to keep Finch away. Not being able to find EleanorandViolet.com suggests that the site has finally expired—but it also means that Finch is now going to struggle to connect with Violet through her writing. And writing that he doesn't have time suggests that he's losing his grasp on being "awake" and that he may fall into another period of "sleep" (depression) soon.



38. FINCH: HOW TO SURVIVE QUICKSAND

Finch moves into his walk-in closet, which feels like a warm, cozy cave. He brings in the jug of **water** from Mudlavia and a picture of Violet in with him, along with the license plate from the accident site. Finch pulls out his computer, puts an unlit cigarette in his mouth, and tells himself he knows how this goes. He's done this before. Then, he explains that although *MythBusters* says it's impossible to drown in quicksand, people have died this way. Finch starts to write the "Eight Steps to Surviving Quicksand."

The way that Finch frames moving into his closet suggests that for him, the best way to gain control of his worsening mental health is to control his surroundings. And writing out the steps to surviving quicksand suggests that Finch is also trying to gain control by describing how he's going to get through this difficult period.



It's already too late for Finch to follow step one, which is to avoid quicksand. Second, people need to take sticks with them to check for quicksand. Finch thinks he's already bypassed this step also. The third step is to drop everything if you end up in quicksand—heavy things will make you sink faster. Moving into the closet is Finch's way of following this step. Fourth and fifth, a person must relax and breathe deeply. Next, it's essential to get on your back and take your time. The last step is to take frequent breaks, because it's exhausting to get out of quicksand. Taking breaks and keeping one's head up buys a person time.

Finch likening his worsening mental state to quicksand shows again how inadequate the English language is to describe mental health issues and emotional turmoil more broadly. But this metaphor nevertheless allows Finch to share with readers what it's like to experience a mental downturn like this (it's "exhausting," and it's essential to relax). And further, likening what's happening to being stuck in quicksand also makes it clear that the stakes here are high. The fact that some people have drowned in quicksand suggests that Finch could die during this downturn.



39. VIOLET: THE WEEK AFTER

Violet goes back to school on Monday and is a little shocked and disappointed that nobody seems to know she's not a virgin anymore. Only Brenda figures it out when Violet is slow answering what she did over the weekend. Brenda assures Violet that Finch is a gentleman and won't spread it around. On their way out of the cafeteria, Violet invites Brenda to work on *Germ* with her. Brenda laughs but agrees.

Violet is having a difficult time trying to decide how having had sex changes her identity—it's something that's very important to her, but she also discovers that it's not something obvious to other people. So, it may have changed her, but not necessarily in a visible way.



When Violet and Finch get to U.S. Geography, Finch looks exhausted. After class, they kiss under the stairwell. They spend the entire week at school kissing in dark corners, and at night, they chat online. As they discuss the likelihood that Violet's parents will move on, Violet is unwilling to tell Finch that her parents might not ever move on. Finch seems a little off, like he's half hiding behind a curtain.

The fact that Violet can sense that something is wrong with Finch suggests that Finch's mental illness is becoming more difficult for him to hide as he declines. However, Violet doesn't mention anyone else noticing that Finch seems off. She is likely the only person who notices or cares.



Violet tries to go to sleep after midnight, but she can't sleep—she's thinking about *Germ*. She sketches out some ideas, including a "Wander" section that would ask readers to send in videos or pictures of their favorite sites. She emails Brenda, Finch, Jordan, the three Brianas, and Lara, inviting all of them to contribute. Though Violet drafts an email to Amanda too, she doesn't send it and deletes it in the morning.

*Here, Violet starts to expand her community by inviting these girls to contribute to *Germ*. The written word, she realizes, can connect people and give them a reason to keep going. And notably, she doesn't just want to feature her friends' writing. She also wants to create a robust community where readers can also feel seen and heard.*



After breakfast with her parents on Saturday, Violet tells them she's going to Amanda's house. They ask no questions, and Violet bikes to Finch's house instead. They have sex and then hide under the blanket, talking about *Germ*. Violet thanks Finch for showing her that this sort of thing matters, but Finch suggests that Violet would've gotten back into writing even without him. Violet doesn't like the implication that there's life without Finch, but then they discuss all the places they want to travel and have sex. Violet feels guilty for lying to her parents and feels again like Finch is hiding something.

While Violet seems to feel even closer to Finch these days, Finch acts like he's pulling away from her. He seems to be hiding something, he's unwilling to acknowledge how helpful he's been to Violet's recovery, and he also seems to imply that Violet doesn't necessarily need him. This is most likely a result of Finch's worsening mental health, but Violet doesn't know this. And since she knows so little about what Finch is feeling, she can't help him.



40. VIOLET: SPRING BREAK

Violet, Violet's mom, and Violet's dad are on the NYU campus. Though Violet's parents are discussing how Violet can transfer to NYU for spring term next year, Violet is worried that Finch hasn't answered her texts. She wonders if they'll stay together or break up after high school. Violet's mom says she's not ready for Violet to go to college, and Violet's dad's eyes get damp too. Violet can tell that her parents are grieving the fact that they never got to do this with Eleanor. Later, at the hotel, Violet thinks of how she told her mom's literary agent at dinner that she didn't have a boy at home. Her parents looked relieved. But Violet reads through her Facebook messages with Finch and sends him another, quoting Virginia Woolf.

Again, Violet is feeling closer and closer to Finch as time goes on—so it's disconcerting when he won't respond to her messages. And because Violet is so worried about Finch, she's too distracted to think about her future at NYU or any other college. Her parents, meanwhile, are unable to tour NYU without thinking of Eleanor and the past—they still have lingering grief and trauma as well.



41. FINCH: DAY 64 OF THE AWAKE

It snows on the last Sunday of spring break. Finch spends the morning with Decca, building a snowman and sledding. As they walk home from the sledding hill, Decca says she doesn't want to go see her and Finch's dad later. Finch admits that he doesn't want to go either, but he tells Decca that the visits mean a lot to their dad. Finch's mom told him this once; he's not sure he believes it, but Decca might. Later, Finch, Decca, and Kate head for their dad's house. Bored of sitting around in the living room, Finch goes to the bathroom. While he's in there, Violet texts and asks if she should sneak over. Finch says he's "in hell" but will get home soon.

Talking to Decca about how necessary it is to see their dad is Finch's way of trying to take care of his family and make things easier for them. It doesn't matter to him that he doesn't believe his dad gets anything out of the visits—in order to maybe make life easier for Decca, it's worth seeing if she'll believe it. So, this is another instance in which the lie might not be a lie if it feels true, if only to one person.



On Finch's way back from the bathroom, he passes Josh Raymond's room, and the little boy invites Finch inside. The room is huge and filled with fancy, battery-operated toys. Finch tries to push away his jealousy of all the Legos and then notices his beloved old stick horses. When Finch asks Josh Raymond about the horses, Josh Raymond seems uninterested in them. Finch struggles with the urge to hit Finch's dad over the head with them, but instead, he reminds himself what it was like to grow up with his dad. Josh Raymond takes Finch's hand as they head back to the living room.

Finding his stick horses in Josh Raymond's room makes Finch feel even angrier at his dad. His dad is, in Finch's mind, trying to essentially do parenthood all over again with a different kid—and this makes Finch feel even less loved and appreciated. But though Finch resents his dad, he also realizes it's important to not resent Josh Raymond. Josh Raymond might need support in the future, since Finch's dad is violent.



Finch's dad suggests that Finch bring Violet over sometime. Finch imagines the conversation his dad and Violet's dad had; he imagines his dad saying that Finch is a "major-disappointment-weirdo-fuckup." Finch counts as fast as he can and then excuses himself. He walks all the way home to get Little Bastard and then takes off driving for what seems like hours. Around sunset, Little Bastard doesn't seem fast enough, even though Finch is driving 90 miles per hour. Finch pulls over and feels ready to vomit. When he doesn't, he starts running and leaves Little Bastard behind. He tells himself that he'll be okay, and that *everything* will be okay.

The simple fact that Finch's dad doesn't acknowledge that he may have seriously damaged Finch's relationship with Violet and her parents speaks to how disconnected he is from his kids' lives. It doesn't seem to occur to him that Violet's dad would be upset—or that whatever he said about Finch might've contributed to that. And this makes Finch feel even less understood and more alone in his family.



Finch starts to pass farms and then sees a commercial nursery. There are a bunch of cars in the drive and people laughing inside. Finch knocks on the door, and an old woman answers. Finch apologizes but explains that he's on his way to see his girlfriend and he needs flowers. It's an emergency; he wants Violet to know that "this isn't a season of death but one for living." The woman's husband leads Finch to the greenhouses. He tells Finch to take what he needs. In the greenhouse, Finch wants to stay forever amid all the living plants. The man helps Finch pick out a bunch of flowers and then drives him back to Little Bastard.

Finch gets to Violet's house after 11 p.m. and sits in Little Bastard, smoking. He doesn't want to disturb her but tells her to come down to talk. She comes out in her pajamas as it starts to snow again. Violet asks how long Finch has been out here; he's shivering. He doesn't remember. Finch pulls out the bucket of flowers, and Violet opens it. She embraces Finch and tells him he brought her the spring. Later, Finch sits in Little Bastard outside his house. It seems like in the car, Violet is everywhere. Finch thinks of how Violet looks at him, like she can see right into him—she sees a Finch that not even Finch knows exists.

42. FINCH: DAYS 65 AND 66

At school, Finch realizes he's been staring out the window and doesn't know how long he's been staring. He can't concentrate when the teacher reads aloud in English class, and even when he tries to read by himself in the belltower stairway, he can't focus. Finch sits with Charlie at lunch and still can't concentrate. In U.S. Geography, Mr. Black reminds the class not to slack off. Finch writes instead of listening and doesn't let Violet see what he's writing. The words seem to disappear as he writes them.

