Motherless Brooklyn

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF JONATHAN LETHEM

Jonathan Lethem was born in Brooklyn to parents who were artists and political activists. Lethem and his family lived in a commune in the neighborhood now known as Boerum Hill. Lethem's early artistic influences include Bob Dylan, *Star Wars*, and the fiction of Philip K. Dick (*The Man In the High Castle*, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*, *A Scanner Darkly*). Lethem harbored artistic aspirations throughout high school and later enrolled as an undergraduate at Bennington College. Bennington was a liberal arts mecca, and there Lethem met writers like Donna Tartt and Bret Easton Ellis who would later become his peers; the wealthy and secluded atmosphere at Bennington, however, also exposed Lethem for the first time to the harsh realities of class privilege. Lethem moved to California, where he began publishing short stories. His debut novel, *Gun, with Occasional Music*, was published in 1994. Lethem quickly earned a reputation as a skillful writer capable of merging literary fiction with genre sensibilities, incorporating science fiction, noir, post-apocalyptic fiction, and detective stories with ease. Lethem returned to Brooklyn, where he enjoyed continued success as a writer of "genre bending" novels such as *Girl in Landscape* and *Motherless Brooklyn*, which netted Lethem a National Book Critics Circle Award. Lethem was awarded a MacArthur "Genius Grant" in 2005. The author of over 15 works of fiction and a frequent contributor to publications like *Rolling Stone*, *Harper's*, and *The New Yorker*, Lethem has established himself as one of contemporary fiction's most ambitious voices. He currently teaches creative writing at Pomona College in Claremont, California.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Motherless Brooklyn hearkens back to the noir detective stories of the 1940s and 1950s—but it is set in late-1990s Brooklyn. In deciding to give his novel a modern-day setting, Lethem is able to engage with wider intellectual, political, and social issues beyond the core mystery at the heart of the book. Lethem tells a story about Italian mobsters set in a time period well beyond the establishment of the RICO (or Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations) Act—a federal law passed in 1970 which provides for criminal penalties for acts performed on behalf of a criminal organization. The criminal players in *Motherless Brooklyn* have long operated in the shadows and are driven by nostalgia for an idealized version of a world they've never known. In other words, Frank and Gerard Minna want to be bigshots—but unlike their midcentury forbears, who created vast criminal networks that often operated with relative impunity, the Minnas and their Men (Lionel, Tony, Danny, and Gilbert) struggle to get their enterprise off the ground. Additionally, the narrative focuses on a network of Japanese mobsters, or Yakuza, who disguise themselves as monks in order to illegally traffic valuable uni (sea urchin) eggs back to the lucrative Japanese market. This aspect of the plot has drawn criticism from critics such as Sheng-mei Ma, who believes that the novel's undertones are emblematic of the "Japan-bashing" resulting from the "height of Japanese economic power" which took place in the mid-to-late 1990s.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Motherless Brooklyn is at once a work of detective fiction and a parody of noir—a genre of crime or mystery fiction with a dark, cynical, morally ambiguous bent. Hallmark noir novels include Dashiell Hammett's *The Maltese Falcon*, James M. Cain's *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, and James M. Cain's *Double Indemnity* and *L.A. Confidential*. The mystery at the heart of *Motherless Brooklyn*, which takes Lionel Essrog into dark enclaves of New York City, is a decidedly modern take on the noir genre, which itself has roots in the groundbreaking work in the mystery genre done by Arthur Conan Doyle, the creator of the infamous detective character Sherlock Holmes, and Agatha Christie, who created two equally iconic detectives, Hercule Poirot and Miss Marple. Other more contemporary noir titles include Stieg Larsson's *The Girl With the Dragon Tattoo* and its sequels, as well as Megan Abbott's *Die a Little*. Like *Motherless Brooklyn*, Larsson and Abbott's novels have been hailed as genre-bending books which seamlessly blend elements of detective fiction with an artistic or literary sensibility.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** Motherless Brooklyn
- **When Written:** 1990s
- **Where Written:** Brooklyn, New York
- **When Published:** 1999
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary
- **Genre:** Mystery Novel
- **Setting:** New York City; Maine
- **Climax:** Lionel Essrog follows his deceased boss Frank Minna's wife, Julia, to Maine, where Julia tells him the full truth about Frank's involvement with two dangerous groups of Italian and Japanese mobsters.
- **Antagonist:** The Giant; Ullman; Gerard Minna
- **Point of View:** First Person

EXTRA CREDIT

Radical Reimagining. When actor and filmmaker Edward Norton adapted *Motherless Brooklyn* for the screen in 2019, he transposed the novel from a late-1990s setting to a 1950s timeline and made many other significant edits to the plot, characters, and structure of the story. Lethem said of Norton's adaptation: "It's as if the book was a dream the movie once had and was trying to remember it." The film adaptation had little critical or commercial success—but Norton, who had harbored aspirations to adapt the novel since its publication, was recognized by the Satellite Awards for his work on the film's screenplay and presented with the organization's 2019 Auteur Award.

Real-life Landscape. *Motherless Brooklyn* is set primarily in the Northwest Brooklyn neighborhood now known as Boerum Hill—the same neighborhood in which Lethem himself came of age. Throughout the novel, Lethem references many real-life neighborhood landmarks. While Lethem's noir-tinged vision of 1990s Brooklyn has changed drastically over the last 20 years due to gentrification and redevelopment, the close-knit communities of Boerum Hill, Cobble Hill, and Carroll Gardens still retain echoes of the grittiness, scrappiness, and possibility they represent to Lionel Essrog and Frank Minna within the pages of the novel.

PLOT SUMMARY

Lionel Essrog is an uncredentialed "detective" with Tourette's syndrome (a neurological disorder characterized by compulsory, repetitive verbal and physical tics). Lionel is on a stakeout in the Manhattan neighborhood of Yorkville with his colleague Gilbert Coney. Gilbert and Lionel, along with two men named Tony Vermonte and Danny Fantl, grew up together in an orphanage in Brooklyn—and were, at a young age, recruited to work for Frank Minna, a "penny-ante hood" with ties to the Mafia. Minna has, over the years, become a father figure to all four "Minna Men." Lionel and Gilbert wait and listen while Frank, wearing a wire, enters a Zendo (Zen Buddhist study center) and conducts a meeting with an unknown client or acquaintance. The anxious Lionel calms himself by eating White Castle **burgers**. Lionel listens as Minna discusses an unnamed woman, a person named Ullman, and something called a "*Rama-lama-ding-dong*" with his acquaintance, whose voice Lionel does not recognize. Frank gives the code to let the men know that he's exiting the Zendo. A giant man hurries Frank downstairs and into a car and begins driving away. Lionel and Gilbert give chase, relying on Frank—still wearing a wire—to guide them to Greenpoint, a Polish neighborhood in Brooklyn. There, Lionel finds Minna in a Dumpster: he has been stabbed. Lionel and Gilbert hurry Minna to the nearest hospital. On the way, Lionel soothes Minna with jokes, yet Minna knows that he is about to die. Minna drops his beeper, wallet, and watch on the floor just before Gilbert pulls into the hospital. Inside, doctors are unable to revive Minna. Lionel and Gilbert flee the premises and head for the storefront of L&L—the car service which serves as a front for the "detective agency" founded by Minna and staffed by the orphans he took under his wing when they were children.

Lionel departs into memory, recalling his youth and his initiation into Minna's criminal dealings—many of which, Lionel recalls, were done in the name of "The Clients," a pair of aging Italian men named Rockaforte and Matricardi. Lionel recalls meeting The Clients just once, while moving stolen concert gear into the upper floors of the abandoned townhouse which served as the men's headquarters. Also present in the shadows of these dealings was Frank's older brother, Gerard, whom Lionel met twice—the second time Lionel met Gerard, Gerard had come to Brooklyn to hurry Minna away "upstate" after some business gone wrong. Lionel recalls that when Minna returned years later, he had a new bride, Julia, on his arm—and a dream of creating a legitimate detective agency. Nevertheless, Minna was forced to operate in the Brooklyn underworld to scrape by. The prejudiced but sunny Minna, Lionel recalls, used humor as a way of coping with the stressful demands of his job. Lionel recalls one joke in particular about a Jewish woman who travels to Tibet and demands to meet with the High Lama. After obtaining a hard-won audience with the Lama, the Jewish woman reprimands him, addressing him as Irving, for staying away from home so long—she and his father are worried about when their son is coming home.

Back at L&L, Tony orders Gilbert to look into Ullman and sends Lionel to break the news to Julia. When Lionel arrives at Frank and Julia's apartment, he finds that Julia is packing—she is preparing to skip town, and she is bringing a gun with her. Julia insists the hospital called to tell her about Frank. Julia is distraught but not particularly mournful; she talks about how Frank erased the woman she used to be over the course of their marriage. Lionel asks Julia where she's going, and she tells him that she's headed for "a place of peace." Lionel helps Julia downstairs, where a car is waiting for her. A Black detective investigating Frank's death, Lucius Seminole, attempts to deter Julia from leaving—but with no warrant, he can't stop her. Seminole then asks to follow Lionel around town and compare information. Lionel's compulsive behavior—and his nonchalant ordering of sandwiches and magazines to Frank's tabs at several convenience stores—make Seminole suspicious, but Lionel insists he is just as desperate to catch Frank's killer as the detective. Seminole abandons Lionel, who returns home to his apartment above the L&L storefront. The phone downstairs rings, and Lionel goes to answer it: it's Loomis, a sanitation cop who works with the Minna Men. Loomis reports that Gilbert has been arrested for Ullman's murder. Lionel drives to the precinct where Gilbert is being held, but he's not allowed to see

him. Lionel collects Loomis and drives him back to L&L, then heads up to his own apartment for the night. Lionel eats a sandwich and at last allows himself to cry.

In the morning, Lionel straps Minna's beeper to his belt and returns to the Zendo, where he meets a Zendo student named Kimmery. Kimmery invites Lionel to come to a class later—there, she says, he can glimpse the Zendo's Roshi, or head instructor, and some important monks who are visiting. As Lionel leaves, four thugs pull him into a car and announce that they have been told to scare him into staying away from the Zendo. Unintimidated by the inexperienced thugs, Lionel frustrates them into abandoning him in their car. Lionel sees that the car is leased to the Fujisaki Corporation at 1030 Park Avenue. Using a cell phone left in the car, Lionel calls Loomis and asks him to dig up what he can about the building. Lionel visits the building himself, but a group of doormen throws him out. Lionel calls Tony, who urges Lionel to get off the case. Suspicious, Lionel hangs up. Frank's beeper goes off, and Lionel calls the number—it is The Clients. They tell Lionel to come visit them. Lionel travels to Brooklyn, where The Clients urge Lionel to work with Tony rather than against him to bring Julia home so that they can learn her secrets.

Lionel leaves the meeting feeling uneasy. He is even more off-put when he finds Tony waiting for him outside with a gun. Seminole interrupts the standoff. He tells the men that he has lost track of Julia after she flew to Boston, and that he is wary of wading too deep into any mob business. Seminole orders Lionel to leave so that he can talk alone with Tony. Lionel returns to the Zendo. On the way, Loomis calls with information about 1030 Park. He suspects that the powerful people who live there own "half of New York." He has also discovered that Ullman was the bookkeeper for Fujisaki. Lionel arrives at the Zendo, where Kimmery leads him to a room full of students. A group of Japanese monks and the Roshi enter, and Lionel notices the giant in the corner of the room. Upon looking closely at the Roshi, Lionel realizes he is none other than Gerard. Lionel begins performing tics. Gerard nods to the giant, who carries Lionel out of the room, takes him to an alley, and beats him up. Kimmery comes to collect Lionel. She takes him back to her apartment. As Lionel rests on her bed, he looks through some books on her nightstand and discovers a pamphlet for another Zen retreat in Maine, advertised as "A PLACE OF PEACE." Lionel again starts to perform tics, but Kimmery, intrigued by his oddities, seduces him. Lionel and Kimmery have sex. In the middle of the night, Lionel creeps to the kitchen, steals Kimmery's keys, and departs.

Lionel heads back to the Zendo, where he lets himself in and confronts Gerard. Gerard tells Lionel that Frank and Ullman were involved with Fujisaki—but when they began stealing from corporation, they wound up in hot water. Gerard urges Lionel to stay out of things. Lionel heads back to L&L—but when he sees the giant watching Tony and Danny from a car outside the storefront, he sneaks into an L&L car and engages in a stakeout of his own. In the morning, Tony gets into a car and begins driving. The giant follows him—and Lionel follows the giant. As Lionel pursues Tony and the giant northward out of New York, he realizes they are headed for the retreat in Maine.

In a town called Musconguspoint Station, Lionel discovers the site of the retreat—and a connected seafood restaurant called Yoshii's. After asking around about the retreat and restaurant on the docks, a fisherman named Mr. Foible tells Lionel that the Japanese mob, or the Yakuza, have long been coming to Maine to fish for sea urchin. Sea urchin eggs are a delicacy in Japan, where overfishing has made the dish all the more rare. Foible boasts that he no longer has to deal with the mob: he has an exclusive deal with the Fujisaki Corporation, who own the restaurant. Lionel heads to the restaurant, where he is shocked to find Julia working as a waitress. Lionel is even more surprised when the monks from the Zendo—now dressed in fancy suits, revealing their true identity as the Fujisaki Corporation—enter. Julia urges Lionel to leave and meet her at a nearby lighthouse later on.

After leaving, Lionel spots the giant rifling through Tony's car and throwing Tony's things into the ocean. Lionel realizes that the giant has killed Tony. The giant spots Lionel, so Lionel attempts to flee in his car. As the chase ensues, he traps the giant by forcing him to run over a set of spikes at the edge of a ticketed parking lot and wreck his car. With the giant neutralized, Lionel calls The Clients to tell them that Gerard is responsible for Frank's death and that Tony is dead. Lionel then goes to meet with Julia. She tells him her life story, revealing her longtime connection to the Maine Zendo and her relationships with both Minna brothers. Gerard, she reveals, was her "Rama-lama-ding-dong"—they met when Gerard came to the retreat years ago, but as Gerard studied Zen more deeply, he became detached, and she turned to Frank for comfort. Gerard and Frank's dealings with the mob and the Yakuza, however, increasingly worried her. First, Frank betrayed Gerard to the Italian mob, forcing Gerard into hiding at the Zendo; later, Gerard betrayed Frank to the Japanese, requiring Gerard to order Frank's killing as a "sacrifice" that would prove Gerard's fealty to the Japanese. Gerard, Lionel intuits, ordered the giant to kill Frank. Julia, in denial and convinced that Lionel is responsible for Frank's murder, pulls a gun on Lionel. Lionel pulls Tony's gun on her. After distracting Julia by throwing his own gun into the ocean, Lionel rushes Julia and tosses her gun into the sea as well. Then, he feels compelled to throw three more things, including one of his own shoes, into the water. Julia leaves.

Lionel drives back to Brooklyn, where he soon learns that Gerard has "disappeared." Lionel elects to pretend that the elder Minna brother has died in his sleep. Danny, Gilbert, Loomis, and Lionel get to work transforming L&L into a legitimate detective agency, just like Frank always wanted to.

The Yorkville Zendo dissolves. Lionel continues to worry about the seedy underground of society—yet he swears off the idea of vengeance, deciding instead to move on with his life.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Lionel Essrog – Lionel Essrog is the protagonist and narrator of *Motherless Brooklyn*. Lionel is an orphan who has Tourette's syndrome, a neurological disorder characterized by compulsive, repetitive physical movements and verbal vocalizations called tics. This has led to him having been called a "freak" all his life—yet Lionel alone realizes that the obsessive, repetitive nature of his tics actually allows him to do more intentional, more careful work as a burgeoning detective. When Lionel was a young teenager, the local Brooklyn mobster Frank Minna began using him and three other teens from the orphanage—Tony, Gilbert, and Danny—to help with physical labor on "moving" jobs. More often than not, these jobs were illegitimate but were rather in service of a pair of "clients" called Rockaforte and Matricardi, a pair of high-ranking mobsters who had long had Minna in their pockets. Lionel and his fellow "Minna Men" Tony, Danny, and Gilbert have, at the start of the novel, long idolized Minna and have sought to do whatever he needs, whenever he needs it—the three of them work as drivers and uncredentialed "detectives" for Frank. But after one of Frank's meetings with an unnamed man at a Yorkville Zendo (a Buddhist study center) goes horribly wrong and Frank is murdered, the sensitive, focused, emotionally distraught Lionel endeavors to solve the mystery of Frank's murder and achieve justice for his fallen mentor. As Lionel begins unspooling the complicated web of Frank's life, uncovering evidence of his dealings with the Brooklyn mob, the Japanese Yakuza, and a longstanding rivalry with his older brother Gerard, Lionel uses his compulsions for repetitive wordplay and his unique ways of interacting with other people to relentlessly pursue the mystery. Incisive, deeply self-aware, and highly particular, Lionel is the beating heart and the driving engine of *Motherless Brooklyn*. His deep sense of existential loneliness and isolation as a result of his Tourette's provides a new twist on the conventionally dark and cynical noir genre of detective fiction. Through Lionel, Lethem creates a character uniquely poised to investigate the most unlikely connections and disparate threads of a mystery.

Frank Minna – Frank Minna is Lionel Essrog's mentor, a "penny-ante hood" whom Lionel and the other Minna Men—Gilbert, Tony, and Danny—have nonetheless worshipped since Frank sought them out while they were still living at St. Vincent's orphanage in Brooklyn. Frank recruited the boys as employees of sorts for his criminal enterprise. Despite his dealings with the Italian and Japanese mobs, Frank harbors lofty dreams of creating a legitimate, clean detective agency—yet before those dreams can be realized, he is murdered in Brooklyn after a catastrophic meeting at a Zendo (Buddhist study center) in Manhattan. Frank's deep-seated prejudices, love of comedy, and soft spots for misfits, "freaks," and orphans make him a deeply contradictory character. Even as Frank uses Lionel for his own gains—Lionel's tics often distract or disorient "clients" or connections, allowing Frank to counterintuitively gain the upper hand in his shadiest dealings—he takes a deep interest not just in Lionel but in all the St. Vincent's boys, shaping their lives and providing them with a sense of community even as he profits off of exploiting their labor. Even though Minna is low on the totem of influence in the Brooklyn underworld, to his veritable disciples (Gilbert, Tony, Danny, and Lionel), Minna is a man to emulate. Minna's strange gravitas, then, propels Lionel to seek answers after Frank is murdered—Lionel wants justice for the only father figure he's ever known, and the only emblem of masculinity he's ever sought to replicate. Frank's complicated dealings with the Brooklyn and New Jersey mobs; with the Japanese Yakuza and the Fujisaki Corporation; with his reclusive brother Gerard; and with his tortured wife, Julia, form a complicated web of mystery and intrigue. But as Lionel desperately seeks to unravel this web, he learns that there is futility in knowing the truth. Jocular, deeply racist, hopeful, and yet dogged by his own shady past and poor choices, Minna is a complicated figure who serves as a single point of connection for the novel's wide range of strange characters, impossible plots, and bogus dealings.