Finch thinks that this must be what it's like to get sucked into a vortex or quicksand. He feels like a weight is pulling him down. Part of his mind notes that his life is pretty great, but Finch feels the weight getting heavier. He's so caught up in his thoughts that he jumps when the bell rings. Violet looks concerned, so Finch focuses on smiling as he walks her to class and then heads to his appointment with Mr. Embry.

Though Finch tells this couple that he needs to show Violet that this is a "season for living," it seems likely that he also needs the reminder. The fact that Finch seems to feel so safe and supported in the greenhouse, among all the growing plants, suggests that he may be struggling with his own thoughts about death and destruction. Getting Violet the flowers, then, is a nice thing to do for her—but it's also a way for Finch to remind himself to stay present and alive.



The fact that Finch doesn't remember how long he's been outside of Violet's house suggests that his mental state is worsening. When Violet insists that Finch brought her spring, it suggests that Violet is truly healing from Eleanor (this is further evidenced by her happiness and her work on Germ). But Finch, on the other hand, seems to be struggling to make "spring" arrive for himself. His mental illness makes it hard to believe that he'll experience good things again.



The novel links Finch's worsening mental state to his inability to comprehend the written or spoken word. So, the fact that Finch can't read, write, or properly listen at all suggests that he's truly struggling. But Finch doesn't want to let anyone know this because of the shame he feels—this even extends to Violet, a person he trusts.



Finch can't talk himself out of his worsening mental health with logic and facts. It doesn't matter that life is going well, since that doesn't change the fact that he feels like he's being sucked into a vortex. This makes Finch feel like he has even less control.



Mr. Embry seems to know something is wrong. To give him something, Finch tells Mr. Embry that Finch's dad wasn't happy, so he got a new family. Finch stumbles in his story when Mr. Embry reminds Finch that Finch's dad died, but Mr. Embry offers his condolences to Finch. Finch wants to cry, but he reminds himself to hide his pain. He thinks of the Russian poet Vladimir Mayakovski's suicide note—but seeing the look on Embry's face, Finch realizes he must've recited the note aloud. Embry wants to know if Finch was on the belltower a second time, but Finch says he just needed some quiet to read.

Finch is struggling to keep his story straight—a reflection of how lost he feels in his own mind and in his life. The fact that Finch accidentally recites Vladimir Mayakovski's suicide note out loud shows one of the consequences of Finch fixating on suicide notes when he's feeling well. Now that he's struggling, he can't call on any other literature to help him make sense of things—all he has are these memorized suicide notes. And this unwittingly reveals to Mr. Embry that Finch is still thinking about suicide.



Mr. Embry asks Finch what he knows about bipolar disorder. Finch smiles a flat smile and makes his voice boring as he asks if it's the "Jekyll-Hyde thing." As Mr. Embry talks about bipolar disorder causing extreme mood and energy shifts, Finch stops smiling. His body turns hot and then cold. He knows that bipolar is a label that "crazy people" get; he's taken psychology classes, and he's watched Finch's dad for the last 18 years. Labels like bipolar "explain people away as illnesses." Finch leaps up when the bell rings, knocking his chair over. Aware that this might look threatening, he holds out his hand. Mr. Embry takes it and pulls Finch close. He tells Finch that he isn't alone, but Finch knows this isn't true—everyone is alone, with only their own minds for company.

Finch clearly articulates here why he's unwilling to have his mental illness diagnosed—whatever the diagnosis might be. He equates a mental health diagnosis with the person being "crazy," and he also insists that being diagnosed means that a person's identity then centers entirely around that diagnosis. Essentially, Finch clings tightly to his desire to be normal—and his desire to be himself, whoever that might be. Mr. Embry's choice to bring up the possibility of bipolar disorder also shows Finch that he can't trust Mr. Embry. In his mind, Mr. Embry wants to take away his individuality and is looking for an excuse to write Finch off as crazy.



After gym class the next morning, Roamer says "Freak" under his breath as he passes Finch. Finch doesn't think—he slams Roamer into a locker and starts to choke him. Both Charlie and Mr. Kappel come to help Roamer as Finch watches the veins throb in Roamer's purple head. Finally, Finch drops him. He thinks that this is all Roamer's fault, but he tells Roamer to never call him a freak again.

As Finch's mental health declines, his ability (or willingness) to censor himself and control his behavior also suffers. Roamer calling him a "freak" no doubt makes the possibility that people might try to diagnose him even worse—then, per Finch's logic, he'd truly be a "freak."



43. VIOLET: MARCH 10

Finch calls Violet after third period, asking her to drive to Southern Indiana to see the Nest Houses (an art installation) and take pictures half in Indiana, half in Kentucky. He ignores Violet when she notes that the Ohio River runs the length of the Indiana-Kentucky border and asks why he's not in class. He says he got expelled and tells Violet to come outside, but she refuses. Finch seems to be talking too fast and refuses to explain anything more. Violet says they can go on Saturday, or they can go somewhere closer this afternoon. In a hollow voice, Finch says he'll go alone and hangs up. Violet has no idea what just happened.

Wandering and spending time with Violet was Finch's strategy for keeping himself "awake" and making sure he didn't succumb to the "asleep" (a depressive episode) again. So, Violet refusing to go with him is a hard blow—it means that Finch is losing the one person who was able to support him and help him stay healthy and stable. Because Finch has kept everything hidden from Violet as much as possible, she also doesn't realize exactly what's going on her, so she can't help Finch.



44. FINCH: DAYS 66 AND 67

The Nest Houses no longer exist; one old man tells Finch that “they been ate up by weather and the elements.” Finch thinks that everyone is suffering the same fate as the Nest Houses and he thinks of the grave he dug for the **cardinal**. He wonders if it’s still there; the thought of the bird’s bones in the grave is the saddest thing Finch can think of.

When Finch gets home, he stares at himself in the bathroom mirror. His reflection disappears, and Finch wonders if he’s gone. This is fascinating. Finch wonders if he can touch himself, and sure enough, he can feel his heartbeat. He shuts himself in his closet, curls up, and breathes carefully. If he breathes too loudly, he might “wake up the darkness.” The darkness could do anything to him, Violet, or Finch’s loved ones.

In the morning, Finch checks the landline voicemail. Mr. Embry left one for Finch’s mom that he says is important, but Finch deletes it. Then, he locks himself back in his closet and breathes carefully. The same phrases cycle through his mind, over and over again: that he’s broken, a fraud, and impossible to love. Violet will figure all of this out soon. Finch’s mind also decides that he has bipolar disorder.

Finch is silent during dinner. Afterward, he steals a bottle of sleeping pills from Finch’s mom and swallows half the bottle. He wants to feel what Cesare Pavese felt. Finch stretches out in his closet and things start to feel hazy and heavy—it feels like sleeping, not like anything heroic. Dragging himself up, Finch tries to make himself vomit but nothing comes up. Then, he puts on his sneakers and runs, though it feels like running through quicksand.

Finch runs to the hospital and asks to have his stomach pumped. He blacks out and when he wakes up, a nurse hands him paperwork to fill out. The only thing filled in is his age and the name, which reads Josh Raymond. Finch laughs. His mind offers several more facts about suicide, and then, when the nurse is gone, he gets dressed and leaves the hospital. Finch knows that if he stays, they’ll contact his parents, and then they’ll *make* him stay. Finch knows he’s too fast for them to catch.

Finch isn’t keen on the idea of burying bodies—he’d prefer cremation. So, the memory of burying the cardinal may make him sad not only because the bones are a reminder that the cardinal is dead. They also remind him how uncaring and unwilling to listen his family is, since they insisted on burying the bird.



Finch’s disappearing reflection suggests that he’s starting to lose his sense of who he is. And then, worrying about “wak[ing] up the darkness” shows how afraid and alone Finch feels. The darkness could refer to the literal darkness in the room, or it could refer to the figurative darkness in Finch’s mind. And while the darkness of the room can’t actually hurt anything, if Finch is referring to his own mind, it would reinforce that he’s most afraid of himself.



Deleting Mr. Embry’s message ensures that Finch’s support network isn’t actually able to help him—not even Kate is going to be able to get the message. And Finch is also still fighting with coming up with the words to describe his experiences. In his worsening mental state, all he can focus on are negative words, which make him feel even worse. His mind also tells him that he has bipolar disorder, which is characterized by cycles of depression and mania (heightened mood) that fit with Finch’s descriptions of his “asleep” and “awake” periods.



This passage makes it clear that Finch has a very particular idea of what suicide should feel like. It should make him feel heroic and like he’s doing something meaningful; it shouldn’t be as easy as falling asleep. This speaks to how much he idealizes suicide—and how much he perhaps shouldn’t.



When Finch talks about leaving the hospital, he makes it clear again that for him, suicide is all about gaining control. He needs the hospital’s help—but on his terms. He needs to feel in control of whether he lives or dies—but only if dying feels a specific way. This shows how acutely Finch craves control, but it also seems clear that trying to get control in these ways is self-destructive.



45. FINCH: DAY 71

Finch gets in Little Bastard and drives 25 miles to Ohio, where a group called Life Is Life meets. It's a group for teens who are thinking about or have attempted suicide. Finch is exhausted; trying to act normal around Violet is difficult. He doesn't want her to see, so he's told her he's sick and doesn't want to infect her. Finch joins the other Life Is Life members around a huge table with water and cookies. The counselor, Demetrius, welcomes newcomers. A girl tries to talk seductively to Finch, but Finch turns her away—he's not here to make friends.

Finch already wishes he hadn't come. He's certain that the brand of cookies on offer contains animal bone char. He focuses on Demetrius, who offers facts about suicide and teenagers. Everyone introduces themselves and shares any mental health diagnoses and whether they've tried to kill themselves. They have to end by saying what's keeping them going. Finch notices that many kids seem dull and vacant, like they're on drugs. He introduces himself as Josh Raymond, admits he "halfheartedly" tried to take sleeping pills, and says that the Jovian-Plutonian gravitational effect is keeping him going.

A bundled up young woman races in. Demetrius assures her it's no problem that she's late as she sits and pulls off her hat and mittens. It's Amanda Monk. Demetrius calls her Rachel and asks her to introduce herself. She says she's bulimic and has tried to kill herself twice with pills. After everyone has introduced themselves, Finch thinks that he's "the only one who hasn't tried to really and truly kill himself." This makes him think that when he does try again, he's not going to mess up.

Finch finds the meeting heartbreaking. He wants to "let the Long Drop come." There's nothing wrong with these kids except that their brains are different. Finch wants to get away from them—and from all the teens who did successfully kill themselves. He wants to escape the stigma and the labels. The other kids talk about their diagnoses like they're the only things that define them—Finch is the only kid who's just himself. One girl shares that when her sister died of leukemia, people sent flowers. But when she almost died from cutting her wrists, nobody cared at all.

Finch feels like he has to "act normal" around Violet because of the stigma surrounding mental health issues. Admitting he's struggling might mean opening himself up to getting a diagnosis—something that Finch is afraid of. This also suggests that Finch doesn't trust that people are still going to love him or want to be around him if he admits what he's actually feeling.



The fact that Finch is talking about bone char in the cookies ties back to his earlier thoughts about the cardinal—dead animals seem to remind Finch of himself and his mental illness. As Finch listens to the other kids introduce themselves, it's telling that he focuses on them seeming dull and vacant because they're on medications. This likely gives Finch more reason to not want a diagnosis—that could mean being prescribed psychiatric drugs, and he seems to look down on these kids who are taking medications to manage their mental illnesses.



It's a major revelation that Amanda is at this Life Is Life meeting and seems to be a regular attendee (since Demetrius recognizes her). This shows Finch that he's not alone in struggling with mental illness and even suicidal thoughts—it's something that can affect anyone. But Finch also vows to not mess up when he tries again to kill himself, and as he says this, implying that he is going to make another suicide attempt.



The way that Finch talks about the other kids suggests that he sees himself as fundamentally different from them—and as superior, since he's "just himself." But Finch also ignores the fact that by thinking this, he's perpetuating the stigma surrounding mental health. If there wasn't so much stigma, people would be more likely to sympathize with these kids, and their illnesses would be treated the same as a physical illness like leukemia.



Finch thinks of Eleanor as the discussion turns to the different medications people are on. He stops listening after one boy says that he's glad to be alive, but he feels like all the things that made him who he is are gone. After the meeting, Demetrius asks Finch what he thought. Finch says nice things and then chases Amanda to the parking lot. By her car, he promises not to tell anyone. He points out that she can always just tell people he's a "freak"—they'll think he's making stuff up.

Finch asks if Amanda still thinks about killing herself. Amanda admits she does and asks if Finch was really going to jump off the belltower. When he gives a noncommittal answer, she asks if he gets tired of people talking about him. Finch points out that Amanda is one of the people who gossips about him, which makes her go quiet. She says that gossiping about other people reminds her that she has control. As she gets in the car, she tells Finch that now he knows he's "not the only freak."

46. VIOLET: MARCH 18

Violet doesn't hear from Finch for three days. It starts snowing on Wednesday, and the roads are so slick that she falls off Leroy multiple times. When she gets home, she asks Violet's mom if she can borrow the car to visit a friend across town. Violet's mom stares but hands over the keys. Violet heads for the car and looks back. Her mom is crying. She explains that she's just happy—she and Violet's dad weren't sure Violet would ever drive again. Violet hugs her mom and then pulls out of the drive. She's shaky at first, but then she remembers Eleanor saying after Violet got her license that Violet could drive her around. She can almost see Eleanor in the passenger seat.

Violet is driving smoothly when she gets to Finch's neighborhood. A woman who must be Finch's mom opens the door, invites Violet in, and gets her **water**. She says that Finch should be home from school by now, and Violet realizes that she has no idea Finch was expelled. Kate comes into the kitchen to chat with her mom and Violet and then sends Violet up to Finch's room. Finch opens his door in pajama bottoms and glasses. He smiles and lets Violet into his room, which is totally bare aside from the unmade bed and two boxes. He explains that he's cleaning up.

Again, this meeting doesn't do much for Finch except convince him that asking for help is silly and misguided. Asking for help, he thinks, will make him less himself, force him to seek a diagnosis, and force him to take medication that will make him even less of himself. But on the plus side, seeing Amanda at the meeting again shows Finch that he's not alone—even if he sometimes feels like he is.



Though Finch and Amanda's conversation is short and adversarial, it nevertheless shows both of them that they're not alone. It also helps both of them see that the other person has reasons for behaving the way they do. While Finch acts out and behaves impulsively to feel in control and stay "awake," Amanda gossips about her classmates.



It seems like Violet is still insistent on biking to school, but she's finally ready to accept that biking everywhere isn't feasible or safe. This is a major step for her—and her mom's reaction drives home how significant this is. When Violet is able to calm her nerves in the car by thinking of Eleanor, it also shows how Violet will be able to continue moving forward. She doesn't have to forget Eleanor—indeed, she should remember her sister in moments like this, but not allow Eleanor's memory to rule her life.



Violet is starting to piece together how disjointed and unsupportive Finch's family is. Compared to how Violet's parents involve themselves in her life, it's unthinkable that Finch's mom doesn't know Finch was expelled. The aside that Violet gets a glass of water here drives home that water, for most people, is a neutral or positive thing—though it's something far more complex for Finch.



Violet asks Finch if he's okay, trying to watch her tone—she doesn't want to sound like a needy girlfriend. Finch says he was feeling under the weather, but he's better now. Then he invites Violet to see his fort, which is in his closet. He leads Violet inside. Finch has guitar, computer, a license plate, and his comforter. Violet sits next to Finch and takes in a small Wall of Ideas. Finch explains that he thinks better in here, where it's quiet. He's putting positive words or phrases on his wall, while anything negative goes in a pile. He tells Violet about an Irish girl who fell in love with a boy. Other girls called her names until she hanged herself.

Violet and Finch write words on sticky notes and then either put them on the wall or throw them in the pile. Then, Finch shows Violet how he rearranges the words on the wall to make a song. After playing their song and explaining that he never writes his songs down, he writes that he'd like to have sex with Violet. They do have sex, and everything feels okay again. But afterwards, Violet notices Finch staring off—and when he looks at her, he doesn't seem to be totally there. He asks her not to tell anyone about his fort, and Violet agrees. She scoots closer to Finch, feeling oddly like he might escape.

Finch explains that he gets in “black, sinking moods” sometimes. Violet says that's normal for teenagers, but Finch ignores this and tells Violet about the **cardinal**. It kept flying into the window, and he begged his parents to bring it inside so that it would stop hurting itself. Finally, the cardinal died, and they buried it. Finch says that this was when he had his first “black mood”; he doesn't remember anything for a little while after the cardinal died. Worried, Violet asks if Finch has spoken to anyone. She looks around, notices the pillows and **water** jug, and asks if Finch is living in the closet. Finch just says that he's been here before—eventually, it works, and he comes out.

As soon as Violet gets home, she goes into her own closet and sits down among her clothes and shoes. She imagines what it'd be like to live in there. When she steps back out, she feels like she can breathe again. At dinner, Violet and her parents toast to Violet driving again. Violet feels horribly guilty for lying to them.

47. FINCH: DAY 75; VIOLET: MARCH 20

Finch offers a quote by Cesare Pavese: “The cadence of suffering has begun.” Finch is “in pieces.”

Pay attention to the way that Finch describes how he's been recently: he's been “under the weather,” and his closet is his “fort” where it's quiet. He's choosing his words very carefully so as to not worry Violet, though it's unclear if he's successful in doing this. And Violet also knows that she has to tread carefully here. Something seems wrong to her, if only because Finch's parents don't seem able to support him.



This exercise with the sticky notes allows Finch to do much the same thing that Decca was doing earlier in the novel by cutting mean words out of books. Finch is trying to ensure that he only has to deal with happy or positive things, since everything else feels so overwhelming right now. Asking Violet to keep his fort secret suggests that he trusts her—but he's also essentially asking her to promise not to help him.



The cardinal's death is associated with Finch's mental illness in his memories. What's notable about the cardinal is that Finch asked his parents for help—and they refused to help him keep the cardinal safe. Now, as a teenager, Finch still doesn't feel safe asking his parents for help. They've shown him that they're not going to support him or try to keep things from dying. So, without them, Finch has had to come up with insufficient coping mechanisms to deal with his mental illness.



By this point, Violet has largely healed from the trauma of losing Eleanor. So, by showing her experimenting with sitting in her closet, the novel more broadly suggests that living in one's closet isn't something that healthy people feel compelled to do—showing, by comparison, how mentally unhealthy Finch is right now.



The lack of explanation surrounding this quote suggests that Finch can't explain what's happening to him. As a result, readers can't tell exactly what's going on, only that he's struggling.