Gerard Minna/Roshi Jerry – Gerard Minna is Frank Minna's older brother. Gerard is also known as Roshi Jerry to his students at the Yorkville Zendo (a Zen Buddhist study center) where he has been hiding out from the Italian mob for years. Gerard and Minna have long been in deep with the Brooklyn and New Jersey mobs—but the mysterious Gerard has been absent from Frank's life for years, and Frank has never revealed his brother's whereabouts to the Minna Men—Lionel, Tony, Gilbert, and Danny—who are his coworkers, flunkeys, and mentees. When Lionel attends a class in *zazen* (sitting meditation) at the Yorkville Zendo, pursuing answers to the mysterious circumstances surrounding Frank's murder after a visit to the Zendo, Lionel recognizes that the Zendo's Roshi (founder and teacher) is none other than Gerard. Gerard, it turns out, has had a lifelong connection to the study of Zen—and his financial dealings with the powerful, shady Fujisaki Corporation have allowed Gerard to mix the pursuit of spirituality and enlightenment with the pursuit of cold, hard cash. Slick, calm, and self-possessed, Gerard does his dealings with the Fujisaki in order to avoid the Italian mob, whose powerful ringleaders Matricardi and Rockaforte he betrayed years ago. Gerard's double-dealing catches up with him, however, when he and Frank devise a plan to fleece the Japanese—leading Gerard to "sacrifice" his brother after the powerful Yakuza, or Japanese mob, find out about his betrayal. Gerard, then, is revealed to have ordered Frank's murder—and

toward the end of the novel, Gerard himself is murdered by the Italian mob after Lionel's investigation turns up Gerard's whereabouts and spheres of influence. Gerard is the shadowy figure at the heart of the novel's mystery and thus one of its primary antagonists. Desperate for power and influence at any cost, Gerard has spent a lifetime outrunning the consequences of his duplicitous actions as he betrays his brother again and again—and eventually, he mysteriously "disappears" or is killed.

Julia Minna – Julia Minna is Frank Minna's wife—and, later, his widow. Sultry, tempestuous, and mysterious, Julia Minna has, since her sudden appearance in Frank's life over a decade ago, become a kind of lodestar for the Minna Men who work under Frank. Lionel, Tony, Gilbert, and Danny are all, to differing degrees, in love with Julia—yet because she's their boss's wife, they understand that she is the ultimate unattainable woman. Early on in the novel, shortly after Frank is murdered, Lionel heads to Julia and Frank's apartment to deliver the grim news—but Julia has already heard what's happened, and she is packing to leave Brooklyn forever. As Lionel investigates Minna's murder, he comes to realize that there's always been more to Julia than meets the eye. When he finally tracks her down, he finds her hiding out at a Zen retreat in Maine, working as a waitress at a Japanese restaurant connected to a Buddhist study center. It turns out that Julia once loved Frank's older brother Gerard, who met Julia when he came to the study center to learn more about Zen—and later, when Gerard became too devoted to his studies to love her, she fell for Frank. As her marriage with Frank deteriorated, Julia two-timed Frank with Tony Vermonte and other unnamed men—now, she simply wants to untangle herself from the Minna Men's vast, sprawling web of influence and crime. Julia is a woman who longs for control over her life but struggles to find it, bouncing from man to man in search of validation and wholeness. Sexy but cruel and intelligent but rootless, Julia embodies many key traits of the *femme fatale* stereotype so intrinsic to noir detective stories.

Gilbert Coney – Gilbert Coney is one of the four Minna Men who work for Frank Minna as unlicensed, inexperienced "detectives" while running the L&L car service in Brooklyn as a front. Of all the Minna Men, Lionel is closest with Gilbert—he and Gilbert had several formative shared experiences as young men at the St. Vincent's orphanage, including a sneaky detour into an off-limits exhibit on a trip to the Museum of Natural History and instances of sexual experimentation during their early teenage years. Gilbert is Lionel's partner in the stakeout at the Yorkville Zendo which opens the novel—but when Gilbert is fingered for the murder of a Fujisaki bookkeeper named Ullman, he winds up in lockup, unable to help investigate Minna's murder any further. Lionel and Gilbert's affinity for each other is palpable—even though Gilbert, like Frank and the other Minna Men, often treats Lionel like a freak in order to elevate his own confidence and position within L&L. Gilbert is ultimately freed when no evidence exists to connect him to Ullman's murder. Along with Danny, Loomis, and Lionel, he helps turn L&L into a legitimate detective agency following the conclusion of Lionel's search for Frank's murderer.

Tony Vermonte – Tony Vermonte is one of the four Minna Men who work for Frank Minna as unlicensed, uncredentialed "detectives," operating through a front called L&L, a faux car service. Tony, who has Italian heritage, enjoys Frank's favoritism in large part for that reason—and, from a young age, believes that Frank is preparing him to succeed his position in the Brooklyn underworld. Tony is headstrong, fiery, and self-centered. He resents Lionel and often mocks him for his Tourettic verbal tics and physical behaviors—but whereas the other Men, Minna included, see humor and even value in Lionel's differences, Tony seems dead-set on debasing and demoralizing Lionel as thoroughly as possible. Lionel, on the other hand, admires Tony and wants to work cooperatively with him. Even as Tony pushes Lionel away, Lionel ends up risking it all to save Tony from the clutches of the giant after intuiting that Tony has gotten himself in deep with whatever Gerard and Frank Minna have been cooking up with the Brooklyn mob and the shadowy Fujisaki Corporation. Entitled, proud, and desirous of Frank Minna's singular attentions, Tony Vermonte is ultimately killed by the giant for his involvement in Frank's dangerous schemes against the Japanese Yakuza. Tony's story, like Frank's, illustrates the danger of getting in too deep when it comes to a life of crime.

Danny Fantl – Danny Fantl is one of the four Minna Men who work for Frank Minna as "detectives" and faux drivers at L&L, the car service Frank established long ago as a front for his unlicensed private investigation agency. Danny, like the other Minna Men, has known Frank most of his life, having started working for the man while still a teenager at St. Vincent's orphanage in Brooklyn. Danny is Black, and thus he is the prejudiced Minna's least-favored Minna Man. Collected, calm, and stoic, Danny plays things close to the chest and lies low for most of the novel—yet after the climactic revelations about the connections between The Clients, the Yorkville Zendo, and Frank and Gerard Minna's decades of criminal dealings, Danny becomes the de facto leader of the legitimate detective agency that he, Lionel, and Gilbert grow in the wake of their mentor's death.

Kimmery – Kimmery is a young, attractive twenty-something woman with dark hair and glasses who studies and works at the Yorkville Zendo (a Buddhist study and meditation center). Reeling from a recent breakup, Kimmery lives a relatively rootless existence—and she feels that learning Buddhist detachment will help her to move forward from her directionless life. When Kimmery meets Lionel during his investigation into the goings-on at the shady Zendo, however, she gets more than she bargained for. Kimmery is initially intrigued by Lionel's oddness and excited by his unique, free-

associative verbal tics—but after they have sex following a series of violent mishaps at the Zendo, Kimmery becomes off-put by Lionel's intense nature and compulsion to repeatedly call her on the phone. Flighty and naïve, Kimmery believes that Zen Buddhism has a lot to teach her—but she doesn't realize that the Zendo to which she belongs serves as a shadow operation for a vast criminal network with ties to organized crime (both the Brooklyn mob and the Japanese Yakuza). Kimmery believes deeply in the teachings of her Roshi, or instructor—but she doesn't know that the Roshi, Gerard Minna, came to the Zendo looking for a way to both escape the Brooklyn mob and to ingratiate himself to the wealthy and powerful Fujisaki Corporation, from whom he's stealing. Kimmery's naïveté mirrors but ultimately exceeds Lionel's, as she decides she'd rather return to her old life and stay on at the Zendo than uncover the truth by Lionel's side.

The Giant – The giant, also referred to at times as the "pierogi monster" (due to his Polish roots) or the "kumquat eater," is an impossibly large man whom Lionel estimates to be well over 300 pounds. The giant is responsible for Frank Minna's murder, and it seems clear from the outset of the novel that he was hired by someone else to do the job—yet the resentment and hatred Lionel feels for the giant due to his murder of Frank fuels Lionel's desire to bring the giant to justice. The giant says little throughout the novel, yet his ominous and looming presence serves as a dark reminder of the real and violent consequences of making a life within New York City's vast, sprawling criminal underworld. Gerard Minna is ultimately revealed to have been responsible for hiring the giant to murder Frank—a necessary "sacrifice" in proving Gerard's loyalty to the Fujisaki Corporation following the revelation that together, he and Frank were fleecing (or stealing from) the Japanese.

The Fujisaki Corporation – The Fujisaki Corporation is a collective of characters: six Japanese businessman-cum-Zen-monks who have chosen to live part-time in America in order to operate within the lucrative trade of sea urchins, prized widely for their delectable **eggs** but overfished heavily in Japan. The Fujisaki Corporation, headquartered at a giant and imposing apartment building of interconnected mansions at 1030 Park Avenue, uses the Yorkville Zendo as a front for their trade while reaping the benefits of the urchin-rich coastal waters of Maine. Powerful, deadly, organized, and firmly of "One Mind," the Fujisaki Corporation stands in stark contrast to the Minna Men's distrustful, disorganized mode of operation. The Fujisaki Corporation represents a host of contradictions: men who live engaging spiritual lives yet desire vast wealth and power, they seek to have their cake and eat it too as they spread their influence across not just New York City but indeed the world. Lionel is envious of Fujisaki's coordination and cooperation, even as he resents the role they have played in the death of his mentor Frank, whom Gerard had killed as a "sacrifice" to Fujisaki after being caught conspiring with Frank to skim money away from the corporation.

Alphonso Matricardi and Leonardo Rockaforte/The Clients – Alphonso Matricardi and Leonardo Rockaforte, often referred to only as "The Clients," are a pair of aging Italian mobsters who operate a sprawling criminal enterprise throughout Brooklyn and New Jersey. Out of a jointly-owned house on Degraw Street in Boerum Hill, the formal and soft-spoken yet frighteningly powerful pair—whom Lionel believes may or may not be secretly romantically involved—runs a business redistributing goods seized by a group of suburban bandits who highjack trucks inbound for New York City. Lionel, Tony, Danny, and Gilbert were recruited by Frank to help with work for The Clients when they were still orphans at St. Vincent's. But after Frank double-crossed Rockaforte and Matricardi, he was forced into exile upstate; and upon his return to Brooklyn, he had to beg The Clients for his very life. Matricardi and Rockaforte, the novel implies, have far-reaching influence and the capacity to kill with impunity. Lionel believes that it is The Clients who are ultimately responsible for Gerard Minna's eventual "disappearance" as revenge for his part in Frank's theft from them many years ago.

Lucius Seminole – Lucius Seminole is a Black detective working primarily in Southeast Brooklyn who finds himself entangled in the murder of Frank Minna after Frank dies at a hospital within Seminole's jurisdiction. Seminole is highly suspicious of Lionel, Julia, and the other Minna Men. Out of his depths in with the Italian mob scene in Brooklyn, Seminole finds himself struggling to force the Minna Men to cooperate with his investigation. Though Seminole pursues answers from Lionel and Tony aggressively in the 24 hours following the murder, once Lionel and Tony begin following their own leads up to Maine, Seminole fades into the background of the investigation.

Loomis – Loomis is a police officer who works for the Sanitation Department. Though a useful connection for the Minna Men of L&L, Loomis is unfortunately often slow on the uptake and a bit of a bumbling lug. Nevertheless, Loomis does help Lionel to uncover vital information about the Fujisaki Corporation and their dealings at 1030 Park Avenue—information that eventually helps Lionel crack the case of Frank Minna's murder.

Ullman – Ullman is a man who is never seen over the course of the novel, though his murder (which is concurrent with Frank Minna's) is a significant red herring (or misleading clue) throughout much of the novel. Ullman is eventually revealed to be a bookkeeper for the Fujisaki Corporation with whom Frank was working together to skim money from the Fujisaki. Lionel focuses intently on solving the mystery surrounding Ullman's murder—but he ultimately concludes that he cannot feel guilty about every unknown, faceless person who dies as a result of criminal involvement.

Pinched, Indistinct, Chunky, and Pimples – Pinched, Indistinct, Chunky, and Pimples are a crew of four decidedly

unintimidating thugs who are hired to threaten and "scare" Lionel away from the Yorkville Zendo. Lionel eventually realizes that the four of them are Zendo students who do the bidding of Gerard Minna, the Zendo's Roshi (founder and teacher).

MINOR CHARACTERS

Carlotta Minna – Carlotta is Frank and Gerard Minna's mother, an "Old Stove" who used to sell old Italian family recipes out of her Brooklyn brownstone until her passing.

Welcome – Welcome is a bartender who works at a bar near the L&L storefront.

Mr. Foible – Mr. Foible is a boatman and fisherman who has an exclusive arrangement selling valuable sea urchins harvested off the coast of Maine to the men of the Fujisaki Corporation.

Zeod – Zeod is the gregarious proprietor of a deli on Smith Street frequented by Frank Minna and his Minna Men.

Night Doorman/Dirk – Dirk is the nighttime doorman at a townhouse near the Yorkville Zendo.

Walter – Walter is the young daytime doorman at a townhouse near the Yorkville Zendo.

Albert – Albert is a security guard at Brooklyn Hospital.

The Doctor – This doctor unsuccessfully attempts to revive Frank Minna after he is brought into Brooklyn Hospital as a stabbing victim.

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.

MYSTERY AND THE FUTILITY OF ANSWERS

Jonathan Lethem's *Motherless Brooklyn* is a novel-length parody of—and love letter to—the noir genre: a kind of detective novel marked by dark cynicism or even misanthropy. As Lethem creates a twisting, labyrinthine mystery and follows Lionel Essrog, the unlikely, Tourette's-afflicted detective who seeks to solve it, he both highlights the ridiculous self-seriousness of noir and points to the larger failures of the entire mystery and detective genre. Ultimately, Lethem argues that the practical answers at the heart of a mystery are useless once uncovered and are therefore futile to pursue; when someone goes missing or is murdered, their memory cannot be brought back or served true justice by the empty pursuit of the facts of their death.

At the start of the novel, even as Lethem sets up a distinctly dark and brooding noir atmosphere, Lionel Essrog believes that in solving the mystery of his former mentor Frank Minna's murder, he can do right by Frank and obtain justice on his behalf. Lionel is one of two-bit Brooklyn gangster Frank Minna's "Minna Men," a group of orphans whom Frank began using as flunkies in his burgeoning criminal enterprise years ago. Frank sought to start a "legitimate" detective agency by hiring the Minna Men as his amateur, weaponless "detectives." But now, Frank himself has been mysteriously murdered, and Lionel believes that he is uniquely positioned to solve the mystery of Frank's death. He begins following leads connected to a mysterious Upper East Side Zendo (or Buddhist house of worship); a giant Polish man; and a massive, shadowy apartment building rumored to be home to the city's most obscenely wealthy residents. Lionel believes that by finding the facts and solving the mystery, he'll be able to give Frank's memory the justice it deserves. Even as Lionel hones in on the disparate answers to the sprawling mystery in front of him, however, it becomes clear that just figuring out what happened to Frank won't bring him back—and it certainly won't heal the emotional wound that Lionel sustained in experiencing the death of his mentor and the closest thing he ever had to a father. Nevertheless, Lionel pursues the answers to the increasingly absurd, haywire puzzle in front of him with a dogged determination, believing that there is still hope. As Lionel connects romantically with Kimmery, a student at the Zendo who may be able to help Lionel uncover the place's secrets, he engages in the following fantasy: "Here Minna would be properly mourned. Here I'd find surcease for my pain and the answer to the puzzle of Tony and [...] why Minna [...] had to die [...] and I would never tic again." In solving the mystery, Lionel sees not only justice for Frank but an end to his own struggles with otherness, with Tourette's, and with the inability to make sense of a hostile, corrupt world.

Toward the end of the novel, Lethem demonstrates Lionel's sense of defeat and feelings of futility in the aftermath of having obtained the entire story of Frank's death from Frank's widow, Julia. Lionel at last realizes, with all the information he wanted at his disposal, that the facts alone stand to bring no closure, no justice, and no path to redemption. By the end of the novel, Lionel has successfully solved Frank Minna's murder. He has assembled all of the facts and realized that he has a choice between inaction and vengeance. Though he gives the thought of vengeance "five or ten minutes of [his] time," he ultimately decides that there is no point in continuing to run "the labyrinth that runs under the world"—that is, the labyrinth of truth about the world's corruption. He knows better now, he says, than to let his "obsessive instinct" get the best of him. The ghosts of those he's lost—and those he once believed were "[his] to protect"—still haunt him, but Lionel ends the novel by stating that he is going to let them stay "busy howling at the windows" rather than infiltrate the "house" of his consciousness. Lionel's resigned, exhausted state at the end of

the novel reflects the futility of "solving" a mystery. Lionel has all the facts—but he has realized how deep the corruption within his city runs and how profoundly depraved the human spirit can truly be. He knows that in the face of such widespread immorality and illegality, he is just one man who can't do much of anything. "I can't feel guilty about every last body," Lionel states in the book's final lines, revealing his understanding of the fact that neither guilt nor a foolish attempt to take down the powers that be will bring Frank back. Lionel wanted answers—but now that he has them, he realizes how futile they truly are.

"Put an egg in your shoe, and beat it. Make like a tree, and leave. Tell your story walking," Lionel entreats readers in the final lines of *Motherless Brooklyn*. Lionel—and Lethem—have led readers on a twisting, urgent journey through Brooklyn and beyond in search of answers and justice. Now, having realized that the former does not necessarily beget the latter, Lionel admits there is little one can do in the face of injustice except move on and "tell [one's] story." Lionel has proven himself a true noir detective: disappointed by the world, disheartened by the corruption all around him, and unable to reconcile the idea that solving a mystery doesn't mean that justice is done.

DIFFERENCE AND OTHERNESS

Lionel Essrog, the protagonist of *Motherless Brooklyn*, suffers from severe Tourette's syndrome: a neurological disorder marked by repetitive, uncontrollable physical or vocal tics. Lionel also displays obsessive-compulsive tendencies: as he makes his way through the world, he feels compelled to tap his surroundings; to kiss and lick objects and people; and to engage in endless, riffing wordplay which is often obscene in nature. Lionel, an orphan, has been told all his life by those around him that he's a "freak"—and he has come to believe that he truly is one. By creating a protagonist whose life is marked by otherness—Lionel is constantly reminded that he is different, other, and unusual—Lethem seeks to show how conformity and sameness are illusory. Through Lionel, Lethem argues that those who are different, disabled, or otherwise relegated to the fringes of society are actually those whose stories most profoundly reflect the core, essential struggle of the human experience: the desire to be recognized, known, and accepted as one is.

Throughout the novel, Lethem suggests that Lionel and everyone he encounters—even those individuals considered "normal" or neurotypical—experiences the same desire: to see themselves reflected in the world around them. Lethem uses Lionel's repeated identification of "Tourettic" patterns and structures in the world around him in order to demonstrate Lionel's desire to have his own internal psychological, physical, and emotional experiences reflected back at him. Lionel is devastated when his mentor and primary father figure, Frank Minna, dies early on in the novel. He becomes determined to solve the mystery of Frank's death in an attempt to secure justice for Frank—the only person in Lionel's life who "encouraged [him] to have a take on everything, and to spit it out." Lionel observes that while Frank always seemed to think that Lionel's tics and repetitions were jokes or even impressions, Frank still allowed Lionel to experience the feeling of being known and accepted for the first time in his life. "In this way," Lionel recalls of his early relationship with Frank, "Minna licensed my speech, and speech, it turned out, liberated me from the overflowing disaster of my Tourettic self." While growing up in an orphanage in Brooklyn, Lionel always felt different and othered. Only Frank Minna's acceptance allowed Lionel to feel, for the first time, that he was not a "disaster," as he'd been told for so long. Instead, in Minna's company, Lionel begins to sense that his differences don't necessitate his living on the fringes of society. Minna's embrace of Lionel's differences allows Lionel to perceive his own uniqueness in a new light. His differences don't close him off from the world—instead, seeking out those differences in the world around him actually allows him to feel more connected to his surroundings.

As the novel progresses, Lionel continues to seek out things that seem to him to be "Tourettic" in order to feel more in touch with himself and less alone: the New York City subway (and New York City itself), the music of Prince, the behaviors of a gray kitten named Hen whom Lionel adopts for a short period of time, the career path of a detective, and even guilt. As Lionel points to the things around him which reflect his own inner experiences with Tourette's—a "useless" and "inelegant" flow of utterances "contemptuous of perimeters [and] doomed to be mistaken or refused on delivery"—Lionel seeks to feel recognized and understood by the world in which he lives. Lionel draws parallels between the demanding, fast-moving, ever-shifting nature of detective work and the "free movement" of his own thoughts, voice, and body. He sees his compulsions and comforts reflected in the erratic behavior of Hen, a cat with whom he quickly bonds—but then he pushes away when his desire to inspire the same tics he observes in the cat results in Hen's growing unease in Lionel's apartment. Additionally, "the abruptness and compulsive precision [and] the sudden shrieks and silences" of Prince's music provide a "balm" for Lionel's brain, as seeing the patterns of his own thoughts laid out in sonic form in Prince's most iconic songs makes Lionel feel less alone. As Lionel repeatedly seeks out parallels between his own intensely different experience of the world—and his resultant feelings of ostracization and loneliness—Lethem reveals the core human desire to see one's experience reflected back to oneself. Lionel has been made to feel freakish, othered, and bizarre his entire life—yet as he grows older, he comes to see that in several core, fundamental ways, he is much the same as those around him. Lionel's ability to begin seeing his journey reflected in the infrastructure and minutiae of the world which

surrounds him speaks to Lethem's assertion that difference, variation, and otherness actually form the world.

The word "normal" only appears once in the entirety of *Motherless Brooklyn*—yet the desire to understand what "normal" is and to be assured of one's normality, runs like an undercurrent through the heads and hearts of nearly all of the characters within the novel. Ultimately, however, Lethem suggests that there is no true normalcy—not in terms of behavior, feeling, or experience. Difference and otherness, Lethem argues, is the foundation of society—not a threat against it or an anomaly within it.

MASCULINITY, FATHER FIGURES, AND MENTORSHIP

Though Lionel Essrog is a member of "Motherless Brooklyn"—the nickname that Frank Minna's brother Gerard gives to the group of orphans whom Frank takes under his wing during their youth—as the novel unfolds, Lethem focuses more on what it means to be fatherless than what it means to be motherless. Without any concept of a "father" apart from Frank, Lionel and his fellow Minna Men—Tony, Danny, and Gilbert—strive to figure out what it truly means to be a man as they grow up straining toward a vision of masculinity inspired solely by Frank, who's their fair-weather father figure. Though the title of the novel focuses on the orphans being motherless, Lethem ultimately argues that for young men, fatherlessness and the absence of a steadfast model of masculinity is the more pressing concern—and the factor that may ultimately shape how they find themselves embodying (or failing to embody) a masculine identity.

Early on in the novel, Lethem interrogates the concept of masculinity at which Lionel has arrived through his relationship with Frank—and what that concept means for how Lionel moves through the world. Lionel begins the novel's second chapter with the following list of the Minna Men's characteristics: "Minna Men wear suits. Minna Men drive cars. Minna Men listen to tapped lines. Minna Men stand behind Minna hands in their pockets, looking menacing. Minna Men carry money. Minna Men collect money. Minna Men don't ask questions. Minna Men answer phones. Minna Men pick up packages. Minna Men are clean-shaven. Minna Men follow instructions. Minna Men try to be like Minna but Minna is dead." The rest of the chapter delves into Lionel's past and explores how he came to be a Minna man. Many years ago, Lionel explains, Frank Minna—then a two-bit hood working odd jobs for a pair of Italian gangsters known only to Frank's orphan lackeys as The Clients—plucked Lionel, Danny, Tony, and Gilbert from an orphanage for boys in downtown Brooklyn. Over the years, Frank molded the young boys into "Minna Men": a tiny but dedicated army of motherless (and fatherless) boys desperate to impress their idol, Frank. Now, Lionel has a narrow and highly specific idea of what it means to be a Minna man. But as he points out at the end of this passage, "Minna is dead," and Lionel and his fellow Men will have to begin discovering what manhood means independent of Frank's quirks, instructions, and defining habits. "In our dreams we Minna Men were all Frank Minna," Lionel goes on to say, demonstrating that in the absence of a true father, his and his fellow Men's ideas of masculine identity have been entirely shaped around Minna's vision of masculinity.

As the novel progresses, Lionel reckons more deeply with how the image of masculinity he learned to emulate as a result of his idolatry of Frank is, in many ways, false and insufficient. Lionel is first presented with an alternate mode of masculinity during his investigations into the shady goings-on at the Yorkville Zendo (a Buddhist house of worship)—the site of the stakeout-gone-wrong on the night of Frank's murder. When Lionel attends a lecture at the Zendo in order to gather more information on a group of important visiting monks, Lionel notices the "six bald Japanese men['s] [...] robes revealing glimpses of sagging brown skin and threads of white underarm hair." These important monks embody a very different image of masculinity which nonetheless intersects, in a few ways, with the Minna Men's internalized notions of what it is to be a man. Like Minna Men, the monks are quiet and keen to follow instructions—but unlike the buttoned-up Minna Men who always wear suits, the monks embody a more lax and vulnerable masculine affect. Even later in the novel, Lionel follows Frank Minna's widow, Julia, up to Maine—where there is another Zendo connected to the Yorkville institution. At a restaurant specializing in Japanese and Thai **cuisine**, Lionel finds Julia working as a waitress—and once again encounters the monks but finds that this time, they're dressed to the nines in fine suits. The monks are the shareholders of the shadowy and powerful Fujisaki corporation, the entity which funnels money through the Zendos to support their illegal trade in valuable uni (sea urchin) eggs harvested off the coast of Maine. "They were all we could never be no matter how Minna pushed us: absolutely a team, a unit, their presence collective like a floating island of charisma and force," Lionel observes of the monks. He feels the men are "the image the Minna Men had always strained toward but had never reached and never would reach." When Lionel first encountered the Fujisaki men dressed as monks, he found their image of masculinity alien and even slightly repulsive—now, however, as he sees the men take on a more traditionally masculine guise, he finds himself full of envy and sadness. The vision of masculinity that Lionel has been chasing all his life—instilled within him by his mentor and father figure, Frank Minna—has felt effortful to attain and even more difficult to maintain, requiring a strict set of rules and behaviors in order to approximate. Seeing the effortless ways in which a real community of men embody a shared sense of masculinity rather than one impressed upon them by a single entity reveals to Lionel the ways in which his ideas of masculinity have been malformed through Minna's influence. Ultimately, Lethem

suggests that to be decentered from a healthy, fluid, collective sense of the masculine, as the Minna Men tragically are, is to spend one's life struggling—and failing—to find a mode of masculinity that creates a sense of authentic, intimate brotherhood.

LANGUAGE, COMMUNICATION, AND UNDERSTANDING

Lionel Essrog, the protagonist of *Motherless Brooklyn*, suffers from Tourette's syndrome—and his endless verbal tics and echolalia (repetitions of others' spoken words) often take the form of wordplay, puns, and a steady stream of seemingly unassociated verbalizations. Through Lionel, Lethem explores the ways in which language shapes one's understanding of the world—and the ways in which it can further one's sense of isolation and unknowability. Lionel's struggle to be heard, seen, and known is an ironic one: with his loud verbal tics and physical compulsions, he is hyper-visible and hard to ignore even on the busy streets of New York City. Yet the loudness and strangeness of his presence often make people discount what he says or avoid him entirely. Ultimately, though, Lethem suggests that language—no matter how it is expressed—is a way of making the world more knowable, comprehensible, and bearable to live within.

Lethem frames Lionel's obsession with language as inextricable not only from his Tourette's, but also from his identity as a self-proclaimed detective. When it comes to Tourette's and detective work alike, language is Lionel's way of investigating, interpreting, and understanding the chaotic, mysterious world around him. Lionel's "Tourettic compulsions for counting, processing, and inspection" have been a defining force within his life since his childhood at St. Vincent's orphanage in Brooklyn. As Lionel struggled to find the "language of [him]self" throughout his youth, he found release in his mentor and father figure Frank Minna's encouragement—Minna, amused rather than off-put by Lionel's verbal tics, which have all his life taken the form of repetitive and often obscene wordplay, encouraged Lionel to let his utterances flow rather than keep language "bubbled inside." Lionel's brain has always "sizzled with language," and when he's not performing tics, he can feel the compulsion toward wordplay welling within him like water straining to burst forth from a dam. Lionel uses language both to self-soothe his own irresistible compulsions and to try to understand the world around him. By playing around with words, syllables, and sounds, Lionel investigates the world and considers the linguistic meanings behind even ordinary words, names, and phrases, drawing connections between unlikely and disparate things. Lionel is able to investigate the world in this way—and though all the Minna Men consider themselves detectives in the making, Lionel is the only one who uses language to experience and understand the world around him.

Even when Lionel feels that his Tourette's gets in the way of his ability to exist normally in the world, Lethem demonstrates how Lionel's Tourettic speech actually allows him to express himself better—and thus make himself knowable in new ways to those who might initially struggle to understand him. For example, in a conversation with the Yorkville Zendo (or Buddhist study center) student Kimmery midway through the novel, Lionel tells Kimmery that he is "*con-worried*." The word "con" slips out because Lionel, who is attracted to Kimmery, is struggling to monitor and control his tics in order to better communicate with her and make himself appear normal or even attractive to her. After uttering the word "*con-worried*," Lionel fears Tourette's has "mangl[ed his] speech again"—but Kimmery smiles, asking if Lionel conceives of "con-worried" as a way of expressing confusion and worry at the same time. She adopts the world herself, attempting to soothe Lionel by urging him not to be too "conworried." This anecdote demonstrates how Lionel's unique grasp of language—which often seems like the opposite of a grasp to him—actually works both ways. Lionel is better able to understand, interpret, and participate in the world because of his endless reinventions of language—but even speech that he fears he has mangled or corrupted actually allows those around him to understand him better. Language, Lethem suggests, is one of the greatest points of connections available—and just as it allows Lionel to feel more a part of the world, it allows those who want to get to know Lionel to feel more a part of his unique experience of it.

Lionel's unique yet complicated relationship to language elevates *Motherless Brooklyn* from simple detective story or noir parody to a deeper investigation into the ways in which one can, through careful attention to the intricacies of language, create a deeper relationship with the chaos of the world. Lionel knows that just as his Tourettic tics are out of his control, so too are the actions of others and the changing tides of the world around him. Through language, Lionel seeks to find meaning in the world and to grasp its confusing, unpredictable shifts.

SYMBOLS

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

FOOD

Throughout *Motherless Brooklyn*, food symbolizes the futility of searching for comfort and simple pleasures in a world marred by violence and corruption. Lionel Essrog, the novel's narrator and protagonist, has Tourette's syndrome—a neurological disorder characterized by the presence of repetitive and compulsive physical and verbal tics. The only times Lionel experiences even a degree of relief from his nearly incessant performing tics is when he is sexually aroused or eating food. "Food really mellows me out," Lionel

observes early on in the novel as he focuses intently on methodically eating a sack of six White Castle sliders—and for a large portion of the novel, food does seem to have a calming effect on Lionel, allowing him to surrender to his compulsions yet enjoy their fruits.

Eventually, however, as Lionel finds himself compelled to overeat in the name of ritual—such as when he compulsively orders a giant collection of sandwiches from his neighborhood deli or when he wolfs five hot dogs in a row at a restaurant—Lionel comes to see that there is little real, lasting comfort to be found in fleeting pleasures like food. The symbol of food is even further complicated when Lionel discovers that the trade of valuable but overfished uni (sea urchin) eggs lies at the heart of the complicated mystery which ties together Frank and Gerard Minna, the shadowy Fujisaki Corporation, and the intimidating New Jersey mobsters Matricardi and Rockaforte. The fact that a singular and highly-sought delicacy has become the impetus for a vast and lucrative criminal enterprise confirms for Lionel and the reader alike the futility of taking comfort in things which simply create the illusion of safety and control.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Vintage edition of *Motherless Brooklyn* published in 1999.

Walks Into Quotes

Food really mellows me out.

Related Characters: Lionel Essrog (speaker), Gilbert Coney

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 2

Explanation and Analysis

Early on in the novel, as Lionel Essrog and his colleague Gilbert Coney engage in a stakeout outside a Zendo (Zen Buddhist study center) on Manhattan's Upper East Side, the anxious Lionel takes refuge in a steaming sack of White Castle sliders. In this quotation, as Lionel meditates on the calming effect food has on him, Lethem introduces the symbol of food as a mechanism for attaining a false, temporary sense of calm or control. Throughout the book, Lionel—who suffers from Tourette's syndrome and who finds that food is one of the few things that "mellows" his compulsive verbal and physical tics—will turn to food as a source of refuge, focus, and safety. The few moments that food provides these things for him, however, are ultimately illusory. Lionel's difference and otherness as a person with a noticeable mental illness cannot be smoothed over—just as the mess of murder, intrigue, corruption, and futile pursuit of logic and justice about to unfold cannot be explained or solved so easily.

I gritted my teeth while my brain went *Guy walks into the ambulance ramp stabs you in the goddamn emergency gut says I need an immediate stab in the garbage in the goddamn walk-in ambulance says just a minute looks in the back says I think I've got a stab in the goddamn walk-in immediate ambuloaf ambulamp octoloaf oafulope.*

"*Oafyoulope!*" I screamed, tears in my eyes.

Related Characters: Lionel Essrog (speaker), The Giant, Gilbert Coney, Frank Minna

Related Themes:

Page Number: 27

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Lionel rides with his dying boss, Frank Minna, toward the nearest hospital after Frank has been stabbed. Lionel's brain attempts to cope with the pain, grief, and anxiety he's feeling by engaging in a tic centered around wordplay. Lionel tries to processes all that's happened in the last few hours: a stakeout gone wrong, Frank's stabbing at the hands of an unknown giant Polish man, the attempt to soothe Frank using a joke about an octopus, and now, an illegal but desperate entrance to the hospital using a forbidden ambulance ramp. As Lionel does so, all of his confusion, sadness, and trauma catch up to him and create a jumble in his mind.

This passage provides a glimpse into Lionel's fast-moving brain and the ways in which he attempts to self-soothe and make sense of the world through language, wordplay, and free association. The buildup of information that seems to make Lionel's brain a clogged, chaotic place, however, will also prove instrumental as he begins uncovering the mystery of Frank's stabbing and all the factors that led to it. Lionel's brain works in a unique way, drawing connections between disparate things and shuffling information, words, and events around until they make sense. Lionel's Tourette's syndrome—the very thing that makes him so different from those around him and so confusing even to those closest to him—will soon prove vital in solving the complex and

unlikely mystery that has unraveled before him.

Motherless Brooklyn Quotes

Minna was barely a man then himself, of course, though he seemed one to us.

Related Characters: Lionel Essrog (speaker), Danny Fantl, Gilbert Coney, Tony Vermonte, Frank Minna

Related Themes:

Page Number: 40

Explanation and Analysis

In this quotation, Lionel describes the first time he met Frank Minna. When Lionel was young and living in an orphanage in Brooklyn, Minna began recruiting Lionel and three other orphans—Tony, Gilbert, and Danny—to take care of odd jobs for him. This mostly centered around his moving company, L&L, which the boys would later learn was a front for mafia activity. The boys, however, grew to idolize Frank Minna as a father figure and a model of masculinity, demonstrating loyalty to Frank throughout their lives—even as they became men themselves and recognized that when they first met Frank and essentially began devoting their lives to him, he was "barely a man then himself."

This passage is significant because it represents Lionel's interrogation of the model of masculinity upon which he has built his life and his sense of self. Frank represents a version of masculinity that centers on looking tough and intimidating, suppressing one's emotions, and pursuing financial success at all costs—even through illegal means. Becoming a "Minna Man," as Lionel, Tony, Danny, and Gilbert call themselves, has seemed to the four an important and honored distinction for a long time. But as Lionel reflects on the origin of his connection to Minna, he finds himself realizing that Minna was never the man Lionel thought he was—rather, he was a man who took advantage of orphaned boys, none of whom had anyone turn to or anything to lose.

'You probably ought to know, Lionel's a freak," said Tony, his voice vibrant with self-regard.

"Yeah, well, you're all freaks, if you don't mind me pointing it out," said Minna "No parents—or am I mixed up?"

Silence.

"Finish your beer," said Minna tossing his can past us, into the back of the van.

And that was the end of our first job for Frank Minna.

Related Characters: Lionel Essrog, Frank Minna, Tony Vermonte (speaker), Gilbert Coney, Danny Fantl

Related Themes:

Page Number: 49

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Lionel recalls an exchange between Tony and Frank Minna in the early days of Lionel, Tony, Danny, and Gilbert's association with Frank. Lionel, who has Tourette's syndrome, has always been different and other—his classmates at St. Vincent's, a Brooklyn orphanage, considered him a "freak" from childhood onward. But as Tony attempts to draw Minna's favoritism and ingratiate himself with the man, Minna pulls Tony up to size by pointing out that not one of the boys is more "freakish" than the others. This passage is significant because it shows, in part, why Lionel gravitated toward Minna over the years. Minna treated Lionel like a "freak" from time to time—but he never singled Lionel out as being especially more difficult, strange, or unlikeable than the other boys. Lionel has spent his life trying to embody the same traits as Minna—and in this recollection, the seed of his preoccupation with Minna becomes clear. The masculine example that Frank sets, then, seems to go deeper than macho posturing—Frank's manhood is also defined by a kind of fatherly acceptance of his mentees' quirks that allows Lionel to feel uniquely accepted.