After U.S. Geography, Amanda comes up to Violet and says she has to tell her a secret. Violet sighs but agrees to keep the secret. Amanda says on Sunday she saw Finch at Life Is Life, a support group for teenagers considering suicide. He said that he'd swallowed pills and gone to the hospital.

Amanda seems to recognize that Finch needs people to look out for him—she may be a bully, but she doesn't actually want Finch to die. By telling Violet, she also gives Violet the important information she needs to realize that Finch needs help.



As soon as school is over, Violet bikes to Finch's house. He doesn't answer, and it seems like Finch's mom and sisters aren't home. Violet finally heads to her house and sends Finch a Facebook message. He replies like nothing is wrong and says that his birthday is tomorrow. Violet wants to ask him about the pills and the hospital, but she's afraid he'll disappear. He tells her to come tomorrow for dinner.

Especially after what Amanda said about Finch, Violet can no longer ignore that something is seriously wrong with him. But he makes it clear here that he's trying to make everything seem as normal as possible. In this way, he also makes it more difficult for Violet to even consider bringing up that something might be amiss.



48. VIOLET: MARCH 21 AND BEYOND

When Violet knocks on Finch's bedroom door, it takes a minute for him to answer. He opens the door wearing a suit; his hair is freshly buzzed. It makes him look older and more attractive, but his bedroom is still "hospital bare." Violet is worried and feels like the blue walls are suffocating. She says they need to talk, but he kisses her and asks how she feels about space travel and Chinese food. He asks her to take her shoes off and close her eyes, and then Finch leads Violet into his closet. Once she's seated, Finch tells her to open her eyes.

That Violet feels like Finch's pool-blue room is suffocating suggests that she and Finch are moving further apart as he spirals more deeply into his mental illness. The blue of the walls was comforting to him, since it reminded him of water and specifically of Virginia Woolf's suicide note. But to Violet, it reminds her of a hospital. And describing it as "suffocating" also suggests that she's more focused on the negative connotations of water—the fact that it can kill.



Finch has painted his closet with planets and stars, and everything is glowing. He points to a blacklight bulb in the ceiling and notes that Jupiter and Pluto are aligned in his rendering. This is the "Jovian-Plutonian gravitational chamber." Violet can only gape at him. She's so worried about Finch, but this is the nicest thing anyone has done for her. The Chinese food is from Finch's favorite restaurant, and Violet doesn't ask if he left his closet to go get it. She tells herself he got it, because he doesn't have to stay inside the closet if he doesn't want to.

Violet is caught between worrying for Finch and being overwhelmed by his thoughtfulness. At first, her love for Finch seems to outweigh her worry; this is why she tells herself that Finch left his closet to get the Chinese food himself. But the fact that Finch is essentially living in a "Jovian-Plutonian gravitational chamber" nevertheless suggests that he feels like he's floating right now, something that could be negative and reflect his declining mental state.



Violet and Finch pass a bottle of vodka back and forth, and Violet says that all of this is perfect. She thinks that Amanda must've been wrong; telling her about Life Is Life was supposed to upset her. As they eat, they talk about everything except for how Finch feels. Then, Violet gives him a first edition copy of *The Waves* that she found in New York. Finch admits that he's been looking for this book for months.

*Because Violet loves Finch so much, she's willing to ignore the red flags (such as that they're eating in Finch's closet) that suggest Finch is having a hard time. Giving Finch a copy of *The Waves* offers some hope that Finch might be able to replace some of the negative words in his head with words that are positive and connected to Violet.*



Finch and Violet lie on the floor. Finch tells Violet that Sir Patrick Moore was the first to explain black holes in an accessible way. He'd ordered that a map of the Milky Way be drawn on the TV studio floor. Finch shares some facts about black holes: not even light can escape them, and they engulf everything that gets too close after something passes a point called the "event horizon." After explaining these facts, Sir Patrick Moore walked into the drawn black hole and disappeared. This, according to Finch, was magic.

The way that Finch describes black holes mimics the way he describes going into his "asleep" (depressive) phases. At some point, it's impossible to resist—there's nothing he can do to get out of the "asleep," and he can't see anything good while he's in that state. Describing Sir Patrick Moore's disappearance into the painted black hole as "magic" again suggests that Finch can't effectively describe his experiences—it's "magic" when he goes into the "asleep" or "wakes up" again.



Finch says that being sucked into a black hole would be the coolest way to die. Nobody knows what it'd be like, but Finch likes to think he'd just be swallowed and get to stop worrying about everything. Violet takes his hand and tells Finch that he's her best friend. She cries as she realizes how true this is—Finch is a better friend than Eleanor was. Concerned, Finch pulls Violet close. Violet says that Amanda told her about Life Is Life and the hospital, and she admits that she's worried. She wants to help him and wants him to talk to someone.

As Finch talks about how cool it would be to die in a black hole, it shows Violet how interested he is in suicide. Black holes aren't just cool to him—they represent what he thinks is an ideal way to die. This forces Violet to accept that something is amiss with Finch. Asking him to get help shows that she trusts him to not be angry with her for bringing it up.



Finch smiles an awful smile and says he doesn't need help. He's not like Eleanor—Violet shouldn't try to save him, just because she couldn't save Eleanor. Finch says he'd love to be Violet and be normal for a day. He's the "freak" and the "weirdo" who's unpredictable and "crazy." Finch says that he's not just his symptoms, though—he's not a diagnosis, an illness, or a problem. He's a person. He suggests that Violet must regret getting up on the belltower that day, and he says that he warned her this would happen. Violet storms out of the closet. She knows Finch can't follow her, though she tells herself that if he loves her, he'll figure out a way.

Finch's reaction suggests that to him, being asked to get help is a version of betrayal. In his mind, Violet is asking him to give up his identity as Finch, put his tumultuous feelings into words, and possibly accept a diagnosis and medication. To Finch, this is unacceptable. Lashing out at Violet is a way to deflect attention away from the problem at hand and make her feel like she shouldn't try to help him anymore—which may end up being harmful in the long run but is exactly what Finch wants.



When Violet gets home, Violet's mom and Violet's dad are watching TV. Though Violet feels terrible, she tells them that she met Finch when she climbed up onto the belltower ledge. He talked her down and saved her, and now he needs help. Violet admits that she's been seeing Finch against her parents' wishes, but they need to help him. She tells her parents everything. Violet's mom tells her that she's disappointed, but Violet was right to ask for help.

Because Violet trusts her parents to be caring and fair, she's comfortable telling them about Finch and ask for their help. This speaks to how robust Violet's support network is—especially now that she knows it's okay to use it. Asking for help might go against Finch's wishes, but it nevertheless makes it possible for Finch to finally get the help he needs.



It takes Violet hours to fall asleep. She hears rocks hitting her window in her dreams, but then she wakes up and wonders if Finch actually was outside. When she gets up, he isn't there. Violet spends the next day with her parents, checking her email and Facebook. All the girls she invited to contribute to Germ write back happy to contribute. Meanwhile, Violet's mom spends the day trying to get ahold of Finch's mom. A psychiatrist friend of Violet's dad speaks to Decca, but Decca only confirms for him that Finch isn't in his room or his closet.

On one hand, Violet's life seems to be going well—everyone wants to contribute to Germ, and it seems like the project will take off. But on the other hand, Violet is forced to acknowledge that Finch's support system is nearly nonexistent. Violet, it seems, is the only person willing or able to try to get Finch help.



Ryan finds Violet in the hallway at school on Monday and asks if she's heard from colleges and if Finch is going to go to the same college. Violet isn't sure. As people greet Ryan, Violet remembers Eleanor inviting her to come along to Ryan's brother's party. She wonders if Ryan remembers that Eleanor died on the way home from that party. She wonders what it'd be like to be with "good, steady Ryan" after being with Finch.

Violet shows here that although she's doing better, she's still not entirely healed after Eleanor's death. Ryan still brings up unhappy memories—memories that are made all the more painful by the possibility that Ryan doesn't remember things the same way. As Violet considers what dating Ryan would be like, she suggests she's not the same person she was a few months ago.



Violet can't concentrate in U.S. Geography. Charlie and Brenda haven't heard from Finch in a few days either, but they insist this is normal. When Mr. Black asks all the students for updates on their projects, Violet tells him that Finch isn't here. Mr. Black insists on an update anyway. Rather than tell him about Finch living in his closet and being in serious trouble, Violet simply says that she's learning a lot about Indiana.

Just like Finch's family, Brenda and Charlie make it clear that they don't worry about Finch, no matter how he acts. Moreover, Finch has trained them to think this way by never letting them in on the fact that he was struggling. In this way, Finch kept his mental illness a secret and ensured that nobody would suspect anything was wrong.



Violet hasn't heard from Finch by Tuesday, so she bikes to his house. Decca answers and lets Violet in. Violet runs up to Finch's room, which she can tell is empty. Finch's guitar, laptop, and other effects are gone from his closet. Violet stands in the closet and calls his phone. She leaves him a voicemail and then rifles through his drawers. Back downstairs, she asks Decca if Finch's mom got Violet's mom's voicemails. Decca says her mom hasn't, but it's normal for Finch to disappear. He'll be back. Violet wants to ask everyone why they don't care about Finch disappearing and why they think this is normal. She calls Finch one more time. He doesn't answer.

Because Violet has grown up believing that it's important to pay attention to people and get them the support they need, it's shocking to her that nobody seems to be doing that for Finch. She's seemingly the only one who deeply cares about him, and she's starting to realize that she's not going to be able to save Finch all on her own. And again, the fact that Decca seems unconcerned that Finch seems to have permanently left speaks to how disconnected and uncaring Finch's family is.