With Minna's encouragement I freed myself to ape the rhythm of his overheard dialogues, his complaints and endearments, his for-the-sake-of arguments. And Minna loved my effect on his clients and associates, the way I'd unnerve them, disrupt some schmooze with an utterance, a head jerk, a husky "*Eatmebailey!*" I was his special effect, a running joke embodied.

Related Characters: Lionel Essrog (speaker), Frank Minna

Related Themes:

Page Number: 57

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Lionel recalls how Minna began singling him out and bringing him along to meetings with clients when Lionel was still a teenager. Lionel, who spent his entire childhood trying to blend in at St. Vincent's orphanage in Brooklyn and minimize his differences from the other children, spent a lifetime suppressing the verbal and physical tics that are part of his Tourette's syndrome. Under Minna's tutelage, however, Lionel felt accepted and appreciated for the first time in his life. Even if Minna often laughed at Lionel's tics—and soon began using Lionel purposefully as a distraction, a "special effect," and a negotiation tool in shady dealings with other Brooklyn mobsters—Lionel felt free, at least, for the first time to let loose with his verbal tics and at last be himself.

This passage demonstrates the ways in which Lionel came to use language and communication as a way of participating in and understanding the world around him based on Minna's encouragement. Whereas others often view Lionel's Tourette's as something to be mocked or even feared, his syndrome actually works to his advantage in his role as a Minna Man. With this, the novel suggests that being different isn't automatically a negative thing, and that language (no matter how idiosyncratic) is an important way in which people make sense of their surroundings and connect with others. Additionally, though Lionel was Minna's "running joke," he always anxiously sought to prove himself to Minna as a man and a detective—and yet counterintuitively, without Minna's guidance, Lionel never would have been able to conceive of a full self at all. In this way, the book makes the case that boys need a masculine role model—whether positive or negative—to fully realize their identities and come into their own as young men.

"This is exciting for you, Ma? I got all of motherless Brooklyn up here for you. Merry Christmas."

Related Characters: Frank Minna (speaker), Alphonso Matricardi and Leonardo Rockaforte/The Clients, Danny Fantl, Gilbert Coney, Tony Vermonte, Lionel Essrog, Carlotta Minna

Related Themes:

Page Number: 71

Explanation and Analysis

In this quotation, Frank Minna brings Lionel, Tony, Gilbert, and Danny—four orphans—to Christmas dinner at his mother, Carlotta's, brownstone in Brooklyn. As Frank announces to his mother that he has brought "all of motherless Brooklyn" to dine with her, Lethem self-consciously nods to how peculiar it is that being motherless is central to the book, when really, Lionel and his fellow Minna Men's journeys are all about how being fatherless has affected their lives.

Minna is the boys' idol and the only emblem of masculinity they have. For Frank to suggest that being motherless is the boys' defining characteristic means that he has no clue of how large his influence looms over the lives of the orphans he's taken under his wing. He sees them merely as tools through which he can more quickly accomplish the odd (and sometimes dangerous) jobs that he undertakes on behalf of his higher-ups in the mob, Rockaforte and Matricardi. Throughout the novel, Lethem will continually point out how Lionel and the other Minna Men model themselves entirely around Frank—even as Frank leaves them in the dark or treats them as disposable. This thoughtless treatment, too, informs how the Minna Men relate to one another and to the world around them.

Interrogation Eyes Quotes

Minna Men wear suits. Minna Men drive cars. Minna Men listen to tapped lines. Minna Men stand behind Minna hands in their pockets, looking menacing. Minna Men carry money. Minna Men collect money. Minna Men don't ask questions. Minna Men answer phones. Minna Men pick up packages. Minna Men are clean-shaven. Minna Men follow instructions. Minna Men try to be like Minna but Minna is dead.

Related Characters: Lionel Essrog (speaker), Danny Fantl, Gilbert Coney, Tony Vermonte, Frank Minna

Related Themes:

Page Number: 90

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Lionel describes the traits he associates with being a Minna Man—or a man who works closely with Frank Minna, a small-time Brooklyn mobster. Lionel feels that ever since Minna began associating with him, Tony, Gilbert, and Danny while they were still orphans, he has modeled his vision of what it is to be a man upon the very

specific vision of masculinity that Minna embodies. Now that Minna is dead, however, Lionel feels he has no model for how to proceed with his life, how to grow as a man, and how to construct his behavior, his habits, or his future.

This quote is significant because it illustrates the ways in which Lionel has looked to Minna and the other Minna Men as beacons of masculinity, having felt different and othered his entire life due to his Tourette's syndrome. Now, Lionel feels lost in the mist, unsure of how he should move forward not just with his behavior or his aesthetics but with his very life—and, he implies, the other Minna Men are in the same boat. The novel thus implies that being fatherless has grave consequences for young men, as Lionel and the other Minna Men are aimless, confused, and distraught without a father figure to guide them.

❝ Music had never made much of an impression on me until the day in 1986 when, sitting in the passenger seat of Minna's Cadillac, I first heard the single "Kiss" squirting its manic way out of the car radio. [...] It so pulsed with Tourettic energies that I could surrender to its tormented, squeaky beat and let my syndrome live outside my brain for once, live in the air instead.

Related Characters: Lionel Essrog (speaker), Frank Minna

Related Themes:

Page Number: 127

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Lionel describes hearing the "Tourettic energies" of Prince's music. This quotation is significant for several reasons: first, Lionel describes the "Tourettic" patterns of Prince's music as a kind of reflection of the ways in which his own mind, afflicted by Tourette's syndrome, works. The "tormented" music allows Lionel some relief from his tics as he relaxes into being able to witness the patterns of his mind enacted outside of him. This passage is also important because it shows how Lionel is able to look to Prince not just as an emblem of Tourettic thought but as a model for masculinity that's different from the masculinity espoused by Frank Minna. Lionel has felt lonely, isolated, and othered because of his Tourette's his entire life. Even when Minna made him feel accepted, Lionel is still faced with the constant reminder that he is a "freak"—that both the intellectual perspective and the type of masculinity he embodies are far from the mainstream. Thus, the music of Prince allows Lionel to experience two very different but nonetheless entwined senses of validation.

(Tourette Dreams) Quotes

❝ (in Tourette dreams you shed your tics)

(or your tics shed you)

(and you go with them, astonished to leave yourself behind)

Related Characters: Lionel Essrog (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 130

Explanation and Analysis

In this quotation, Lionel Essrog contemplates his own dreams. Tourette dreams, Lionel says, allow him to shed his tics and leave himself behind. This passage—and the emotions it contains—are deeply significant, as they clue the reader in to the conflicting feelings Lionel experiences each and every day. Throughout the book, Lionel doesn't often reflect on the emotions he associates with going through life with Tourette's syndrome—but in rare passages like this one, he clues his audience in as to the "astonish[ment]" he feels at the idea of being free of himself, even if just for a few hours. This passage clues readers into Lionel's complex inner world—when he is awake he is subject to his tics at all times, yet he has learned to move through his days without apologizing for or carrying a sense of embarrassment about who he is. When Lionel is asleep and vulnerable, however, he allows himself to indulge the fantasy of leaving himself behind and existing in his purest, most distilled form.

Bad Cookies Quotes

❝ "What's to be good at?" I said.

"You have no idea. Breathing for starters. And thinking, except it's not supposed to *be* thinking."

"Thinking about not thinking?"

"*Not* thinking about it. One Mind, they call it."

Related Characters: Kimmery, Lionel Essrog (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 138

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Lionel talks with Kimmery, a student at the Yorkville Zendo (a Zen Buddhist study center). Lionel has come to believe that the Zendo is the center of some nefarious criminal activity. As Lionel interviews Kimmery

about life and day-to-day operations at the Zendo, she tells him about the classes offered in disciplines such as meditation and *zazen*, or sitting.

This passage is significant because as Kimmery describes the state of "One Mind" (not thinking about thinking), Lionel feels a peculiar affinity with the state of mind she's trying to describe. Lionel describes his Tourette's as a very meta disorder in which he's always counting counting, thinking about thinking about Tourette's, and otherwise engaging with the verbal and physical tics his disorder compels him to perform in self-referential terms. The idea of focusing intently on not thinking, then, is both foreign and familiar to Lionel—he spends so much time thinking about thinking, performing tics in anticipation of performing tics, and otherwise processing the side effects of his disorder that such intense focus is familiar to him, while the idea of completely eradicating such thoughts and achieving a state of nothingness seems, perhaps, impossible.

The woman on the line did it all by rote, and so did I: billing information, name of deceased, dates, survivors, until we got to the part where I gave out a line or two about who Minna was supposed to have been.

"Beloved something," said the woman, not unkindly. "It's usually Beloved something."

Beloved Father Figure?

"Or something about his contributions to the community," she suggested.

"Just say detective," I told her.

Related Characters: Lionel Essrog (speaker), Frank Minna

Related Themes:

Page Number: 165

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, as Lionel orders an obituary for his late mentor Frank Minna, Lionel struggles to put into words who Frank was—and how Frank would want to be remembered. While Lionel acknowledges that Minna was a "Beloved Father Figure," he is self-aware enough to know that Minna wouldn't have seen himself that way—and might actively shirk the categorization if he could. Lionel chooses, as his final act of fealty and loyalty to Minna, to print the obituary by presenting a vision of Minna that Minna would have liked. Lionel knows that all Minna wanted was to run a clean, legitimate detective agency—and so Lionel chooses to forever immortalize Frank Minna as a detective, which he was not, as opposed to the what he actually was. The latter might have embarrassed, offended, or put off Minna in life, which still matters to Lionel even though Minna is dead.

While Lionel has always looked to Minna as a father figure and a model of masculinity, Lionel is wise enough to know his place in Minna's life. Even after Minna has passed away, Lionel still views him as an intimidating figure whom he must obey and tiptoe around. This implies that although Lionel deeply values Minna's role in his life, Minna did not feel the same way about him—a reality that's perhaps even more tragic than Lionel's status as an orphan in the first place. This further demonstrates Lionel's enduring and profound feeling of being alone—even more so than he was when Minna lived, when Lionel could operate under the delusion that he was as important to Minna as Minna was to him.

One Mind Quotes

"I've got Tourette's," I said.

"Yeah, well, threats don't work with me."

"Tourette's," I said.

Related Characters: The Giant, Lionel Essrog (speaker), Gerard Minna/Roshi Jerry , Frank Minna

Related Themes:

Page Number: 204

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Lionel finally finds himself face-to-face with the giant who killed Frank Minna. Lionel knows next to nothing about the giant except for the fact that he is Polish, that he has a nebulous connection to the Zendo, and that he was likely hired to kill Frank. After Lionel began performing tics wildly during an important monk's lecture inside the Zendo, Gerard Minna—the Zendo's Roshi, or head instructor—ordered the giant, evidently some kind of bodyguard, to take Lionel outside. Now, as Lionel tries to explain his behavior inside the Zendo, he finds that certain things are lost in translation. As Lionel explains that he has Tourette's, the giant mishears him and assumes that Lionel is trying to threaten him.

This passage is thematically significant because it demonstrates how isolating Lionel's disorder is—the story takes place in the mid-1990s, and not everyone has heard of Tourette's or understands what it is. This compounds the

isolation that Lionel already feels in his day-to-day life. When he tries to use language to communicate the truth about himself to another person, that truth is misheard and misunderstood. Even more significantly, the fact that the giant hears "threats" in place of "Tourette's" is inextricably intertwined with the state of modern masculinity within the circles in which both Lionel and the giant operate: men like the giant (and like Lionel) have been primed to trust no one and to consider everything a threat. Of course, then, the giant mishears the word threat in a vaguely similar word.

I can't own a cat because my behaviors drive them insane. I know because I tried. I had a cat, gray and slim, half the size of Kimmery's, named Hen for the chirping and cooing sounds she made... [...] She enjoyed my attentions at first, my somewhat excessive fondling. [...] But from the very first Hen was disconcerted by my head-jerks and utterances and especially by my barking. She'd tum her head to see what Id jumped at, to see what I was fishing for in the air with my hand. Hen recognized those behaviors—they were supposed to be *hers*. She never felt free to relax.

Related Characters: Lionel Essrog (speaker), Kimmery

Related Themes:

Page Number: 209

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Lionel describes his failed attempt at pet ownership many years ago. As Lionel recalls effectively scaring off his pet cat, Hen, he illustrates the ways in which his verbal and physical tics often prove alienating to other people—and, evidently, to animals as well. Lionel attempted to adopt a pet to feel a sense of connection to another being while avoiding the frustrations and confusions that have often accompanied his attempts at intimacy with humans—yet Lionel found himself even more isolated, lonely, and othered when his cat's recognition of behaviors that mirrored her own biological impulses drove her away from him rather than closer to him. This passage illustrates the pain of being unable to communicate with another, using Lionel's failed relationship with Hen the cat to metaphorize and externalize the larger difficulties he has with making himself known and understood even to those closest to him.

Auto Body Quotes

See me now, at one in the morning, stepping out of another cab in front of the Zendo, checking the street for cars that might have followed, [...] moving with my hands in my jacket pockets clutching might-be-guns-for-all-they-know, collar up against the cold like Minna, unshaven like Minna now, too... [...] That's who I was supposed to be, that black outline of a man in a coat, ready suspicious eyes above his collar, shoulders hunched, moving toward conflict. Here's who I was instead: that same coloring-book outline of a man, but crayoned by the hand of a [...] child.

Related Characters: Lionel Essrog (speaker), Gerard Minna/Roshi Jerry , Frank Minna

Related Themes:

Page Number: 226

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, as Lionel Essrog arrives once more at the Yorkville Zendo in order to confront the Roshi of the study center, who's Frank's brother Gerard Minna in disguise. As Lionel does so, he pays careful attention to his own appearance. Lionel has modeled his ideas of manhood and masculinity, for much of his life, around his now-deceased mentor Frank Minna. Minna himself looked to the archetype of the detective as the embodiment of true masculinity and freedom. As Lionel plays the role of detective—the role his mentor longed for all the Minna Men to inhabit seamlessly—Lionel cannot stop comparing himself visually to Minna, copying the things Minna did in order to affect power, control, masculinity, and agency.

In reality, however, even as Lionel finds himself more enmeshed in a mystery than ever before—and looking more like a real detective than he's ever looked—Lionel still feels hollow and empty, like an "outline of a man" drawn in by a child with naïve, unattainable ideas of masculinity. This passage represents the pain and confusion Lionel feels as he tries to inhabit the image his mentor left behind for him—and he finds that it doesn't feel authentic or fulfilling on any level.

On second thought, there *is* a vaguely Tourettic aspect to the New York City subway, especially late at night-that dance of attention, of stray gazes, in which every rider must engage. And there's a lot of stuff you shouldn't touch in the subway, particularly in a certain order: this pole and then your lips, for instance. And the tunnel walls are layered, like those of my brain, with expulsive and incoherent language—

Related Characters: Lionel Essrog (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 237

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Lionel Essrog engages in a familiar, repetitious pattern of his: comparing everyday edifices, institutions, and concepts to the "Tourettic" rhythms of his day-to-day life as a person with Tourette's syndrome. Lionel seeks to find aspects of his own experience reflected in the world around him in order to feel less alone. His life has been defined by difference and otherness—but by using language, perspective, and experience to seek out the "Tourettic" parts of everyday existence, Lionel can feel more connected to the world around him and thus more suited to exist within it.

Lionel asserted earlier in the novel that the subway was a decidedly un-Tourettic space—but now, as he rides the train from Manhattan to Brooklyn, he finds himself searching for parallels between the immediate environment around him, the train, and the larger world which he struggles to move through "normally" each day. By turning the world into something he can understand and handle through the lens of Tourette's, Lionel makes the hostile city around him into a place where his otherness and difference fades into the background, even if just for a moment.

"I'm a detective, Kimmery."

"You keep saying that, but I don't know. I just can't really accept it."

"Why not?"

"I guess I thought detectives were more, uh, subtle."

"Maybe you're thinking of detectives in movies or on television." I was a fine one to be explaining this distinction. "On TV they're all the same. Real detectives are as unalike as fingerprints, or snowflakes."

Related Characters: Kimmery, Lionel Essrog (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 255

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Lionel and Kimmery talk on the phone as Lionel, hot on the case, pursues a "lead" up to a Zen retreat in Maine. Kimmery and Lionel both interrogate their ideas of what it means to be a detective. *Motherless Brooklyn* is, in many ways, a novel-length parody of the noir genre and detective stories more generally. Lionel himself makes fun of egocentric, jaded detectives from movies and fiction—yet at the same time struggles to see the ways in which his own journey reflects the very elements of detective stories he denigrates.

Lionel wants to be a "real detective"—but even as he insists that real detectives are unique, noble, and inscrutable, he finds himself playing into tropes about what it means to be a detective. Kimmery is right: Lionel is an unlikely detective, one who challenges the status quo and is hard to "accept" as one of the cynical detectives featured in classic mysteries. Lionel's engagement with what it means to be a detective is, of course, formed entirely by the ideas his mentor Frank Minna harbored about what it meant to be not just a detective, but a man. Lionel's bizarre, decidedly unsubtle approach to detective work marks him as someone in engagement with the legacy of the detective archetype—even as he seeks to dismantle it due to his own insecurities, uncertainties, and lofty ideals.

"Roshi says this thing about guilt," she said after a minute. "That it's selfish, just a way to avoid taking care of yourself. Or thinking about yourself. I guess that's sort of two different things. I can't remember."

"Please don't quote Gerard Minna to me on the subject of guilt," I said. "That's a little hard to swallow under the present circumstances."

Related Characters: Lionel Essrog, Kimmery (speaker), Frank Minna, Tony Vermonte, The Giant, Gerard Minna/ Roshi Jerry

Related Themes:

Page Number: 256

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Lionel is tailing the giant, who is tailing Lionel's colleague Tony Vermonte up to a Zen retreat in Maine. Lionel, bored and anxious on the drive up, uses his cell phone to call Kimmery, a student at the Yorkville Zendo with whom he's recently had a one-night stand. When Lionel tries to tell Kimmery about the Roshi of the Zendo's true identity, the naïve Kimmery refuses to listen. She is only able to focus on the positive things Roshi has said to

her—but Lionel, who knows that Roshi is really Gerard Minna, and that Gerard may have been responsible for his brother Frank Minna's murder, is unable to hear about the Roshi's teachings.

This passage demonstrates the vastly different ways in which Kimmery (who has come to view Roshi as a kind of father figure) and Lionel (who has long seen Frank Minna as his own father figure) conceive of masculinity, emotion, the self, and guilt. Both Lionel and Kimmery look up to men who are decidedly unemotional and unremorseful, characteristics that they have similarly internalized as examples of toughness and masculinity. Yet Lionel dismisses Kimmery's concept of guilt as a way of avoiding responsibility to oneself simply because it comes from Gerard Minna, a man he hates. Later on in the novel, Lionel will find himself interrogating the nature of guilt and attempting to understand how his own differences have impacted the ways in which he experiences guilt, shame, and introspection.

"Will you take my order, Julia?"

"Why don't you go away, Lionel? Please." It was pitying and bitter and desperate at once. She wanted to spare us both. I had to know from what.

"I want to try some uni. Some—*orphan ocean ice cream*!—some urchin eggs. See what all the fuss is about."

Related Characters: Julia Minna, Lionel Essrog (speaker), The Fujisaki Corporation, Frank Minna

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 274

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Lionel arrives at Yoshii's, a sushi restaurant in Maine connected to a Zen retreat that is itself connected to the Yorkville Zendo (a Zen Buddhism center). Lionel has been searching for answers to his murdered mentor Frank's connection to the Zendo for days. Now, in Maine, he feels that he is close to uncovering the larger mystery between Frank, his brother Gerard, the study of Zen, and the shadowy Fujisaki Corporation that owns the restaurant. Lionel's hunch is confirmed when he enters the restaurant and finds Frank's widow, Julia, hiding out as a waitress.

This passage is significant because Lionel can sense that Julia, who is desperate for Lionel to leave this place and forget it entirely, wants to "spare [them] both" from something. Lionel is so close to obtaining the answers he's long been seeking, yet he is distracted by the diversion of ordering some rare, precious uni (sea urchin eggs). Food is an ongoing symbol of the futility of searching for distraction in a violent and corrupt world, so Lionel's focus on the uni suggests that whatever comfort or sense of control that Lionel has obtained will soon be shattered.

It all happened at once. There were six of them, a vision to break your heart. I was almost glad Minna was gone so he'd never have to face it, how perfectly the six middle-aged Japanese men of Fujisaki filled the image the Minna Men had always strained toward but had never reached and never would reach... [...] They were all we could never be no matter how Minna pushed us: absolutely a team, a unit, their presence collective like a floating island of charisma and force.

Related Characters: Lionel Essrog (speaker), Danny Fantl, Gilbert Coney, Tony Vermonte, Frank Minna, The Fujisaki Corporation

Related Themes:

Page Number: 274

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Lionel is taken aback as the six monks he saw at the Zendo (Zen Buddhist center) in Manhattan enter a restaurant in a remote town in Maine. This time, the monks are dressed not in robes but in fancy suits, revealing themselves as the heads of the Fujisaki Corporation. As Lionel considers the Fujisaki men's cool, streamlined, and most importantly "collective" appearances, he realizes just how profoundly naïve, inexperienced, and incohesive the Minna Men truly are. By proxy, he recognizes how disorganized and poor a leader Frank Minna was.

This moment represents a large but painful shift for Lionel, who has organized his life and his concept of masculinity around the image of Frank Minna. Lionel has always felt different from everyone around him, primarily due to how his Tourette's syndrome causes him to think and behave differently than other people. Being a Minna Man was the chance to be part of something: to be a member of a team. Now, however, confronted with the Fujisaki men, Lionel at last understands that he and the other Minna Men will never embody the sense of unity the Fujisaki men embody. Crucially, then, the novel suggests that manhood isn't

merely about posturing as macho—true masculinity entails a sense of brotherhood with and respect for other men that Frank did not foster among the Minna Men.

Is guilt a species of Tourette's? Maybe. It has a touchy quality, I think, a hint of sweaty fingers. Guilt wants to cover all the bases, be everywhere at once, reach into the past to tweak, neaten, and repair. Guilt like Tourettic utterance flows uselessly, inelegantly from one helpless human to another, contemptuous of perimeters, doomed to be mistaken or refused on delivery. Guilt, like Tourette's, tries again, learns nothing.

Related Characters: Lionel Essrog (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 284

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Lionel once again compares an element of the world around him (or, in this case, within him) to his experience of living with Tourette's syndrome. As Lionel describes the similarities between the experience of guilt and the experience of life with Tourette's, he investigates the "useless[ness]" and "inelegan[ce]" of both things. Both guilt and Tourette's, Lionel suggests, have the power to infiltrate and overturn a life—both are frequently misunderstood, and both ultimately "learn nothing."

In other words, Lionel feels that he is primed to understand the feeling of guilt because of his experiences with Tourette's—and yet he is shocked to discover how poorly his Tourette's has insulated him against the compulsions associated with guilt and remorse. Lionel finds himself comforted time and time again by his own ability to find his experience of Tourette's reflected in the world around him, such as when he listens to the "Tourettic" music of Prince or takes the "Tourettic" New York City subway. Now, however, when confronted with the "Tourettic" components of guilt, Lionel finds himself unable to find comfort in the parallels—he is, at this point in his journey, only further disheartened by his guilt's (and his Tourette's syndrome's) inability to evolve, grow, or learn.

Formerly Known Quotes

I needed her to see that we were the same, disappointed lovers of Frank Minna, abandoned children.

Related Characters: Lionel Essrog (speaker), Frank Minna, Julia Minna

Related Themes:

Page Number: 297

Explanation and Analysis

As Lionel Essrog at last confronts Julia Minna, Frank's widow, he finds that while Julia gives him many of the answers about Frank's past he's been seeking, she still views Lionel as a burden or even an enemy. Lionel wants Julia to see the similarities between them—like Julia, Lionel is confused and in pain, and he wants to be able to turn to Julia for comfort. He feels that he and Julia were both "abandoned" by Frank—though Julia was his wife and Lionel was simply an orphan Minna took under his wing, Lionel feels that Frank treated them both simultaneously as "lovers" and "children."

This is significant because it allows readers to see the ways in which Lionel makes sense of his confusing life through language. There isn't a word, he perhaps feels, for what his relationship with Frank meant to him: it shaped his worldview, his sense of masculinity, and his path through life. Wherever Frank led, Lionel followed—and the same, Lionel knows, was true for Julia. In this moment, as Lionel tries and fails to connect on a human level with Julia—a woman he feels he knows and understands, yet a woman who resists the idea of being truly known by anyone—his sense of difference and otherness is compounded and he is left feeling more alone than ever before.

Good Sandwiches Quotes

Then somewhere, sometime, a circuit closed. It was a secret from me but I knew the secret existed. A man—two men?—found another man. Lifted an instrument, gun, knife? Say gun. Did a job. Took care of a job. Collected a debt of life. This was the finishing of something between two brothers, a transaction of brotherly love-hate, something playing out, a dark, wobbly melody.

Related Characters: Lionel Essrog (speaker), Alphonso Matricardi and Leonardo Rockaforte/The Clients, Frank Minna, Gerard Minna/Roshi Jerry

Related Themes:

Page Number: 304

Explanation and Analysis

In the last chapter, Lionel informed Matricardi and Rockaforte of Gerard Minna's whereabouts. Matricardi and Rockaforte are a pair of mobsters who had long been hunting Gerard Minna after they betrayed him. Here, Lionel describes the anticlimactic, mysterious end of Gerard's life. Gerard was "a job" that was taken care of quietly and efficiently.

The blasé way in which Lionel speaks about the end of Gerard—whom he has loathed ever since he discovered that Gerard was responsible for his own brother (and Lionel's mentor) Frank's death—demonstrates the anticlimactic futility of answers, justice, and retribution. Lionel has been searching for justice for Frank for the entire novel—and now that it has been secured at last, Lionel sees the strangely quiet end to the story as a simple payment of debt. This quote is significant because it speaks to the futility of finding answers to the mysteries of life, as well as the unique ways in which masculinity, duty, and "brotherly love-hate" unfold within the dark, shadowy underworld through which Lionel has spent his life moving.

❝ In detective stories things are always, always the detective casting his exhausted, caustic gaze over the corrupted permanence of everything and thrilling you with his sweetly savage generalizations. This or that runs deep or true to form, is invariable, exemplary. Oh sure. Seen it before will see it again. Trust me on this one. Assertions and generalizations are, of course, a version of Tourette's. A way of touching the world, handling it, covering it with confirming language.

Related Characters: Lionel Essrog (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 307

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, taken from the final chapter of *Motherless Brooklyn*, a jaded yet self-aware Lionel Essrog compares himself to the archetype of the "exhausted, caustic" detective—yet he complicates the comparison by admitting that while he's making a generalization about detectives and detective stories, generalizations and assertions are how he has learned to "handl[e]" the world. Throughout the novel, Lionel has expressed the ways in which he views the world through the lens of his Tourette's—now, Lionel draws a direct parallel between the ways in which he seeks to confirm his experience of the world and the ways in which detectives in traditional mysteries attempt to compartmentalize their worlds. Lionel feels that the world is made more manageable when he assigns generalizations and blanket assertions to it. He recognizes his instinct to mock this same response in the detectives in the stories he knows and admires. Yet here, Lionel concedes that he, with his "sweetly savage generalizations" (a byproduct of his disorder), is more like these detectives that he has ever realized.

❝ That was me, Lionel. hurtling through those subterranean tunnels, visiting the labyrinth that runs under the world, which everyone pretends is not there. You can go back to pretending if you like. I know I will, though the Minna brothers are a part of me, deep in my grain, deeper than mere behavior, deeper even than regret, Frank because he gave me my life and Gerard because, though I hardly knew him, I took his away. I'll pretend I never rode that train, but I did.

Related Characters: Lionel Essrog (speaker), Gerard Minna/Roshi Jerry , Frank Minna

Related Themes:

Page Number: 310

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Lionel discusses the subterranean tunnels" and secret "labyrinth[s]" which run under the surface of the world. But Lionel isn't speaking about literal tunnels or passageways—rather, he is speaking about the cruelties, dangers, and uncertainties of the hidden dealings, often criminal in nature, which keep the world turning.

This passage is significant because Lionel has spent the entire novel trying to get information about what befell his mentor, Frank, and what the true nature of Frank's far-reaching ties to the Brooklyn mob and indeed the Japanese Yakuza really was. Now that Lionel has "rode [the] train" and discovered the answers to the questions he had about the world around him, he feels a sense of weariness, exhaustion, disgust, and futility. He is uncertain of whether or not he can truly pretend that the crime-ridden "labyrinth" he's discovered does not exist—and if he even wants to. Lionel, then, ends the novel in a state of uncertainty and mixed resolve. Like many detectives in movies and stories of the noir genre, he has become embittered rather than empowered by what he's learned about the world over the course of his investigation.

> Ullman? Never met the guy. Just like Bailey. They were just guys I never happened to meet. To the both of them and to you I say: Put an egg in your shoe, and beat it. Make like a tree, and leave. Tell your story walking.

Related Characters: Lionel Essrog (speaker), Frank Minna, The Fujisaki Corporation, Ullman

Related Themes:

Page Number: 311

Explanation and Analysis

In the final lines of the novel, Lionel Essrog points out the ultimate futility of answers to the mysteries that encircle and define a life. He has solved Frank Minna's murder and gathered all the facts surrounding the death of his beloved mentor. But there are still parts of the story that Lionel will never access or understand, just as there are parts of himself that will remain unknowable in spite of his best efforts to know himself fully. Lionel never met Ullman, the Fujisaki Corporation's bookkeeper who wound up dead, and he has never met "Bailey," the invisible entity at whom many of his tics are directed. Lionel knows now that there are huge swaths of the interior world as well as the physical world that are simply unknowable. Rather than linger on the frustration and difficulty of this fact, Lionel invokes his mentor Frank Minna's advice as he vows to "tell [his] story walking"—in other words, Lionel plans to move on with his life and accept that there are things he can't know or understand, and that sometimes, even after the answers to life's biggest questions are revealed, there is still a sense of hollowness, futility, and uncertainty.

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.

WALKS INTO

In the opening lines of the novel, Lionel Essrog describes his experiences moving through life with Tourette's, a neurological disorder characterized by compulsory, uncontrollable, repetitive verbal and physical tics. Lionel feels that his tics and vocalizations allow him to smooth away the imperfections of the world—but sometimes, when he pushes his tics too far, he finds himself actually creating more wrinkles and imperfections. Still, the impulse to tic quickly grows from an itch to a strain. "Eat me!" is one of Lionel's most frequent tics.

Right away, Lethem establishes that the novel to come will be observed through the eyes of a character who often feels profoundly different from those around him. He thus introduces an investigation of language and communication, particularly how Lionel at once feels othered and empowered by his inability to control his speech.

Lionel is sitting in a car eating White Castle **sliders** with a man named Gilbert Coney. After Lionel screams out, "Eat me!" he feels himself able to concentrate more fully on the hamburger—food, he says, is one of the things that calms him most. Gilbert and Lionel are on a stakeout on the Upper East Side of Manhattan. Together, they wait outside of a townhouse in the Yorkville neighborhood—but they have no idea what they are doing there. Their boss, Frank Minna, usually sends them on errands in Brooklyn—but here, the two are off the map.

Lethem begins teasing out the situation at hand and the connections among the players within it. By introducing the symbol of food almost immediately, Lethem suggests that the mechanism by which Lionel attains calm is soon to be disrupted—and it may never again function in the same way.

Gilbert points to a sign on the doorway of the townhouse. Lionel can see that it reads "Yorkville Zendo." Gilbert asks what a Zendo is. Lionel supposes that it has something to do with Zen Buddhism. As Lionel thinks about Zen, he feels an "echolalia salad" form in his brain as the impulse to repeat related words—"*Zendo, Ken-like Zugng Fu, Feng Shui master, Fungo bastard, Zen masturbation, Eat me!*"—rattles through his mind. Instead of vocalizing his tic, however, Lionel focuses on inspecting and eating his third **slider**. Gilbert has obtained six sliders for Lionel, knowing that Lionel's compulsive instincts mean that he frequently needs to do things in sixes.

Lethem uses this passage to deepen his readers' understanding of the peculiarities and particulars of Lionel's viewpoint. Lionel's ever-churning brain makes quick, almost unconscious associations which allow him to see things differently and more deeply than most people. Though Lionel talks about his Tourette's like it's a burden, it's clear that his disorder is suited to his detective work in many ways.

Gilbert and Lionel watch as a young woman in her twenties with short dark hair and glasses enters the Zendo using a key. Coney asks what the two of them are supposed to do, and Lionel suggests they just observe and take notes. Lionel opens the glove compartment, enjoying the sound it makes, and writes that a woman with glasses entered the building at 6:45 p.m. He slaps the compartment door six times. Lionel slightly resents how Tourette's controls his behavior.

Whereas the previous passage showed how Lionel's Tourettic symptoms often allow him to deepen his understanding of the world around him, this passage shows how they just as frequently function as roadblocks.

Lionel hears Frank Minna's voice. He looks out of his window and sees that Frank has ducked down beside the car. Lionel rolls down his window and compulsively taps Frank's shoulder, a gesture Frank that has put up with for over 15 years. Minna asks for a cigarette, and Gilbert gives him one. Minna tells Coney and Lionel that he's going inside the Zendo, and he asks Gilbert to follow him inside and wait at the bottom of the stairs. Gilbert protests, but Minna hushes him. Minna drops a radio and headphones in Lionel's lap and tells the two men that he's wired.

Minna is clearly going into a situation that scares him—he's wearing a wire and asking for backup to try to ensure some measure of safety for himself as he wades into the unknown. Meanwhile, his years-long toleration of Lionel's quirks is a hint that he's something of a father figure to the younger man, suggesting that even masculine role models can sometimes exhibit anxiety and vulnerability.

Minna gives Gilbert and Lionel instructions as to what to do when he says certain things: if he says "Not if my life depended on it," they should rush upstairs and find him. If he says he is going to use the bathroom, it means that he is coming downstairs with a group of men, and that Lionel and Gilbert should get ready to follow their car. Lionel repeats Minna's instructions back to him, and Minna pinches Lionel's cheek. Minna heads inside, and Coney follows him. Lionel slips his headphones on; confused and anxious, he eats a **burger** to calm himself.

This passage demonstrates several things: first, it shows how heavily Minna relies upon his men's fealty and readiness. It shows how Lionel's Tourette's makes him valuable to Minna as a kind of parrot, adding further nuance to Lionel's condition as something that both hinders him personally and helps him professionally. Finally, it shows how Lionel continually attempts to self-soothe by distracting himself with food, stuffing his mouth in order to quiet it.

As Minna arrives upstairs, Lionel listens to his conversation with another man. Minna and the other man discuss complications about a contract for a building. The other voice invites Minna to sit and talk. Minna resists and asks where Ullman is. The other man tells Minna that Ullman is downtown. Minna swears and suggests they "call the whole thing off." Lionel listens carefully, taking notes as he listens to the men settle in and pour drinks. He is unable to suppress a verbal tic: "Eat shit, Bailey!" he screams. Lionel explains that Bailey is a name only has meaning in the context of his Tourette's—he has no idea who Bailey is or where the name comes from, but Bailey functions as a kind of "target."

As Lionel explains the logic—or lack thereof—behind one of his most prominent tics, it becomes clear that the conscious and the subconscious are commingled within his brain. Lionel has a great deal of anger and frustration but nowhere to aim it; in creating "Bailey," consciously or unconsciously, Lionel has created a repository for his frustrations.

Lionel listens as Frank and the unnamed man discuss a mysterious woman. The man accuses Frank of "los[ing] control of her," while Frank retorts that she simply misses her "*Rama-lama-ding-dong*." As Lionel struggles to understand the opaque, confusing conversation, his nerves—and his tics—increase. Lionel is startled when the doorman of a nearby apartment building knocks on his window. He rolls it down, and the doorman tells him that his "friend" wants him. Lionel waves the doorman off as he desperately tries to control his tic and simultaneously listen to the conversation taking place over the wire. The doorman, however, is insistent. Lionel tells the doorman to get the name of the man who wants him. The doorman again insists Lionel come in, and Lionel says that he'll be right there.

The mysterious events of the evening increase in intensity as Lionel struggles both to understand a confusing conversation and to make himself understood when a strange individual approaches his car. The conversation Lionel is listening to sets the scene for the novel's core mystery—yet because Lionel hears only bits and pieces, it is clear that the burgeoning detective has his work cut out for him.

Lionel hears Frank ask to use the toilet over the radio. Lionel realizes it is time to go. He gets out of the car, pushes the doorman out of the way, and retrieves Gilbert from the Zendo. The two of them hustle back to the car and Coney takes the wheel. Lionel resists the urge to tic as his anxiety worsens. Soon, Minna and another man—a "giant" in a black coat who stands about seven feet tall—emerge from the Zendo. Minna and the giant get into a car. The car pulls away, and Coney begins following it.

As Frank exits the Zendo with another person—as he warned Lionel and Gilbert that he might—it is nonetheless clear that Frank has firmly lost control of the situation. Lionel and Gilbert, desperate to save their mentor, leap into action—even as Lethem implies that this night is the most "action" they've ever seen in their tenure as detectives.