49. FINCH: DAY 80 (A MUTHAF#@*ING WORLD RECORD)

In the poem "Epilogue," the poet Robert Lowell asks, "Yet why not say what happened?" Finch isn't sure how to answer that question. He's just wondering which of his feelings are real, and which "me" is actually him. He's only ever liked one version of himself, and that Finch was awake as long as possible. Finch couldn't stop the **cardinal's** death, so he feels responsible for it. In a way, Finch's entire family was responsible—their house was built where the cardinal's tree once was.

Finch makes it clear here that he's still struggling to figure out his identity. It's deeply unsettling to not know who he is—or if anything he feels is real. Bringing up the cardinal, meanwhile, suggests that Finch is still thinking about death. Insisting that his whole family is responsible for the cardinal's death shows again that Finch doesn't believe his family can help him—or would even be willing to try.



Finch flashes again on the final line of Virginia Woolf's suicide note, in which she tells her husband, "If anybody could have saved me it would have been you." Cesare Pavese wrote "We do not remember days, we remember moments." Finch remembers running to buy flowers. He remembers Violet's smile, and how she looked at Finch like he was whole. Violet's hand in his made it seem like someone belonged to him.

Pairing Virginia Woolf's suicide note with the moments he remembers of his relationship with Violet suggests that Finch thinks Violet is the only person who could've saved him. This is another indicator that he's still thinking about suicide. And the finality in the note's tone suggests that Finch is considering suicide more seriously than he has in the past.



50. VIOLET: THE REST OF MARCH

On Thursday, Finch starts to text Violet. He writes that “they were all perfect days,” but then he turns his phone off and doesn’t respond to Violet’s texts or voicemails. He texts back hours later to say that he’s “found.” Violet’s mom talks to Finch’s mom, who says that Finch is going to check in every week and that they don’t need a psychiatrist for him. This is normal; Finch isn’t missing. When Violet asks her mom if they know where Finch went, she notices her mom look suddenly worried. Violet knows that if *she* disappeared, her parents would have police looking in multiple states. Violet’s mom says she doesn’t know, but it seems like they have to trust that Finch is okay.

At school, Violet feels like the only one who notices Finch is gone. School days proceed as normal: Violet gets acceptance and rejection letters from colleges, plays in an orchestra concert, and holds her first meeting for *Germ*. Whenever she texts Finch, it takes him ages to write back—and he never actually responds to what she says. She’s starting to get angry.

After another two days, Violet starts getting texts from Finch. He writes first that he’s “on the highest branch,” and then that they “are written in paint.” That night, he writes that he believes in signs—and the next afternoon, he writes cryptically, “The glow of Ultraviolet.” The following day, he writes, “A lake. A prayer. It’s so lovely to be lovely in Private.” Then, the texts stop.

Finch’s first text alludes to one of Finch and Violet’s first conversations about whether a “perfect day” is possible. He seems to imply that all their days together were perfect, speaking to the power of connecting with another person. His next text, though, shows that he’s unable to actually articulate how he’s feeling. As Violet and her mom discuss the situation, Violet is again reminded that Finch’s support network is much less dependable than her own.



Violet’s feeling that she’s the only one who cares about Finch’s disappearance suggests that on some level, she thinks that everyone should be just as concerned about him as she is. Everyone has some responsibility to help him—and everyone but her is failing in that regard.



Again, Finch’s texts don’t make any sense to Violet, so they’re even more maddening than they might be otherwise. And because Violet doesn’t know what he means by any of these phrases or observations, she also has no way of knowing whether Finch needs help or not.



51. VIOLET: APRIL

Easter Sunday falls on April 5. Violet and her parents drive to the A Street Bridge and climb down to the riverbed, where Eleanor died. In the riverbed, they find a license plate with flowers planted around it. Violet goes cold. She knows that Finch did this—and she also knows that she and her parents have survived the last year. On the drive back home, Violet wonders when Finch was there.

When Violet’s parents don’t say anything about Eleanor, Violet starts to talk about her and Eleanor’s plans to see Boy Parade. It was Eleanor who suggested they follow the band across the Midwest. Violet says that Eleanor was great at taking things a step further than Violet would’ve. She thinks that in that way, Eleanor was a lot like Finch. Violet starts to sing her favorite Boy Parade song, and Violet’s mom joins in.

It may be unclear when Finch created this memorial for Eleanor, but it nevertheless shows how deeply Finch cares for Violet (and perhaps even her parents). Creating the memorial, moreover, shows the importance of remembering Eleanor and honoring her without dwelling on the past.



By opening up and talking about this experience with Eleanor, Violet tries to show her parents how helpful it can be to put their feelings into words. It will allow them to connect with one another and keep Eleanor’s memory alive. Violet’s mom seems to agree with Violet—or at least want to make her happy—when she starts to sing.



Back at home, Violet thinks about why she wants to start a magazine. She studies her notes and then looks at the spot where her calendar once hung. Violet thinks of the X's that she used to mark the days off, just because she wanted those days to be over. In her wandering notebook, she writes: "Germ Magazine. You start here."

Violet hasn't heard from Finch since March—but now she's angry instead of worried. She's upset at herself for "being so easy to leave" and angry at Finch for leaving. Eventually, Violet puts the few things of Finch's that she has in a box in her closet. Since Finch has their wandering map, Violet buys another map so she can finish their project. On April 11, Violet borrows the car and visits a museum, but she feels like a tourist. She keeps an eye out for a Saturn SUV and tries to tell herself that she's over Finch. She imagines how he'd look at her if he could see her driving now.

Meanwhile, Ryan and Suze break up, and Ryan asks Violet out. They go to dinner at a fancy restaurant and talk about mundane things. The date is normal and nice, and Ryan is also normal and nice. Suddenly, Violet likes how solid and dependable Ryan is—aside from the stealing. She lets him kiss her when he drops her back at home.

On Saturday afternoon, Amanda stops by and asks to hang out. She and Violet play tennis in the street, and that night, they go to the Quarry. Violet texts Brenda, Lara, and the three Brianas. A bit later, Jordan comes too. The following Friday, Violet goes to the movies with Brenda and then sleeps over at Brenda's house. Brenda tries to bring up Finch and assures Violet that Finch didn't leave because of Violet. They stay up all night working on *Germ* stuff. Violet reads emails out loud from girls at school who want to contribute to the magazine. She realizes that Brenda is her closest friend.

52. VIOLET: APRIL 26

Mid-morning on Sunday, Kate shows up at Violet's house and asks if she's heard from Finch. She explains that Finch has been checking in on Saturdays, but they didn't hear from him yesterday—and then they got a weird email from him earlier. Violet feels a bit jealous as she reads the email. In it, Finch writes about going to a pizza place in Indianapolis with his whole family. He recalls everyone being happy. He tells Finch's mom that she's not old, tells Decca that tough words can be beautiful, and warns Kate to be careful with her heart. Violet doesn't know what to make of it.

Without Finch or Eleanor to distract her, Violet turns to what she has left: Germ. With the magazine, she wants to give people something that will help them see that there are reasons to live and to enjoy it—just as Finch showed her. This illustrates the power of the written word to connect people and to give them a sense of purpose.



Violet feels like she has no choice but to process Finch's disappearance like she would any other breakup. Being upset that she's "easy to leave," though, suggests that Violet blames herself for Finch's disappearance. This weight makes it more difficult for Violet to move on, even as she takes steps like putting away his things and continuing on with their project. Her narration also makes it clear that she's not over Finch, even though she'd like to be.



The date with Ryan shows Violet's life starting to normalize after Finch's disappearance. And as Violet thinks of Ryan in terms of his solidity and his stealing, she shows that she's learned to think of people as containing both good and bad elements.



Finch's disappearance may be difficult for Violet to process, but that doesn't mean that her life is ending like it seemed to after Eleanor died. Rather, Violet has learned to cope with her grief by reaching out and connecting to others—even Amanda. The fact that they seem to make up suggests that Violet has become more understanding of mental health issues, since she now knows that Amanda has been struggling.



Finch seems to have very purposefully written this email to his family in a cryptic way. This gives Finch power in this situation—whatever's going on, he's able to control what his family does or doesn't know about it. However, given that readers are aware of Finch's suicidal thoughts, it's possible to see this as a potential goodbye note to his family.



Violet suddenly feels breathless, and Violet’s mom comes around the corner and looks concerned. Violet hugs her mom and then goes upstairs to log onto Facebook. She finds a message from Finch that he sent a few minutes after he sent the email to his family. He says that “the words are written in *The Waves*.” Finch includes a passage about “shining in the dark” and being prepared. He writes, “*I am rooted, but I flow...‘Come,’ I say, ‘come.’*” Violet writes back, “‘Stay; I say, ‘stay.’” She calls Finch, and when he doesn’t answer, she calls Brenda. Brenda also received an email that said that a guy will love Brenda for who she is. Charlie also got a weird email, seemingly saying goodbye. Something is wrong.

Violet drives to Finch’s house. Finch’s mom starts crying as soon as she sees Violet and wraps her in a tight hug. Violet asks to speak to Kate alone. On the patio, Violet tells Kate about the emails to her, Brenda, and Charlie. Kate reads the messages and is confused. Violet shows her a copy of *The Waves* and notes that Finch took the lines out of order, putting them together in his own way. Kate is perplexed. Suddenly, she says that Finch is supposed to go to NYU in the fall; he got early acceptance and never told anyone. He might be in New York. Kate only knows about NYU because she happened to get the voicemail from someone in admissions. Kate also says she never got any messages from Violet’s mom—Finch must have erased them.