Lionel tries to listen on the radio, but he cannot hear anything. Through his tics, he urges Gilbert to get closer—but in the thick Second Avenue traffic, it is impossible. With no place for his stress to go, Lionel's tics worsens. Further downtown, at Fifty-eighth Street, the black car in which Minna is travelling speeds through a light—Coney and Lionel are left behind as the black car speeds through traffic, clearly attempting to lose its tail. As soon as they can, Coney and Lionel speed forth, no longer trying to disguise the fact that they are tailing the black car. Coney follows the car into the Midtown Tunnel toward Queens. At the end of the tunnel, Lionel pulls together the fare—but he is disappointed when the other car hurries through an E-Z Pass lane.

As the chase quickens and the drama mounts, Lionel copes with the buildup of stress in his body by uttering a series of verbal tics, again illustrating how Tourette's is a way in which Lionel copes and interacts with what's happening around him. Lethem also uses this passage to parody classic car chases—mundanities such as the lack of an E-Z Pass, for instance, slow Lionel and Coney down and mirror for readers the banal frustrations of everyday life.

Gilbert and Lionel, having lost the black car, pull over on a random street in Queens after searching fruitlessly for several blocks. Lionel listens desperately to the radio, hoping that Minna will drop a clue over the wire. Sure enough, within a few minutes, Minna makes a sardonic remark about the large Polish man in the car with him needing to "stay within sniffing distance of a pierogi." Immediately, Lionel hears the sound of Minna being hit. Lionel asks where a nearby Polish neighborhood, and Coney replies that Greenpoint is Polish. Though Greenpoint is across another bridge, in Brooklyn, Lionel and Gilbert decide to head there.

Lionel knows that Minna won't leave him stranded—and indeed Minna does his best to leave hints for his men, even though doing so endangers his own life. Minna's propensity for jokes based on racial and ethnic stereotypes (pierogis are a Polish food) allows him to slyly drop a hint about his location—but his remark offends his captor and also tips him off as to the fact that Frank is wearing a wire.

Lionel hears Minna make another remark over the radio—he says something about "Harry Brainum Jr." Lionel knows Minna is trying to give him clues, but he is uncertain of what Minna's talking about. Lionel becomes more anxious as he hears Minna being hit repeatedly. Gilbert realizes that they've just passed a sign reading Harry Brainum Jr.; Lionel urges Coney to turn back, and he does. Lionel and Gilbert circle the block slowly, noting a large Dumpster near the entrance to the Brainum hardware warehouse. There is no sign of the black car, but Lionel insists that Minna must be here. Lionel gets out of the car and walks on the sidewalk as Coney drives the car beside him. Soon, Lionel spots Minna's wire on the ground near the Dumpster.

Minna manages to successfully lead Gilbert and Lionel to his location—but by the time they find him, there is a sense of dread in the air as well as physical evidence of what has happened to Minna. Lionel isn't surprised by the high-stakes, violent turn the evening has taken—he knows that Minna has dealings with shady, dangerous people, and he is clearly used to successfully getting Minna out of lower-stakes situations.

Lionel rushes for the Dumpster. As he approaches, he hears Minna moan. As Lionel pulls himself up over the rim of the Dumpster, he realizes that the lip of it is covered in blood. Minna is curled up in the garbage clutching his stomach—Minna, too, is covered in blood. With Gilbert's help, Lionel pulls Minna from the dumpster and hurries him into the car. Minna gives Lionel and Coney directions to Brooklyn Hospital, the nearest emergency room. Lionel performs tics and barks as Minna breathes unsteadily in the backseat. Minna tells Lionel that he's dropping his wallet, watch, and beeper on the floor—he doesn't want them stolen at the hospital. Minna explains that he was stabbed, but he won't tell Lionel or Coney who knifed him.

The mystery deepens as the injured Minna refuses to name his attackers—yet he leaves behind bridges to solving the mystery in the form of his possessions. Minna is not long for this world, yet he very obviously doesn't want to involve Lionel or Gilbert any more deeply in what's going on.

Minna asks Lionel to tell him a joke, so Lionel tells a silly joke about a man who brings his pet octopus to a bar, betting the bartender $100 that the octopus can play any instrument. The bartender presents the octopus with a succession of instruments, each of which the octopus plays skillfully. Finally, the bartender hands the octopus a set of bagpipes. When the octopus struggles with the bagpipes, the octopus's owner urges the octopus to hurry up and play them. The octopus says that he's not going to play the instrument—instead, if he can get its clothing off, he's going to have sex with it. Minna doesn't laugh. Lionel, Gilbert, and Minna ride the rest of the way to the hospital in near silence. Minna still refuses to tell Lionel or Coney who stabbed him.

Minna loves jokes—but he doesn't respond at all to the one Lionel tells him, either out of disappointment or the distracting force of the pain he's in. Minna's deadpan reaction to Lionel's joke implies that Lionel didn't tell the joke Minna wanted to hear—and that the joke he was hoping for may be a clue to what's going on, even if Minna refuses to tell the men what's happening outright.

As Minna instructs Gilbert to illegally enter the hospital via an ambulance ramp, Lionel's brain goes into overdrive, and he silently engages in wordplay revolving around the octopus joke, Minna's stabbing, and the hospital until he screams nonsense and begins to cry. A security guard named Albert tries to wave Coney's car away from the ambulance entrance, but Lionel insists Albert find them a stretcher. The car smells like blood, and Minna looks terrible. Two interns hurry out to take Minna inside. As Lionel follows the stretcher, Minna asks what the name in the punchline of a joke Lionel used to tell about a Jewish lady traveling to Tibet to see the High Lama. Lionel tells Minna that the name is "Irving." Lionel asks if the name Irving is a clue, but before Minna can answer, a doctor intubates Minna and hurries him into surgery.

This passage shows how in an impossibly difficult and chaotic moment, Lionel turns to language—and his conscious and unconscious processing of it—in order to make sense of the world around him. Throughout the novel, Lethem will explore how language and communication allow individuals to form bridges between themselves and the rest of the world—and how for Lionel, whose inner world already revolves around grasping at language, the chaotic, painful, and nonsensical parts of the physical world are made more palatable through language.

In the chaotic waiting area, Lionel sits beside Gilbert and replays the events of the evening. He begins performing tics, drawing the stares of others in the room. Albert approaches Lionel and, assuming Lionel is drunk, tells Lionel that he "can't be like that in here." Lionel continues performing tics as Coney sticks up for Lionel, explaining that he has a condition. Lionel struggles mightily against the impulse to grab Albert's nightstick. He continues performing verbal tics until a triage nurse calls for Coney and Lionel: the doctor has news about Minna.

This passage shows how poorly other people understand Lionel and demonstrates how much cruelty and prejudice he faces because of his condition. Lionel has a hard enough time connecting to the world around him—and that tenuous connection is made more difficult when people refuse to extend him any empathy or understanding.

The doctor who wheeled Minna into surgery earlier approaches Gilbert and Lionel and tells them that there was nothing he could do for Minna. Coney, not understanding the doctor, asks to see Frank. Lionel, realizing what is happening, erratically performs tics and nearly vomits. The doctor tells Coney firmly but gently that Frank is dead. Lionel begins tapping the doctor. Coney demands to see Minna, but the doctor refuses—Minna's body, he explains, is now evidence. The medical examiners, the doctor says, want to speak with Coney and Lionel. Lionel, however, tells Coney that they need to leave quickly. The doctor asks Albert to bring Coney and Lionel to speak with some policemen.

In this passage, Lethem shows how Lionel and Gilbert react very differently to the devastating news of their shared mentor's death. Lionel uses his Tourettic tics, both verbal and physical, to remain grounded in the face of a painful, disorienting moment, while Gilbert jumps immediately to denial and anger.

Given the threatening vibe that he and Gilbert give off as large, suited "Minna Men," Lionel knows that he and Coney will be able to walk out of the hospital. Lionel shouts at the doctor nonsensically as Coney rebuffs the doctor and heads past Albert toward the exit.

This passage shows how Lionel's Tourette's is useful in difficult situations as an excuse or a form of distraction. Lionel's disorder often inhibits his ability to be invisible or unnoticeable—but in situations where an all-out offensive is required, Tourette's is actually quite helpful. Lethem will go on to explore how Lionel has been taught, for better or worse, to use his condition to his advantage in situations like this one.

MOTHERLESS BROOKLYN

Lionel Essrog looks back on his childhood in the St. Vincent's Home for Boys, an orphanage located next to the Brooklyn Bridge, surrounded by the loud, bustling chaos of downtown Brooklyn. Until Frank Minna rescued him from the home, Lionel recalls, he practically lived in the orphanage's library. His obsession with reading reflected his fear; his boredom; and his burgeoning Tourettic compulsions for inspection, processing, and investigation. The young Lionel didn't yet understand his condition, and he struggled to "find the language" he needed to express himself.

Lionel pauses the main action of the story to retreat into memory. He wants to bridge the chaotic events of the present with the history of his personal past in order to connect his coming-of-age journey with the difficult position he finds himself in right now. Lethem uses this retreat into the past to show why Frank Minna is so important to Lionel—and how Lionel's slow journey toward self-acceptance is entwined with his relationship to Frank. Meanwhile, his reflection on his struggle to "find the language" needed to communicate emphasizes the importance of language as a means of connecting with and understanding one's surroundings.

Lionel met Minna when a teacher at St. Vincent's who knew Frank offered to let Minna "borrow" a group of orphans for the afternoon to help with a moving job for a client. The teacher brought Lionel and three other boys to Minna. The first boy was Tony Vermonte, a confident 15-year-old Italian boy revered as the "God of Experience" at St. Vincent's. The second was Gilbert Coney, Tony's stocky right hand who was, some years ago, responsible for teaching Lionel how to masturbate, creating a bond between them. The third boy was Danny Fantl, a light-skinned, white-passing Black teenager who, unlike the other boys, never expressed any sadness or anxiety about being an orphan. Minna, Lionel realizes now, was only 25 and hardly an adult himself on the day that he, Danny, Tony, and Gilbert first met him.

As Lionel introduces the younger versions of himself, Frank Minna, and the "Minna Men," he examines the ways in which he, Gilbert, Danny, and Tony all idolized Minna as a rare father figure or standard of masculinity—in spite of the fact that on that fateful day, Minna was even younger than Lionel is now. Lionel is interrogating the ways in which his ideas about masculinity, brotherhood, duty, and indeed the self were all formed by Minna's early influence.

Lionel recalls an anecdote about sitting on an Atlantic Avenue bus in front of a man with a horrible belching tic in order to illustrate the idea that Tourette's is a way of finding out what people are willing to overlook. Though everyone on the bus—himself included—was repulsed by the man's belching, Lionel knew that after getting off the bus and arriving at their destinations, few people would remember the belching man. The belching man, however, must live forever with his own awful noises.

Lionel inserts this seemingly unrelated anecdote in order to demonstrate how for others, differences—even glaring or perturbing ones—can be easily forgotten once a return to a state of social normalcy is achieved. For people like Lionel, however, difference cannot be escaped—this is a lesson he'd soon learn more practically through his relationship with Minna.

Lionel wonders now if the boys who joined him in becoming Minna Men—Tony, Danny, and Gilbert—even recall his kissing tic, which, over the years, Lionel began to layer behind other behaviors such as tapping and touching things. In order to shunt his own attention away from his kissing tic, Lionel allowed the simmering language within him to boil over. Rearranging words and creating echolalia, or meaningless repetitions of words heard in conversation or on television, became his primary tic. Still, however, Lionel remained ashamed of his speech-based tics, afraid that saying something was the same as meaning it, and that to reveal the depths of his oddness to his peers would make him even more of a target than he already was.

Lionel recalls how he learned to suppress his instincts, deny the truth of who he was, and do whatever it took to make himself seem "normal" from an early age. Lionel found that his physical tics were too alienating, so he learned to use verbal tics rooted in (but occasionally divorced from) language in order to at least seem intentional. But this, too, was a catch-22 for Lionel: he felt that in disrupting the intentionality associated with speech, he was also doing something wrong. This passage shows the depths of Lionel's feelings of otherness and estrangement—and it foreshadows how his relationship with Minna impacted those feelings.

Lionel goes back to recalling his first day working for Minna. Minna drove Lionel, Tony, Danny, and Gilbert to a large warehouse in Red Hook, where he instructed them to carry moving boxes from the inside of a large truck into the warehouse. The four young boys ran the crates inside hurriedly in spite of the summer heat. When the job was done, Minna drove the boys to a bodega for some cold beers. There, Frank at last asked the boys their names. They introduced themselves one by one. Lionel was so excited he could not stop tapping things. When Tony called Lionel a "freak," Minna retorted that all of the boys were freaks.

This passage shows how even as Tony, from a young age, attempted to differentiate himself and the rest of the boys from Lionel, Minna saw that the boys were all already alienated and othered due to their status as orphans. Minna didn't want Lionel to be treated poorly by his peers—but he also sought to exploit the vulnerable, impressionable boys for their labor.

The next week, Minna came back to the orphanage to collect the boys for yet another moving job at the same warehouse space. As the boys worked, Minna asked them if they knew what they were doing. Tony replied that they were moving boxes. Frank urged them all to only ever refer to their tasks as moving work. At the end of the job, Frank gave each boy a $20 bill and a business card for "L&L MOVERS," an enterprise run by Frank and Gerard Minna—Frank's older brother.

This passage makes it clear that Minna was, all along, using the boys as extra participants in his criminal dealings. Yet he tried to keep the illegal nature of the work he involved them in under wraps, disguised behind a legitimate business. This complicates Minna's role as a kind of father figure for the boys, as he is at once making them feel empowered and disempowering them through exploitation.

The boys asked what L&L stood for, but Minna refused to tell them. Lionel immediately began to perform tics, coming up with combinations of words such as *Least Lonely*, *Liking Lionel*, and *Lois Lane*—and then devolving into nonsense words like *Lunchylooper* and *Lockystuff*. Minna ordered Lionel not to tug the boat—from then on, to "tugboat" would be slang for trying Minna's patience. Minna, Lionel recalls, diagnosed him as a "Terminal Tugboater" long before Lionel or any of the other Minna Men knew the word for Tourette's.

This passage shows how Lionel's unique gifts for making quick verbal associations or repeatedly turning over a phrase, clue, or idea represent a liability to Frank. Much of Frank's business is tied up in language meant to disguise the truth—whereas Lionel's use of language is meant to expose different facets of different truths. This places Lionel and Minna in opposition to each other—yet it also binds them together in a unique way.

From then on, Minna gathered the boys frequently to take them to jobs in remote yards in Red Hook or up and down Court Street storefronts. Twenty dollars a day was always the boys' pay. Some jobs seemed legitimate. Others, however, were shady deals sealed with a shared cigar between Minna and whomever he was doing the work for. The boys developed a sense of camaraderie—they stuck up for one another at St. Vincent's and at Sarah J. Hale, the rough-and-tumble high school where they attended classes together. The boys could not wait to graduate school and begin their lives in Minna's world.

This passage connects the boys' burgeoning sense of collective brotherhood and masculinity to the ways in which they see Minna moving through the world, colluding with other men in the name of crime and self-advancement.

Tony soon became the clear leader of the group—and Minna's favorite. Minna often came to the orphanage just for Tony, collecting him for help on a secret job or for driving lessons in a vacant lot. Gilbert was most often stuck with grunt work, such as sitting in double-parked cars or repainting Minna's moving vans. Lionel became the lookout and often accompanied Minna into negotiation rooms. Minna often sought Lionel's opinions on clients and urged Lionel to "spit it out." Minna's encouragement of Lionel's speech and echolalia freed Lionel, whom Minna began to use as an unnerving force or wild card in meetings with clients.

Though Tony emerges as Minna's favorite, this passage shows how Minna frees Lionel, in a way, by encouraging him to speak (and perform tics) freely. Even though Minna uses Lionel for his own purposes, relying on Lionel's disorienting aura to turn the tides in tense meetings, Lionel feels accepted in a way he never has before. This dual sense of exploitation and camaraderie, Lethem suggests, informs not just Lionel but all the Minna Men's understanding of what it means to be a man.

Lionel recalls being introduced to two of Minna's prominent clients: a pair of Italian men named Matricardi and Rockaforte who owned a brownstone on Degraw Street. Four or five months after Minna started using the boys for moving jobs, he brought them to an abandoned dock near Fulton Street. Two small vans drove up, and Minna instructed the boys to unload them into his own. Lionel was shocked to find that the vans were full of musical instruments, sound equipment, and concert gear. Once the van was full, Minna drove it and the boys back to Brooklyn to Degraw Street, where they unloaded the equipment inside the house. The interior of the home, Lionel recalls, was stripped and gutted—only the front parlor was left decorated and looking like a home.

This passage shows that even as Lionel and the other boys recognized that their labor was being exploited in the name of crime and theft, they felt so allegiant to Minna that they did whatever he asked without questioning or resisting. This, too, Lethem suggests, plays into the boys' burgeoning ideas about masculinity: they are learning that to be a man is to be stoic, dutiful, and loyal.

While moving the equipment into an empty room upstairs, Lionel discovered a cache of fancy silverware—he stole a fork for himself to carry as a talisman. Minna brought the boys downstairs to meet the clients, Matricardi and Rockaforte, two old men in fine suits. In the room with the two men, Lionel immediately sensed fear and tension radiating from Minna. Rockaforte asked Frank if the four boys did whatever he asked of them; Lionel could sense a heavy weight behind the question. Minna casually replied that the boys were "good kids." Matricardi said the word "orphans" aloud thoughtfully.

This passage shows how Matricardi and Rockaforte consider Minna's use—and molding—of orphans for his own personal gain to be interesting rather than morally repugnant. Matricardi and Rockaforte are intimidating and powerful men, and as Lionel is introduced to them, he feels a palpable sense of anxiety.

Rockaforte explained that the house they were in once belonged to Matricardi's mother—they kept her parlor intact, exactly as it was when she lived in it. The two men explained they had been friends since childhood. Lionel, anxious, rubbed the fork in his pocket to calm himself. Rockaforte asked Lionel and the other boys what "kind of men" they wanted to grow up to be. Without hesitation, Tony answered that he wanted to be like Frank. Rockaforte asked Tony if he wanted to be a musician. Minna immediately told Rockaforte that he could not accept their gift. Matricardi offered the orphans musical instruments again—and again, Minna refused. Rockaforte told Minna that the instruments were due to be burned anyway. After a tense moment, Matricardi told Minna to forget the offer. Instead, Matricardi gave Tony, Lionel, Gilbert, and Danny each a $100 bill.

This passage demonstrates Rockaforte and Matricardi's gentle testing of the ways in which Minna has shaped these orphans' lives. By asking them what "kind of men" they want to grow up to be, Rockaforte and Matricardi can size up exactly how powerful Frank's influence over the boys is—and how the boys are learning to conceive of power, masculinity, and individuality. At the same time, Rockaforte and Matricardi's own attempt to influence the boys is met with Minna's sharp resistance—clearly Minna fears these men and doesn't want to do anything that will put himself or the boys in their debt.