Back inside, Violet notices Decca arranging pieces of paper on the floor, just like Finch did with his sticky notes. Violet asks to look at Finch’s room, and Kate tells her to go ahead. It still smells like Finch, and it looks untouched. Violet digs through his drawers and then goes into his closet. She puts a black T-shirt of Finch’s into her purse and then sits down. Finch’s closet seems like a black hole—he disappeared into it. Violet looks around and notices that the wall she’s sitting against is also covered in sticky notes. The two lines of words seem jumbled, but Violet rearranges them until she recognizes them. She ends up with: “There was nothing to make him last a long time” and “Go to the **water** if it suits thee there.”

Violet goes back downstairs to find that Kate has left to look for Finch. Violet asks Finch’s mom to follow her back upstairs. When they get into Finch’s room, Finch’s mom is confused as to when he painted it blue. Violet leads her into the closet, and Finch’s mom recognizes the first line of sticky notes: it’s what Finch said when the **cardinal** died. The second line is from *The Waves*. Violet thinks he’s gone someplace they wandered where there was **water**. Violet offers to give Finch’s mom directions to several places, but Finch’s mom turns to her and asks Violet to go. Sobbing, she asks Violet to bring Finch home.

Especially considered alongside the Facebook message to Violet and the emails to Brenda and Charlie, it seems more and more likely that Finch is saying goodbye to his loved ones—he may be preparing to commit suicide. But again, because Finch’s writing is so cryptic and purposefully cagey about what exactly is going on, none of his loved ones are able to figure out exactly what’s happening. Violet may only feel so breathless and concerned because she alone realized how unwell Finch was before he disappeared.



*The fact that Finch took lines from *The Waves* out of order and put them back together in a new way illustrates another way that people can connect with literature. Rearranging the text like this allows Finch to create his own meaning. However, though it seems like he expects Violet to grasp the significance of his message, she’s clearly just as perplexed as Kate is. When Kate mentions that Finch is accepted to NYU, she reveals how intelligent and gifted he is. But because of Finch’s mental illness, he isn’t able to apply himself in school or look forward to something like college.*



The fact that Finch’s room looks untouched suggests that Violet is the only person who has searched it looking for clues—another indictment of his family’s lack of concern. As Violet discovers the second wall of sticky notes, it seems like Finch left them there explicitly for her to decipher them as she does here. He’s now using their shared love of language to leave her a message. It’s particularly ominous that he mentions going to the water, since he often associates water with death.



Again, it’s telling that Finch’s mom had no idea Finch painted his room blue—she hasn’t been in the room recently, and she’s not involved in her son’s life enough to know about major changes like this. But importantly, she can identify the first line as being related to the cardinal’s death. And she seems to realize that the implication of this is ominous—Finch seems to have thought of the cardinal’s death as a sort of inevitable suicide. And again, given that he associates water with death, this suggests that Finch is in danger.



53. VIOLET: APRIL 26 (PART 2)

Violet goes for herself, not for any of Finch's family members. She knows what she'll find—and she knows it'll be her fault. She made Finch leave his closet by telling her parents he was in trouble. Violet calls her parents and tells them she'll be back in a while, and then she drives faster than normal. She thinks "there was nothing to make him last."

Violet sees Little Bastard parked on the side of the road before she sees anything else. She pulls in behind the van, something inside of her screaming at her to leave. If she leaves, Finch will still be alive. But Violet gets out, walks up the embankment, and then walks down to the **Blue Hole**. It's peaceful and quiet. Violet notices Finch's clothes folded neatly on the bank. She finds his phone in a boot, and their wandering map in his jacket pocket. Violet takes the map and then starts to say, "Marco." No one answers.

Violet takes off her shoes and dives into the **water**. She swims as deep as she can, but she can't hold her breath as long as Finch could. Violet knows he's gone, but she continues to dive for him. Finally, she crawls out and calls 911. Soon after, the sheriff, fire department, and an ambulance arrive. The family who owns the property mills around too, and the husband says, "Goddamn kids." Violet knows he's talking about Finch. Men dive into the lake. Violet wants to tell them they're not going to find Finch since he's made it to another world, but eventually, they bring up a bloated body. Violet refuses to identify it.

When the sheriff asks for Finch's mom's number, Violet says that she'll call. Finch's mom answers the house phone on the first ring, which enrages Violet. Violet says she found Finch where she thought she would and apologizes. Finch's mom makes an awful sound, and after a minute, the sheriff takes the phone. Violet lies down and thinks of *The Waves*.

54. VIOLET: MAY 3

Violet stands in front of her mirror, studying herself. She's dressed in black and wears Finch's T-shirt. Her face doesn't look like it belongs to a girl who has great parents, great friends, and a bunch of college acceptance letters. Violet thinks her face looks like it belongs to a sad girl who has experienced horrible loss. She wonders if she'll ever see anything but Finch and Eleanor in her reflection, and she wonders if other people can tell. Later, Violet tells her parents that she wants to go to the funeral alone. They've been watching her closely. Violet has also caught them exchanging angry looks with each other—they're furious at Finch's mom.

Violet is purposefully cagey here about knowing "what she'll find." She seems to imply that she expects to find Finch's dead body—but she's unwilling to say it in so many words. By not voicing that fear explicitly, she maintains some control over the situation.



It's significant that Violet describes the Blue Hole as being peaceful and quiet. Previously, Finch described water as being peaceful and quiet in Chapter 12 (though Violet doesn't know about this). It's also worth noting that Violet shows how far she's come by being willing to look for Finch at all. She knows she's going to find something horrific and upsetting—but she's not as afraid of difficult emotions anymore.



The novel has made it clear that "Goddamn kids" aren't actually the problem—stigma and shame surrounding mental health issues, which can make a person feel like their only choice is to take their own life, is the real problem. Out of respect for Finch and to protect herself, Violet tries to tell herself that Finch got what he wanted by killing himself—that he made it to another world where he doesn't have to be in pain anymore.



Only now, when Finch is dead, does his mom pick up the phone. Violet believes that Finch's mom had numerous opportunities to help and support her son before it got to this point, and therefore seems to blame Finch's mom (at least in part) for his suicide.



Here, Violet articulates the idea that what a person looks like on the outside doesn't always match what a person feels on the inside. She is, to many people, a college-bound girl with supportive parents and friends. But right now, in the middle of grieving for Finch not long after Eleanor's death, Violet feels like she's never going to be anything but sad and grief-stricken. She doesn't seem to realize yet that she can be both—she can mourn these losses while also looking to the future with hope.



At the funeral, Finch's family stands in the front row. Violet studies Finch's dad's back and notices that Finch's entire family is crying. The funeral takes place at the top of a hill in the largest cemetery in town. Violet remembers that Finch wanted to be cremated. Everyone is crying, including Amanda, Ryan, and Roamer. Violet stands next to Brenda and Charlie, and her parents are nearby. Brenda stares at Roamer with an angry expression—Roamer and his friends are the ones who called Finch a "freak."

The preacher finishes, and Violet thinks that he didn't mention suicide at all. Officially, Finch's death was ruled an accident, since they didn't find a proper suicide note. But Violet knows it wasn't an accident. She thinks that "suicide victim" is an "interesting" phrase, since it implies that the person didn't have a choice in dying. Maybe Finch didn't feel like he had a choice—but Violet will never know. Angrily, she remembers how Finch was the one who lectured her about the necessity of living. It's not fair that he left, especially after what happened to Eleanor. Violet can't remember her last words to Finch, except that they were "angry and normal and unremarkable."

As the crowd disperses, Charlie mutters about the "phonies," and Brenda says that Finch is probably watching and flipping everyone off. Violet asks Brenda if she thinks Finch is somewhere. She says she likes to think Finch *can't* see them because he's in a world he designed. Before Brenda can answer, Finch's mom pulls Violet into a hug. Finch's dad hugs Violet next, until Violet's dad pulls her away. Over dinner, Violet listens to her parents talk about Finch's parents. Violet leaves the table before they can start talking about how selfish Finch was to commit suicide, especially when Eleanor died and didn't get a choice.

Violet sits in her closet and notices her calendar. She studies all the blank days, the ones she didn't put an X on because she spent them with Finch. She thinks that she hates Finch and wishes she could've done something. She wishes she hadn't let him down and that she'd been enough to make him stay. Violet wonders if it was her fault and asks Finch to come back.

To Violet, it's further proof that Finch's parents didn't care about him or know him well that they chose to have him buried instead of cremated. And Brenda suggests that all the bullies who made Finch miserable are partially to blame for his suicide. Though the novel makes it clear that it was no one person's fault, this also shows how damaging the stigma surrounding mental health can be. Roamer might not have caused Finch's suicide, but he contributed to Finch's feeling that he couldn't ask for help.



As Violet thinks about the term "suicide victim," she realizes that there's a lot of tension in that term. It doesn't totally describe a person who chose to take their own life—especially in this case, when the authorities were unable to definitively rule Finch's death a suicide. The simple fact that Finch didn't leave a proper note, though, shows how disconnected he was from the written word. He struggled so much to make sense of his own experience that it was impossible to explain himself to someone else.



Violet and her family see Finch's parents' attempts to hug Violet as rude and invasive. This is especially true since, to Violet and her parents, Violet was the only person who actually cared about Finch. But although Violet and her parents might agree on this, Violet also can't stomach the way she knows her parents talk about Finch's suicide. It's unfair, she thinks, to compare Finch and Eleanor's deaths.



The blank days on Violet's calendar are reminders of all the happy days she spent with Finch. And her conflicting emotions now that Finch is dead show that it's going to be difficult to cope with his death.