Minna hurried the boys out of the brownstone and into the van, urging them to forget the names of the men they just met and refer to them only as "The Clients." Gilbert, however, kept asking about the men. Minna told him that they didn't live in the brownstone, but in Jersey. Lionel performed a tic, calling out "Garden State Brickface and Stucco"—a renovation firm that played ads on local stations. Minna laughed, and Lionel was grateful to make Minna happy. Minna, again, urged the boys to forget the names Rockaforte and Matricardi.

This passage underscores Minna's fealty to—and fear of—Matricardi and Rockaforte. He clearly doesn't want to do anything to upset them—and he wants the boys to know that in spite of the wealth and power that The Clients radiate and seem to offer, they are not men to be trifled with.

Lionel recalls a time when Minna remarked upon the uniqueness of his last name, Essrog, and suggested that Lionel look up the name Essrog in the phone book. Lionel did so and found three families with the name. Once, he dialed the Essrogs from a warehouse where he was waiting for instructions from Minna on a job—when a man named Essrog finally picked up, Lionel began to verbally tic, invoking "Bailey" before hanging up. Over the years, Lionel says, he would call the Essrogs' numbers many other times—but he would never introduce himself.

This passage shows that even when confronted with the possibility of finding his family—and discovering real examples of family, masculinity, and safety—Lionel preferred to maintain his fealty to Frank and his reliance on the invisible target of "Bailey" for guidance and comfort instead. Lionel seems to feel that finding his family so easily, after wondering about them for so long, is anticlimactic or unsatisfying in some way.

Lionel describes how he, Tony, Gilbert, and Danny came to see the world filtered through Minna's likes, dislikes, and prejudices. For example, Minna found hippies threatening yet pathetic; he thought that homosexual men were harmless but often called the boys "half a fag" as an insult. Minna liked some minorities but detested others—yet found pointing out stupidity, anxiety, or strangeness in others oddly endearing no matter their race. Lionel felt that as an "Overt Freak Supreme," he himself was a kind of mascot to the prejudiced but easygoing Minna. Minna enjoyed endearments only when folded into insults and appreciated talk only on the fly.

Lionel characterizes Minna as a man with a penchant for racially insensitive jokes and a vast array of deep-seated personal prejudices—here, he uses an offensive slur in reference to gay men. Meanwhile, it becomes clear that Minna's attachment to the four orphans is less about his particular affinity for them—or even empathy or affection for them—and more about his use of their labor and unique gifts in pursuit of his own goals.

Lionel says that in all the years he knew Minna, he only met Frank's brother Gerard twice. The first time was on Christmas Day of 1982, when Frank brought Lionel, Tony, Danny, and Gilbert to **dinner** at his mother's house. Carlotta, an "Old Stove," cooked and sold old Italian recipes out of her kitchen. During Christmas dinner, Lionel was grateful for the soothing effects of the food—he was so excited to be nurtured by Carlotta that he was barely able to hold back his tics. Lionel remembers Minna watching the boys wolfing their meatballs and telling his mother that he'd brought "all of motherless Brooklyn" to eat at her table. Minna's brother Gerard entered, chuckling at the phrase. Gerard explained he'd been upstate but had brought Frank a "present"—a large white envelope which he instructed Frank to open in private before abruptly leaving.

As Lionel describes Minna's relationship to his family, he uses an anecdote about Minna teasing "motherless Brooklyn" for their loneliness and resulting desperation for comfort and human contact. The phrase "motherless Brooklyn" gives the book its title—yet the novel itself is much more concerned with how being fatherless rather than being motherless affects young men in search of father figures and models of masculinity. This search for masculine idols manifests in the boys making associations with clearly dangerous, uncaring men like Frank and Gerard.

Lionel recalls a popular phrase Minna used to say: "Wheels within wheels." Wheels within wheels, for Minna, referred to coincidences or conspiracies, the secret "wheels" that turned the world. Lionel and the other boys felt that Minna knew the secret systems that ran not only Court Street but the world—and Lionel can never remember a time at which he wasn't certain that Minna knew who Lionel's parents truly were.

Minna's use of the phrase "wheels within wheels" speaks directly to the theme of mystery and the futility of answers. Minna has taught the boys—especially Lionel—to be sensitive to the secret governing systems beneath everything, leaving them in a constant state of suspicion and uncertainty. In this way, he sets them up to be disappointed, as the "wheels" of the world will perpetually turn regardless of how doggedly they pursue answers.

Lionel recalls one April day when Minna drove up to the orphanage to collect them—his van was busted, its windows smashed and its sides covered in graffiti. As the boys piled into the van, Tony remarked that someone must have been sending Frank a message—a statement that infuriated Minna. In response, Minna called Tony a "dickweed" for wanting to be a gangster like Scarface. Minna forced Tony and the other boys out of the van and made them walk back to the orphanage. Lionel, anxious, became trapped in a "loop of self," performing tics by endlessly replicating "dickweed" and making plays on words—*restrictaweed*, *detectorwood*, *vindictaphone*. Tony, hurt and incensed, attacked Lionel with a piece of plywood smeared with dog feces he picked up off the ground, spreading the mess across Lionel's face before turning away in shame.

This passage foreshadows a profound shift in the patterns Minna has established with the orphans. Minna is clearly in trouble, yet doesn't want to admit it. His sense of self, particularly his sense of masculinity, is tied to his slick image and his connections—now that those connections are threatened, he feels that his masculinity is too. This anxiety clearly reverberates throughout the boys' lives, too, as evidenced by Tony's cruel, demeaning attack on Lionel when Lionel's tics echo Minna's insult and thus threaten Tony's *masculinity.*

Five weeks later, when Frank came to pick the boys up for the first time in over a month, he had Gerard with him again. The two brothers joined the orphans in the yard or the orphanage where they bounced a basketball around a few times before Minna announced that he would be leaving town for a little while, heading upstate to a place Gerard frequently went—and that he didn't know when he'd be back. Minna turned to the frightened Lionel and pulled from his pocket a book called *Understanding Tourette's Syndrome*. He handed it to Lionel, apologizing for not getting it to him sooner. Gerard quickly took Minna by the arm and hurried him away. Several days later, Tony rounded up the boys and led them to the van, which was parked off a nearby highway—someone had set it on fire and hollowed it out.

As Minna bids a sad farewell to Lionel Tony, Gilbert, and Danny, it is clear that something is forcing him out of Brooklyn. The boys can intuit that Minna has gotten in too deep either with The Clients or with some other entity—yet this doesn't mean that they will miss their father figure any less. Minna's parting gift to Lionel demonstrates his recognition of his own vital role in Lionel's journey of self-understanding—in his absence, he wants Lionel to have the tools to figure things out about himself and his unique place in the world.

Over the next two years, Lionel grew up and discovered more about Tourette's. All the information he found, however, only confused him more—the disorder's spectrum was intimidatingly vast, and the medications Lionel took to ease his tics left him feeling hollowed-out and slow. Danny and Gilbert made their way through school, too, but Tony essentially dropped out and spend his last two years of high school working odd jobs up and down Court Street.

While Lionel, Danny, and Gilbert aim to take care of themselves and seek out their own answers to questions of identity and masculinity, Tony is already at work replicating the vision of masculinity that Minna laid out for him throughout his youth.

Near graduation, Minna returned. He showed up one day to pick up Lionel, Gilbert, and Danny—he already had Tony in his car. Minna greeted Lionel warmly—but Lionel soon realized the Minna who'd come back to Brooklyn was not the same as the one who'd left. Minna packed the boys into his new car, handed them new business cards for L&L Car Service, and drove them to a small vacant storefront nearby. The boys, he explained, were all to receive learner's permits and driving lessons starting the next day. As the boys toured the new space, Frank spoke about his dreams for creating a car service. He also informed the boys that Carlotta had died—and that he'd gotten married. Breathlessly, at last, Frank told the boys his big secret: the car service was to be a front for a detective agency.

In this passage, Frank's triumphant return to Brooklyn both excites and unmoors the four orphans he's taken under his wing. They perhaps feel that on the cusp of adulthood and independence, they still have no choice but to do whatever Minna asks of them—even as Minna's desires and expectations seem to be in a rapid state of flux.

Lionel tells the joke that Minna wanted to hear on the night he died. In the joke, a Jewish mother, Mrs. Gushman, walks into a travel agency, asking for a ticket to Tibet. The travel agent sells her one. In Tibet, Mrs. Gushman asks to be taken to see the High Lama. Everyone she meets tells her that the Lama lives on a mountain in total seclusion, and that those who wish to meet him must first study at a monastery for many years. Mrs. Gushman, however, travels to the mountain and hires Sherpas to take her to the top. All the way up, the Sherpas explain that the Lama will never see her. At the monastery, however, Mrs. Gushman pushes her way in and demands an audience with the Lama. Soon, the Lama emerges. As Mrs. Gushman spots him, she says, "Irving, when are you coming home? Your father's worried!"

This joke is seemingly a non-sequitur; in other words, it appears to have nothing to do, contextually, with the novel's plot. As Lionel works through the joke, however, it becomes clear that the parallels between the ordinary Jewish boy disguised as a High Lama and the novel's exoticization of Asian culture. The Zen Buddhist study center has been the focus of some kind of criminal activity, and so this story is meant to inform readers of how to interpret the clues that Lionel will encounter.

INTERROGATION EYES

Lionel presents a list of characteristics and behaviors that "Minna Men" embody: they wear suits, drive cars, and stand behind Frank Minna while affecting menace. They don't ask questions. They do what they are told. They stay clean-shaven and follow instructions. Above all, Minna Men try to be like Frank Minna—but now, Minna is dead.

In this passage, Lionel consolidates all the lessons he learned about masculinity from Frank Minna in his youth—and how they have affected his, Tony, Danny, and Gilbert's demeanors, behaviors, and feelings over the years.

When Gilbert and Lionel arrive back at the L&L storefront, Tony is there—he announces he's already heard the news about Minna from a Black homicide detective who came to the storefront minutes ago looking for the two of them. Danny is with Tony—he looks pasty and ill. As Lionel looks around the L&L garage, everything—from the cigarette butts in the ashtray to a half-eaten **sandwich** on top of the fridge that Minna didn't finish eating—reminds him of his mentor. Tony and Danny break Lionel's concentration, reprimanding Lionel and Gilbert for leaving a trail back to L&L by giving the nurses at the hospital their names.

All of the Minna Men are grieving Frank—they are furious and distraught as they contemplate the death of their mentor. The men begin turning cruel toward one another and laying blame upon one another as they attempt to manage their feelings. Not having clear answers as to who killed Frank (and why) creates an immense amount of tension and pain for the Minna Men.

Danny, worried, says that someone needs to tell Frank's wife, Julia, what has happened. Gilbert announces that he is not going to tell her or sit around waiting for the detective to return—he is going to go out and find Frank's killer on his own. Tony asks what happened at the stakeout, and Lionel and Gilbert tell him about the Zendo. Lionel reports through a string of tics that a "big Polish guy" killed Frank. The L&L phone rings—someone wants to order a car. Lionel reports that there are no cars. L&L, he explains to the reader, hardly ever has any cars—since they are a cover, they only have five vehicles in their fleet. They have been instructed to answer "no cars" whenever the phone rings.

Lethem uses L&L's "no car" policy—in spite of being a car service—to point out the frustrating nature of red herrings and false leads in detective stories, and to tie in with the idea of the futility of answers. A car service with no cars, a detective agency with no real detectives: everything in the novel parodies how things operate in noir fiction.

As Gilbert fills Tony and Danny in on the events of the evening, Lionel steps out onto the bustling Smith Street for some air. He opens up the door of the car he and Gilbert have been driving retrieves Minna's beeper and watch from the floor and his own notebook from the glove box before going back into the office. Inside, Lionel looks at the notes he took during the stakeout and considers what questions he has about Frank's murder: the woman with the glasses entering the Zendo, the name Ullman, the building Frank spoke of, the unnamed woman whom he "lost control of," and the phrase *Rama-lama-ding-dong*. Lionel wonders if the name Irving has anything to do with the mystery. He tells Danny, Tony, and Gilbert about the clues he has.

Although the Minna Men are unlicensed detectives, Lionel is dedicated to putting these clues together and figuring out what happened to his beloved mentor. The disparate clues that Lionel has don't seem to point in any one direction—yet it is clear as Lionel considers them that he is the perfect person to solve the crime, given his unique angle on interpreting information, doggedly and compulsively pursuing things, and making sense out of nonsense (and vice versa).

Tony orders Gilbert to go out and start looking for Ullman, whoever he is, and determine whether Ullman is the "giant" who killed Frank. Tony says that he's going to the Upper East Side to poke around the Zendo. Tony orders Danny to stay at the storefront and tells Lionel to go tell Julia. The Minna Men, Lionel says, have always been terrified of Julia, who has always been chilly with Frank in a way the Men never could dream of being. At the same time, Lionel admits that the Minna Men have all lusted for Julia, feeling a combination of intimidation and desire for her.

As Lionel describes his and the other Minna Men's collective feelings about Julia, Lethem deepens his investigation of what it means for them all to idolize Frank Minna as a father figure and an emblem of masculinity. Almost compulsively, all four Minna Men saw their mentor Frank as the paragon of masculinity—and as a result, they came to see his wife Julia as the ultimate paragon of femininity that both intimidates and entices them.

Lionel arrives at Frank and Julia's apartment and knocks on the door. Julia opens it—she is wearing only a slip. Lionel follows her into the bedroom, where she is packing clothes and a pistol into a suitcase. Lionel asks her how she heard about Frank, and Julia says that the hospital called. She lights a cigarette. As Lionel stares at Julia, he feels that if she leaves, Frank Minna will truly be gone. Julia says that the Minna Men are responsible for Frank's death. Lionel, trying not to perform a tic, tells Julia that he did all he could for Frank—but Julia says that Lionel sounds exactly like the other Men. Lionel begs Julia to stay—L&L is in her name, and the Minna Men work for her now. Julia refuses. Lionel insists that he and the other Minna Men will find and catch whoever killed Frank.

The mystery intensifies as Lionel arrives at Frank and Julia's apartment to find Julia in a state of disarray—clearly, she knows more than she is letting on if she is packing a gun in her suitcase. Lethem casts Julia as the one-dimensional sultry, dangerous femme fatale archetype—yet knowing how he twists and screws the detective genre, it's safe to assume that he will turn the stereotype that Julia represents on its head soon enough.

As Julia goes to her closet and begins pulling dresses off hangers, she tells Lionel that she's always hated the way Frank dressed her up—she hardly even remembers who she used to be or how she used to dress. Now, she says, she refuses to be the widow in black—she feels it's all Frank kept her around for. She entreats Lionel to "tell Tony no thanks." Lionel asks her what she means. Julia calls Tony "Frank Minna Junior," then tells Lionel that she's sorry for hurting his feelings—she knows that Lionel really wanted to "be Frank."

As Lionel realizes that Julia may have had some involvement with Tony, it becomes clear that in many ways, Tony saw (and still sees) himself as Frank's rightful successor, given their shared heritage and Frank's resultant favoritism over the years. Julia pities Lionel for thinking that he was Minna's favorite.

Julia pulls on a dress and asks Lionel to zip her up. As Lionel does so, he admires her body and begins to tic: "Doublebreasts," he says. Julia takes Lionel's hands and places them on her breasts. Lionel, sexually aroused, feels his "Tourette's brain" grow still. Lionel doesn't have sex very often—but every time he does, he wants to live inside the moment so that he can slow time to a crawl and think straight at last. Snapping back to the moment, Lionel removes his hands from Julia's breasts and asks her not to make fun of him. He asks if something is going on between her and Tony; Julia doesn't deny it, but says she likes Lionel better. Lionel says that nothing could ever happen between them, and Julia agrees—she says that Lionel is too strange for her.

Julia's cruel teasing allows Lionel to experience a moment of introspection and intimacy with the reader as he reveals the peculiar ways in which his mind works. Lionel is a leading man—yet his capacity for seduction is paltry. Lethem uses Lionel's unique, cerebral approach to sexuality in order to challenge and complicate the reader's concept of masculinity.

Lionel asks Julia where she's going. She tells him she's headed to "a place of peace." A car horn sounds outside, and Julia asks Lionel to go down and hold the car for her. He does so—but as Lionel waits on the stoop, a man Lionel recognizes as the homicide detective that the other Minna Men described approaches him and asks who the car is for. Lionel tells him it's for a lady inside and then taps his shoulder. Julia comes downstairs. The detective asks her if she's Julia Minna, and she replies that she was until a couple of hours ago. As she heads for the car, the detective asks where she's going. Julia says that she has a plane to catch—but she hasn't decided where she's flying yet.

Julia is in a state of emotional disarray. She seems almost relieved to be rid of her husband and eager to shed the mantle of "Julia Minna." She obviously feels that Frank took control of her life—and given Frank's shadowy acquaintance's reference to a woman whom he lost control of, it is fair to assume that Julia is using Minna's death to her benefit. It's an opportunity to radically take back that self which Julia feels was stolen from her or corrupted through her union with Minna.

The detective tells Julia that she can't leave. Julia tells the detective that if he wants to question her, he'll have to arrest her. Lionel puts Julia's bag into the car. As Julia slips into the backseat, the detective tries to keep her from leaving, but she can tell that he has no real grounds. She tells the detective to ask Lionel about her whereabouts for the last few hours—he, she lies, is her alibi. Julia rolls up her window and the car pulls away.

Julia is ready to leave Brooklyn, and she doesn't care whom she throws under the bus to clear her own path. By leaving Lionel with the detective, Julia confidently assures her own ability to escape to wherever she may be headed.

The detective turns to Lionel and asks him his full name. Lionel begins performing tics, offering up unlikely configurations of his own name such as "Lullaby Gueststar" and "Alibyebye Essmob." Lionel offers to take the detective on a walk—he says he wants to get a **sandwich**. The detective agrees to follow him to a nearby deli. As Lionel taps the detective again, the detective asks what's wrong with Lionel. Lionel explains that he has Tourette's. The detective, not understanding, asks who Tourette is. Lionel doesn't bother to clarify.

Lionel and the detective are in the unique position of knowing almost nothing about each other—not even the other's name—yet needing to work together in pursuit of a common goal. Their experiences of the world are vastly different, yet they'll need to put all that aside if they want to find Frank's killer.

At Zeod's, a deli on Smith Street where the Minna Men often eat, Zeod, the owner, greets Lionel warmly and asks Lionel to say hi to Frank for him—Zeod clearly hasn't heard the news. Lionel orders a **sandwich**, and the detective asks for a pack of cigarettes. Zeod gathers the items and tells Lionel that he'll charge it all to Frank's tab. As Lionel and the detective leave the deli, the detective asks if Lionel is sleeping with the boss's wife *and* eating on his tab. As Lionel heads for "home," the detective points out that they're walking toward L&L. Lionel doesn't want to tell the detective that there is little difference between home and work for him.

Lionel turns to food for comfort in the midst of a disorienting, humiliating, and painful time. Yet at Zeod's, as Lionel lies about Frank still being alive, he's forced to confront even in the process of trying to secure comfort that there is none to be found in the cruel world in which he lives.