55. VIOLET: MAY—WEEKS 1, 2, AND 3

Every kid at school seems to be grieving Finch. Someone builds a shrine in a display case near the principal's office, and kids leave notes to Finch in it. Violet wants to put all those notes in Finch's pile of bad words. Otherwise, Violet doesn't feel much these days; she cries when she's not feeling empty, and she breaks things off with Ryan. Nobody wants to be around Violet—they seem to be afraid that she's contagious. Violet sits with Brenda, Lara, and the Brianas at lunch, and a few days after Finch's funeral, Amanda sits down at the table and offers her condolences. She also says that she broke up with Roamer. Brenda says it's too late and leaves.

Principal Wertz insists that all Finch's friends and classmates attend a counseling session. Violet thinks that since Finch's death was an "accident," this means everyone can mourn him in public. She requests to see Mr. Embry. Mr. Embry starts by saying he feels responsible for Finch's death. Violet feels angry—she's responsible for Finch's death—but Mr. Embry goes on to say that he's not actually responsible. He could've done more, but trying to assign blame is pointless. Violet says that she could've done more and should've noticed what was going on, but Mr. Embry points out that Finch went to great pains to hide what he was going through.

Mr. Embry opens up a booklet and reads from it. It says as a survivor, a person's emotional well-being depends on how well they learn to cope with the tragedy they suffered. But although getting through this will be hard, "the worst is already over." Mr. Embry hands Violet the booklet, which is titled "SOS: A Handbook for Survivors of Suicide." He asks her to read it and to talk to people about it. Since Finch's death was "different," Violet is going to feel even more difficult emotions.

When Violet notes that Finch's family insists it was an accident, Mr. Embry says it doesn't matter. He just cares that Violet is okay. He tells her that she can't be responsible for everyone. Eleanor didn't have a choice—and perhaps Finch didn't feel like he had a choice either. Violet knows that Mr. Embry is going through every meeting with Finch in his mind, looking for signs. She doesn't ask if it's normal to see reminders of Finch everywhere.

In this passage, both Violet and Brenda act as though they blame their peers at school for Finch's death. The shrine, to Violet, makes it seem like they only appreciate Finch now that he's gone. Amanda's news that she broke up with Roamer, meanwhile, may make Amanda feel better—but hurting Roamer isn't going to bring back Finch. Violet's feelings of emptiness, meanwhile, show that she's traumatized about Finch's death, much like she was traumatized after losing Eleanor.



Violet starts to pick out the ways that suicide deaths are treated differently than accidental deaths. Deaths by suicide, she suggests, are thought of as shameful and inappropriate to discuss. Other deaths, though, give people the opportunity to mourn in public. This again suggests that the stigma surrounding mental health issues keeps people from getting the help they need. Mr. Embry suggests that this is also why Finch hid that he was struggling.



Mr. Embry's booklet encapsulates some of the novel's main ideas about how people should think about grief and tragedy. The tragedy itself, this quote makes clear, is the worst part—so although healing will be difficult, it's not as hard as living through the tragedy itself. Asking Violet to talk to people about the booklet is also a way to connect Violet to her community and give her more support.



One of the most difficult parts of healing after Finch's death, Mr. Embry and Violet find, is that they'll never know exactly why Finch took his own life. They'll never know how he felt in his last days or hours, and they'll never be able to answer their questions about him. Suicide, the novel shows, cuts off communication forever.



That afternoon, Violet reads the entire booklet, and one line sticks with her. It says that the only way to heal is to accept that life has changed forever, but it does go on—just differently. Violet gives the book to her mom at dinner, and Violet's mom spends all of dinner reading it. Violet's dad tries to talk to Violet about college, but she excuses herself. Violet is suddenly happy she's not a parent—it must be horrible to love someone but not be able to help them. She realizes she felt that way about Finch.

The school holds an assembly two weeks after Finch's funeral. They bring in a person to teach self-defense and then show a film about "the realities of drug use." Charlie leans over to Violet and says there's a rumor that Finch died because he was on drugs. Violet is only able to sit through a few minutes before she has to leave the gym and vomit into a trash can. She discovers Amanda sitting nearby and joins her.

After a minute, Violet asks Amanda what goes through a person's mind when they think about killing themselves. Amanda says she felt small and worthless, like the only logical thing to do was to die. It seemed like nobody would notice or care that she was gone. Violet points out that Amanda is popular and has a great, supportive family—but Amanda says that when she's thinking about suicide, those things doesn't matter. Everything feels dark, and all she can think about is herself. She asks if Finch ever saw a doctor and says that Finch was trying to fix himself because of Violet. This makes Violet feel even worse.

In U.S. Geography the next day, Mr. Black reminds the class that their projects are due soon. After class, he asks Violet to stay back and tells her she can turn in whatever she has. He understands that she has "extenuating circumstances." This annoys Violet; everyone is treating her like she's fragile. She tells Mr. Black that she's fine and will finish the project like everyone else. She just wishes she and Finch had documented their wanderings better.

That evening, Violet reads through all of her Facebook messages with Finch. Then, she opens their wandering notebook and writes a letter to Finch. She asks where he went and why he killed himself, and if he knows that she's going to be changed forever now. Violet used to think that she was changed because Finch got her out of her room, but she never expected that her life would change like this. In closing, she says she'll never forgive him for leaving. She just wishes he could forgive her, since he saved her life. Violet studies her *Germ* bulletin board. Suddenly, she gets up and digs out the wandering map. She studies it and sees that Finch circled and numbered five more places for Violet to see on her own.

The line sticks with Violet possibly because she's already seen how true it is. Finch showed her that life went on after trauma—that it was possible to live a new, fulfilling life after Eleanor died. Now, Violet is going to have to go through the same process again after Finch's death.



Because Violet knows that Finch's death was a suicide, it's offensive to her that the school is trying to use his death as a teaching moment. Drug use might be potentially deadly—but as Finch demonstrated, so is feeling alienated and stigmatized because of one's mental illness.



Here, Amanda and Violet begin to repair their relationship. Amanda represents a link to Finch, since she's experienced some of the same kinds of suicidal thoughts that he did (Violet implied that when she was on the belltower, she wasn't thinking and so doesn't have this firsthand experience). Amanda paints suicidal thoughts as alienating and almost impossible to escape from.



It's a mark of how much Violet has healed that she now finds Mr. Black's willingness to give her leeway on her project offensive. While at the beginning of the novel she didn't want to participate in day-to-day school activities, she now recognizes that she'll only be able to heal if she actively engages with her life.



It's another indicator of Violet's progress that only three weeks after Finch's death, she's able to sit down and write him a letter. She obviously can't send it, but it nevertheless gives her a place to get her thoughts out of her head and on paper, where they might be easier to process. In this way, she shows just how beneficial it can be to put one's thoughts into words. While Finch's inability to write and leave a suicide note is connected to his mental illness, Violet's ability to write now illustrates her wellness.



56. VIOLET: REMAINING WANDERINGS 1 AND 2

Violet drives down to the Kentucky border to visit the “shoe trees.” She pulls over when she gets to an intersection on a dirt road, surrounded by trees covered in shoes. Violet has a pair of green Chuck Taylors and a pair of Eleanor’s yellow Keds. She writes “Ultraviolet Remarkable” on her shoes and hangs them next to the Keds.

Violet sits, waiting for whatever Finch wanted her to see. She looks up and sees Finch’s sneakers high up in the tree—Finch was here. Violet reaches for her phone, but it’s in the car. She runs back to it and scrolls through her texts from Finch. His first text, a week after he left, was, “I am on the highest branch.” She reads through his other texts and then heads for the second marked destination on the map.

Violet pulls in at the site of the world’s biggest ball of paint. She hopes nobody has been here since Finch, and that she’ll still be able to read whatever Finch wrote. Mike Carmichael answers the door and leads Violet to the barn where the ball of paint lives, telling Violet how he got started (he painted thousands of coats of paint on a baseball starting in the 1970s). He leads her into a huge room with a massive ball in the middle. Mike says that he tries to paint the ball every day. Violet asks if he might remember Finch and if Finch wrote something on the ball. Mike remembers Finch and shows Violet the violet paint he used. The ball is yellow now; Violet is too late.

Mike explains that he asks people to paint over whatever they write so they leave the next person a clean slate. Violet agrees to paint a layer and asks for sky-blue paint. She feels like she’s losing Finch again as Mike locates paint the exact color of Finch’s eyes. Painting the ball is soothing, and when Violet is done, Mike hands her a guest book to sign. Violet flips back a page and finds Finch’s entry. Next to his name, he wrote the first line of *Oh, the Places You’ll Go!*. Violet signs her name and writes the book’s second line. Violet feels a bit better knowing that whatever Finch wrote on the ball will be there forever underneath the layers of paint.

When Violet gets home, she finds her parents in the living room. She tells them that she needs for them to talk about Eleanor; she misses Eleanor, and she’s sorry they took the A Street Bridge to begin with. She keeps going, saying that she wants to remember Finch and Eleanor—even though she can’t bring them back, and even though Finch’s death might’ve been her fault. If she keeps thinking about them, they won’t be completely gone. Violet’s mom, in tears, pulls Violet into a hug and tells Violet it wasn’t her fault. Violet’s dad cries too, and the three huddle together, sobbing.

Violet doesn’t treat these “remaining wanderings” as opportunities to mourn Finch exclusively. Rather, by bringing Eleanor’s shoes to hang on the tree, she’s able to say goodbye to both Finch and Eleanor.



Now that Violet has started to follow Finch’s final directions, his last few cryptic text messages start to make more sense. This makes it clear that Finch wasn’t just spouting nonsense as he texted Violet—he was creating these experiences for her. It also seems like he suspected she’d use the opportunity to honor Eleanor as well.



The fact that Finch used violet paint again suggests that he created this final string of places to help Violet heal and to honor her. However, the fact that Violet can’t read whatever Finch wrote is nevertheless disconcerting for her. But this mirrors the way that Violet is unable to understand so many things about Finch’s death, including why he killed himself in the first place. She again has to confront the fact that his manner of death robs her of the ability to make sense of the situation.



*Discovering that Finch wrote the first line of *Oh, the Places You’ll Go!* in the guestbook reminds Violet to take Finch’s advice to heart: life might be hard, but it is worth living. This book was important to them—and by reading, singing, and dancing to it together, Violet was able to come to the conclusion that she should keep going.*



By telling her parents all of her fears, Violet shows them how much she trusts them. While she hasn’t felt able to say things like this for much of the novel, she now realizes that voicing these fears and connecting with her parents is one of the most effective ways to remember both Finch and Eleanor. The fact that Violet’s parents comfort her after she’s done shows that going forward, Violet can rely on them—whereas Finch couldn’t rely on his parents.



57. VIOLET: REMAINING WANDERINGS 3 AND 4

Violet drives to what's left of the Pendleton Pike Drive-In outside of Indianapolis. It's been abandoned for decades, and there's only the screen left. It's spooky. As Violet heads for the screen, she thinks of Finch's text from this spot: "I believe in signs." The back of the screen is covered in graffiti, and suddenly, Violet feels her grief overwhelm her. But she walks to the front of the screen and looks up. It reads: "I was here. TF." Violet sinks to her knees and wonders what she was doing when Finch was here. She photographs the screen and then walks to it. She finds a can of red spray paint, climbs up the scaffolding, and writes, "I was here too. VM," under Finch's words.

Violet heads for Munster, a small town bordered by **rivers** in Northwest Indiana. She stops at the Our Lady of Mount Carmel Monastery, and a friar leads Violet to the shrines. He explains that former Polish chaplains dreamed of creating a monastery in Indiana after World War II; this is the result. The friar walks Violet through an arched doorway and leaves her. Inside are a series of underground hallways. The sparkling rocks that make up the walls glitter in candlelight. Violet explores the tunnels and walks through a room arranged like a church.

In the next room, sculptures of the angel Gabriel and Jesus raise the dead. They glow in the blacklight. Violet notices that Jesus is holding a plain rock, which she picks up and exchanges it for an old ring of Eleanor's. Violet stays for a while and then leaves the grotto. She encounters stairs with a sign asking people to ascend the "holy stairs" on their knees. Violet knows that Finch wouldn't have cheated, so she drops to her knees. The friar helps her up at the top and notes that people come from all over to see the Ultraviolet Apocalypse. As she heads to the car, she finally looks at the rock in her hand. It's the rock she and Finch passed back and forth that reads, "Your turn."

Later that night, Violet meets Brenda, Charlie, Ryan, and Amanda at the Purina Tower. At the top, they light candles and talk about Finch. Brenda plays a "greatest hits of Finch" playlist and dances. Violet laughs at Brenda's silly dancing and then joins in. When Violet gets home, she pulls out the map to check out the final destination. She's unwilling to go, because once she does, the project will be over. The final spot is in Farmersburg, 15 miles from the **Blue Hole**. Violet checks the corresponding text: "A lake. A prayer. It's so lovely to be lovely in Private." When she can't find anything on the internet about Farmersburg, she realizes that Finch added this place without telling her.

The drive-in is, in many ways, a dead—like Finch, Eleanor, and the cardinal are. But the fact that the site is still standing suggests that Violet was right: things don't have to disappear from memory once they die. The drive-in seems to be a place where she and Finch can leave their mark, along with all the other people who spray painted on the back of the screen. Violet might care most about Finch's writing, but many people are immortalized here through their words.



When Violet and Finch began to wander Indiana, Violet insisted that there was nothing to see in the state. Especially now, as Finch leads Violet to this glittering grotto, he's able to continue to show her that there's beauty all around her—if only she's willing to look for it. In this way, Finch also reminds Violet that she wanted to travel and see the world, and that she can start in Indiana.



Finding her and Finch's rock is proof that Finch was here, something that Violet seems to find comforting. Leaving the ring with a depiction of Gabriel and Jesus raising the dead also implies that Finch and Eleanor won't be gone forever. Though the novel doesn't go into Violet or Finch's spiritual beliefs, this nevertheless suggests that there are religious traditions out there that can give Violet some peace as she processes Finch and Eleanor's deaths.



Honoring Finch with all their mutual friends shows that Violet is becoming closer with her community in the aftermath of his death. They can now all support one another as they move on from Finch's loss. This specific project might be over once Violet visits the final destination, but Finch also seems to be trying to show her that this doesn't mean her life is over. Indeed, Mr. Embry made it clear that Violet has to continue living and find meaning, even with Finch and Eleanor gone—Violet should keep traveling and exploring.



58. VIOLET: THE LAST WANDERING

Violet gets up early the next morning. She can barely drive past the **Blue Hole**, but she makes it to Farmersburg. She drives around, looking for churches and anything pretty. When she finds nothing, she stops on Main Street to ask for help, but nothing is open since it's a Sunday. Violet gets back in the car and drives past all the churches, but none of them are very pretty, and none are near water. At a gas station, she asks the attendant about nearby lakes and churches. He says that there are some north of here.

Violet drives north until she sees a Dollar General. She stops in and asks an employee if she knows where she'd find a beautiful **lake** and a church. The woman says that Emmanuel Baptist Church is up the highway, and there's a small lake nearby. It's off of Private Road. Violet gets back on the car, thinking that soon, her wandering with Finch will be over. She feels disappointed when she sees the church and the lake—they're not beautiful. As she crawls back along the road, she notices a sign for Taylor Prayer Chapel.

Violet stops and wonders if Finch came here the day he died, and how he found this place. She gets out and enters the chapel. It smells fresh and clean, though it's smaller than Violet's bedroom. She sits in a pew and then goes to the altar. Tucked behind the Bible is a card with the history of the chapel. It was intended to be a "sanctuary for weary travelers" and was built to memorialize people who die in car accidents. Violet knows why Finch chose this place: for Eleanor, and for himself, because he was "a weary traveler."

Violet notices an envelope sticking out of the Bible. She turns the pages to the envelope and notices that someone underlined "Then you will shine among them like stars in the sky." The envelope has "Ultraviolet Remarkable" on it. Violet sits down in a pew and wonders if she's ready to hear whatever Finch had to say. Shaking, she pulls out three sheets of staff paper. One is covered in music and the other two have lyrics. Finch wrote that Violet makes him happy and makes him feel safe. Crying, Violet reads that she "made [him] lovely, happy, and special."

When Violet has the words memorized, she puts the papers back into the envelope and cries. When she gets home, she plays the notes on her flute and gets the tune stuck in her head. She realizes that it's okay that she and Finch didn't collect more souvenirs from their wanderings or do more to organize their project. She thinks that what you leave matters more than what you take.

For the final destination, Finch makes Violet work to figure out where exactly she's supposed to go. Though it's impossible to know what Finch was thinking as he arranged this quest for Violet, it's beginning to seem like he's trying to teach her to be curious and observant all on her own—skills she can also apply to her life going forward.



For Violet, this final trip is bittersweet, especially since she's having such a hard time finding whatever Finch wanted her to see. This may make Violet question how well she knew Finch, or how well she's actually able to interpret his clues.



The Taylor Prayer Chapel shows Violet that Finch cared for her deeply. He knew that she'd need a place like this to say goodbye to Eleanor, as well as to say goodbye to him. Describing Finch as a "weary traveler" encapsulates the idea that his life was extremely difficult for him due to his mental illness—getting through each day was a struggle.



Finch never wrote his songs down—so it's especially meaningful that he did, finally, choose to write something down for Violet. This makes it clear that he loved her; he just couldn't overcome his mental illness on his own to be able to be with her. His lyrics, meanwhile, also make it clear that his death wasn't Violet's fault. He appreciated everything she did for him, but in his mind, it was already inevitable that he was going to die.



Violet now realizes that her and Finch's project wasn't just something they did for school; they did it to connect with each other and to leave their marks on the world. And leaving this music for Violet, as well as helping Violet see that her life has meaning, is what Finch left—and Violet now realizes that's more meaningful than the headache he's caused her.



59. VIOLET: JUNE 20

It's a hot summer day. Violet parks on the side of the road and then hikes over the embankment to the **Blue Hole**. She dives in, looking for Finch even though she knows she won't find him. She thinks of Cesare Pavese who killed himself in 1950 at the height of his career. Nobody could explain why he did it. Another writer remembered him as melancholy and as "a boy who has still not come down to earth, and moves in the arid, solitary world of dreams." Violet thinks that could've been written for Finch.

Violet has written her own epitaph for Finch. It says that he was alive and then he died—but not really, because someone like him can't die. Rather, he'll become part of the legend of the **Blue Hole**, and he'll always be there. Violet treads water and admires the sky. It reminds her of Finch, just like everything else does. She thinks of the places she's going to wander.

Now, several months after Finch's death, Violet seems to be in a much healthier place. Though she still wonders why Finch died (she seems to equate Finch with Cesare Pavese in that they killed themselves while they were full of potential), she realizes now that she's never going to be able to answer these questions—and that she has to be okay with this.



The novel ends by suggesting that the best way to memorialize someone is to remember them. But even more than that, people who find themselves in Violet's position should remember that they have the rest of their own lives to live—and that enjoying life is perhaps the best way to honor their loved ones.





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