Lionel invites the detective into a newspaper shop and picks out a magazine with Prince on the cover. The owner lets Lionel take the magazine, promising to add the debt to Frank's tab. Outside, the detective pushes Lionel up against the wall and asks why Lionel is walking around town pretending that Frank is alive. Lionel begs the detective not to treat him like a suspect—he explains that he wants to catch Frank's killer, too. The detective says it's time to compare notes. He asks if the names Alphonso Matricardi and Leonardo Rockaforte mean anything to Lionel. Lionel is stunned by the mention of "The Clients"—he says he's never heard of them. The detective can tell that Lionel is lying, but he knows he can't do anything. The detective tells Lionel that Lionel makes him sad and urges him to head home if he won't share what he knows.

The detective's increasing suspicions about Lionel are rooted in his focus on Lionel's peculiarities—and Lionel's refusal to publicly acknowledge Frank's death, which the detective sees as a product of a guilty conscience rather than one in denial. Still, Lionel wants to work with the detective. But as the detective reveals more about what he knows, Lionel realizes that the detective might simultaneously know too much and too little: the detective has names and facts but no understanding of the world he's diving into.

Lionel goes into the L&L storefront—and then upstairs into the apartment where he lives. He feels ashamed of living above L&L, and he has constructed rules for separating home from work: he only drinks certain things upstairs, he never plays cards anywhere but downstairs, and he never invites the other Minna Men up. Lionel's apartment is spare: he has only five books, and the only CDs he owns are by Prince. He pours himself a drink, though he wants the ritual more than he wants the alcohol. Downstairs, the L&L phone rings, but there is no machine to pick up the call. Unable to focus on his thoughts with the incessant ringing, Lionel goes down to pick up the phone. Loomis, one of Gilbert's pals and a sanitation inspector, is on the other end—he tells Lionel that Gilbert is locked up after killing someone named Ullman.

Lionel's apartment, connected to L&L, is proof of how little else he has in his life other than Frank Minna and the other Minna Men. Lionel feels that his only safe refuge is with the people who've known him most of his life—people who reflect his understanding of the world back to him. This impulse to err toward the familiar is also reflected in Lionel's love of Prince, whose music mirrors Lionel's live-wire brain.

As Lionel processes the news, he feels relieved at not having to figure out who Ullman is—yet mournful that the clue Ullman represented is now a dead end. He feels annoyed at having to return to the mystery before him tonight, and he feels frightened because he fears that someone is "hunting" Minna Men. Lionel takes an L&L car and drives into Manhattan to the precinct where Gilbert is being held, but he is not allowed to see him. Loomis is there, though, and Lionel winds up driving him back to Brooklyn. Lionel doesn't particularly like Loomis, who has been in the Minna Men's social orbit since high school and who frequently makes fun of Lionel's tics by calling them "routines."

Gilbert's arrest heightens Lionel's suspicion of the vast mystery or conspiracy before him—he feels that Minna Men are being attacked and hunted one by one, and he doesn't want to be next. Lionel knows, though, that the only way out is through: rather than hiding alone in his room, he does what needs to be done, following the example that Minna set for him time and time again.

Lionel pulls up to L&L. Loomis asks Lionel to drive him home, but Lionel insists that Loomis can walk. Loomis asks to use the bathroom. Lionel says he can—if he'll first give up Ullman's address. Loomis says he'll get it tomorrow at the office. Lionel tells Loomis to call Frank's beeper with it. Inside L&L, Lionel finds that Danny is back. While Loomis uses the bathroom, Lionel asks where Tony is, but Danny says he doesn't know. Lionel tells Danny that Gilbert is in jail, pinned for Ullman's murder. Lionel asks Danny where he's been—and when Danny answers, Lionel can tell Danny is lying. Lionel knows that the two of them are both holding back from each other. Loomis returns from the bathroom and calls for a moment of silence for Frank. When it's up, he asks for a ride home. Lionel refuses him once again.

Lionel feels more isolated than ever before. Frank is dead, Gilbert has been locked up, and it seems that Lionel can trust neither Tony nor Danny—who may be working together or separately on something mysterious or nefarious. Lionel knows that from now on, he can count only on himself—and while he could possibly trust Loomis, the bumbling man annoys him. Lionel's role models of masculinity have all failed him for the time being.

Danny stays by the phone while Lionel heads upstairs. After lighting a candle and cutting his **sandwich** into six equal pieces, Lionel puts Prince on his boom box and admires the "Tourettic energies" of the music. Frank always hated Prince's music—but for Lionel, the times he spends listening to the songs of Prince are some of the only times he feels relief from his Tourette's symptoms. As Lionel listens to Prince now and eats his sandwich ritualistically, he finally allows himself to cry for Minna.

Once again, Lionel seeks comfort from the world in the form of food, which usually provides a balm and a distraction. But here, even when combined with the soothing, self-reflective music of Prince, Lionel cannot force himself to escape the pain he's in and the darkness to which he's awoken over the course of this long and difficult night.

(TOURETTE DREAMS)

In a poetic and very brief interlude, Lionel describes how only in dreams does he shed his tics—or, perhaps, do his tics shed him—allowing him to leave himself behind.

Lionel is constantly seeking relief from his tics through food, music, sex, and sleep. He longs to be rid of his Tourettic self due to a combination societal pressure and personal exhaustion. He has been taught to resent rather than embrace his difference and to feel exhausted rather than enlivened by the way his own mind works.

BAD COOKIES

Many mornings, Lionel says, he wakes up feeling disoriented and strange, unable to recognize even basic objects like his toothbrush. He explains that because of his Tourette's, he is never certain whether a feeling is the product of his disorder or whether it is genuine. This morning, Lionel wakes early with a strange yet refreshing sense of disorientation and possibility. He dresses, makes breakfast, and puts on Frank's watch and beeper. Lionel always imagined that if Minna died, the world would shift and become unrecognizable. Instead, this morning, Lionel realizes that it's up to him to take up Minna's mantle. He goes downstairs, past a sleeping Danny, and takes a car to head for the Zendo.

Lionel has been taught to question his own emotional and psychological responses endlessly—yet this morning, as Lionel wakes up into a world without Minna, he expects to be far more disoriented than he actually is. Lionel is pleasantly surprised, yet shocked, to find that the world is continuing on without the man around whom Lionel centered his own life and experiences.

At the townhouse across the street from the Zendo, Lionel finds a young doorman different from the one working last night stationed at the front door. He asks for the doorman's name, and the doorman introduces himself as Walter—but then he explains that Walter is his last name. Lionel asks what the name of the doorman working the previous night is, and Walter says that he's called Dirk. Lionel, beginning to perform a tic, asks Walter if he's seen anything or anyone strange coming or going from the Zendo lately—specifically a giant. Walter doesn't seem to know anything. Lionel gives Walter his business card and, through his tics, tells Walter to call if he sees anything odd. Walter replies that Lionel is odd.

Lionel begins doing some earnest detective work independent of his fellow Minna Men. He plans on following up on every lead, even those that don't immediately yield answers. As Lionel gets his search in motion, he is forced to contend with people who find him strange and thus might thwart or respond insufficiently to his questions.

Lionel paces the block a while before ringing the doorbell of the Zendo five times—he is focused on fives now rather than sixes. Within a few minutes, the girl with the short dark hair and glasses from the night before comes to the door holding a broom. Lionel asks the girl if he can ask her some questions, or if it's too early. She tells him that she's been up for hours sweeping: cleaning, according to Zen practice, is a privilege. The Roshi of the Zendo, she explains, usually does the sweeping himself. The girl invites Lionel inside and instructs him to take off his shoes. He does so and then follows her upstairs into a small kitchen, where she introduces herself as Kimmery and begins making some tea.

Kimmery is a kind, open, and naïve young woman who appears to genuinely believe in the promises and the study of Zen Buddhism. Meeting her introduces Lionel to the world of the Zendo and potentially to the heart of its mysteries. It is important to note that by setting the heart of the novel's strange, convoluted mystery within the Zendo, Lethem's novel has drawn criticism for tying its mystery to Eastern philosophy, bringing shades of Orientalism (exoticizing or distorting Eastern cultures) into the book.

Kimmery begins telling Lionel about the Zendo—a Buddhist study center where anyone can come to learn about the heart of Zen practice and take classes in things like *zazen*, or sitting meditation. The goal of Zen is to achieve a state of One Mind, or an absence of thought. Lionel is intrigued. Kimmery invites him to come to a class later today—some very important monks from Japan, she says, are in town to visit the Zendo, and one is even giving a talk. Lionel asks if the monks run the Zendo, but Kimmery clarifies that the Roshi—an American man—runs it. As Lionel asks more questions, he begins to perform tics. Kimmery has an "oddly blasé" reaction to his outbursts—Lionel wonders if it's related to her Zen practice.

Kimmery is an intriguing figure to Lionel—both because of her interest in attaining a state of One Mind as well as her profound disinterest *in his tics and compulsions. The state of not thinking is attractive to Lionel, who feels that he can't stop the endless machinations of his mind and his mouth—this draws him close to Kimmery and makes him want to learn from her.*

When Lionel asks if Kimmery has seen anyone strange around the Zendo in the last 24 hours, she says that only the Roshi is in the building right now—he is on the top floor, in isolation (or *sesshin*), having taken a vow of silence earlier in the year. The other students are out doing work service. An "old hippie" named Wallace, she says, is probably in the basement, sitting. Lionel asks if Wallace is big, but Kimmery says that he isn't. He asks if she's seen anyone "really big" lately, and she says that she hasn't. As the caffeine from the tea hits Lionel, he begins to perform tics. Lionel wants to leave—but he wishes that he could take Kimmery with him.

Lionel's attempt to find someone suspicious within the Zendo seems to have failed—for now. The only thing of interest that Lionel has found on this visit is a connection with Kimmery—a connection that threatens to pull him away from the task at hand.

Kimmery offers Lionel some **Oreos**. She tells a story about how she used to know a man who worked for Nabisco, the manufacturer of Oreos—he'd said that different cookies were made in different parts of the country and that he could tell where a cookie came from by tasting it. Some cookies, he said, were made half in one place and half in another. Lionel asks if the Oreo man was Kimmery's boyfriend, and she says that he was. Lionel asks Kimmery to take him downstairs to Wallace. She does so, and Lionel realizes that Wallace is not the man he's looking for.

As Kimmery and Lionel share some Oreos, Lethem again engages with the symbolism of food as a way of distracting oneself or calming oneself in the midst of chaos. Food, however, also symbolizes the impossibility of finding refuge in a chaotic, cruel world—and this scene thus foreshadows interruptions, roadblocks, and complications in Lionel and Kimmery's relationship.

Lionel tells Kimmery that he's "*con-worried*." He quickly becomes embarrassed by the ways in which Tourette's mangles his speech. Kimmery, though, understands what Lionel is saying: he is confused and worried. She urges Lionel not to be "con-worried," then kisses him on the cheek and goes to sweep the rest of the Zendo. She reminds Lionel that *zazen* is at five. As Lionel exits the Zendo, he is so focused on thoughts of Kimmery that he hardly notices when two men seize him by the elbows and push him into a car.

In this passage, Lionel finds that while he resents the intrusion of his Tourette's, Kimmery intuitively understands what he's subconsciously trying to say through his tics. This makes Kimmery seem like a point of refuge for Lionel, who has struggled to make himself understood to others (and indeed to himself) all his life.

Inside the car are two more men. Lionel sizes the four of them up. He names them according to their appearances: Chunky, Pimples, Indistinct, and Pinched. The four men immediately begin arguing about where to drive. They tell Lionel that they are trying to scare him. Lionel is unimpressed by the thugs' disorganized, scattered tactics. Lionel asks what the men's "game" is. Chunky replies that they have been told to scare him away from the Zendo.

Chunky, Pimples, Indistinct, and Pinched are fairly bad at their job. Lethem uses these four mediocre thugs to parody linchpins of the noir genre. Whereas in a real detective story, a group such as these four might be effective in scaring the protagonist off the trail, these men fail miserably at their task right off the bat.

Lionel's beeper goes off. The thugs order Lionel to call the number—one of them offers him a cell phone. Using the phone, Lionel dials the number—it is Loomis, who tells Lionel he has Ullman's address for him. Chunky, overhearing the call, asks whose address Lionel is getting. When Lionel says that he's getting Ullman's address, Chunky is shocked—it is clear that these men know Ullman. Pimples pulls the cell phone away from Lionel, and Chunky tells Lionel Ullman was a friend. Lionel points out that even though these guys are supposed to scare him, they're the ones who seem scared. He asks if they're scared of a "big Polish guy," and they admit that they are and that they're right to be. They wouldn't be working for him, they say, if he didn't scare them. Lionel admits that he's scared of the giant, too.

This encounter with Chunky, Pimples, Pinched, and Indistinct confirms to Lionel that the giant is the right line of inquiry to pursue. Clearly, the giant has some power over whatever network is operating around or out of the Zendo—and everyone in his orbit agrees he is to be feared.

Pimples tries to get Lionel to tell him who was on the other end of the phone, but Lionel refuses. He says he's not scared of Pimples, Chunky, Pinched, or Indistinct. Pinched agrees that none of them are good at the work of scaring another person—they're "men of peace" unaccustomed to intimidating others. Pinched gets out of the car and walks away from it. Pimples, Chunky, and Indistinct get out and follow him, leaving Lionel alone in the car—with Indistinct's cell phone, which Lionel pockets. Lionel, recognizing the car he's in as a rental, checks the glove compartment—he sees that the car is on a six-month lease to the Fujisaki Corporation, located at 1030 Park Avenue—an address very close to the Zendo.

As the four thugs fail both to scare Lionel and to knock him off the trail of people and places connected to the Zendo, Lionel uncovers a major new clue. Again, Lethem continues the thread of positioning East Asian people, corporations, and concepts as mysterious, shadowy, and other—a plot point which has drawn the novel criticism in the years since its publication due to harmful Orientalist overtones.

On his walk to the Park Avenue address, Lionel calls L&L using the cell phone. Tony picks up and asks where Lionel is. Tony asks Lionel to come back to L&L, but Lionel insists that he's on a case. Tony asks where Lionel is, but Lionel refuses to answer outright—he is realizing that he no longer trusts Tony. Tony again urges Lionel to hurry back to L&L—but Lionel believes that Tony is bluffing. After Lionel and Tony exchange some barbs about Julia, Tony asks one last time where Lionel is. Lionel lies and says that he's in Greenpoint. Lionel asks if Tony slept with Julia, and Tony tells Lionel he'll tell him when Lionel gets back to L&L. Lionel begins to perform tics. Tony calls him a "tugboat," and Lionel hangs up.

As Lionel's suspicions surrounding Tony's aims increase, Lionel does his best to disguise his own aims from his colleague and former ally. Tony clearly wants to take Minna's place—he's even adopting Minna's cruel nicknames for Lionel in order to try to intimidate Lionel into doing his bidding. Lionel, however, has fealty to no one but Minna.

At the giant, nondescript stone building that is 1030 Park Avenue, Lionel sizes up the edifice and sees that a plainclothes curb man is waiting out front of the building to steer away anyone who doesn't belong. Lionel walks down the block as if he's going past the building, but at the last minute he ducks into the lobby. Immediately, a crowd of doormen in uniforms and white gloves swarm Lionel and ask what he's doing in the building. Lionel says that he's come to see Fujisaki. The doormen reply that he's come to the wrong building—there's no man, woman, or business here by that name. Overwhelmed by the doormen's attempts to deter him, Lionel taps one of their shoulders. Once he touches the nearest, he is compelled to touch them all. The doormen grab Lionel by the elbows and throw him out of the building.

Lionel's attempt to infiltrate 1030 Park Avenue—what he believes is the headquarters of whatever the Fujisaki Corporation is—is unsuccessful. There are clearly many forces at work to keep the building, its inhabitants, and whatever they are up to private. If Lionel didn't realize that he was perhaps in over his head before, now he certainly understands that there are larger forces at work in this mystery than he ever could have imagined.

At a nearby **hot dog** joint, Papaya Czar, Lionel sips juice and wolfs five hot dogs as he dials Loomis. He asks Loomis to pull up whatever information he has about 1030 Park—building records, management company files, anything—and to pay attention to the name Fujisaki. He urges Loomis to dial Frank's beeper with anything he uncovers. As Lionel hangs up the phone, a man sitting next to him complains that while living in LA, he found that everyone nowadays talks on cell phones all the time, even in nice restaurants. He is depressed that even in New York, the same is true—people talk to themselves in public nonstop "like they got some kind of illness[.]"

This brief interlude at Papaya Czar shows just how difficult and painful it is for Lionel to simply move through the world. He is constantly at the mercy of his tics—and the language of those around him is insensitive to those with an actual "illness" or difference. Lionel is doing his best to survive in a hostile world.

As Lionel gets back into his car at long last, his beeper goes off. He uses the cell phone to call the number. On the other end, a gravelly voice announces that Matricardi and Rockaforte are calling. Lionel recognizes Rockaforte's voice right away. Lionel performs a tic as he tries to get out the news: Frank is dead. Rockaforte says that he already knows and that he's very sorry for Lionel's loss. Lionel asks how they found out, and Rockaforte replies only that they found out. Lionel wonders if the two of them have had something to do with Frank's murder.

Lionel has always been intimidated by The Clients, because Minna himself was always intimidated by them. Now, however, Lionel feels that he has nothing to lose—communicating with The Clients, something off-limits while Minna lived, now feels necessary to finding out what really happened to Frank.

Rockaforte says that he's worried for Lionel, whom he's heard is antsy. He asks Lionel to stop running around and come and visit with them at their house on Degraw Street. Lionel says that he's trying to stop the killer—and that he believes Tony is trying to stop him. Matricardi gets on the phone. He asks if Lionel no longer trusts Tony, and Lionel admits he doesn't. Matricardi, too, urges Lionel to come "honor" them with a visit—they can discuss Tony and right what's wrong.

Rockaforte and Matricardi, in spite of their intimidating affect, seem to have a genuine interest in what Lionel is doing—and a real desire to help him. Lionel knows, in the back of his mind, that he could be walking into a trap—but he is more desperate for answers than he is afraid of these two old men.

Lionel is unsure of what to do. He uses the phone to call information, get the number of the *Daily News*'s obituary section, and purchase an obit space for Minna. He puts the charge on Minna's own card. When the woman on the other end asks what Lionel wants the obit to say, she urges him to refer to Minna as "beloved something." Lionel wonders if he should list Minna as a "Beloved Father Figure," but he ultimately instructs the woman to simply call Minna a detective.

As Lionel orders Minna's obituary, it is clear that while he remembers Frank as a father figure—even a "beloved" one—he knows Minna well enough to realize that being a father figure was never one of Minna's primary concerns. What Minna wanted to be, Lionel knows, was a detective—and so he chooses to give his mentor the final gift of being remembered how he would've wanted to be.

ONE MIND

Lionel recalls that in the wake of Minna's return from "exile," he would not disclose to any of the Minna Men the nature of his exile, the circumstances of the day Gerard hurried him away, how he met and married Julia, what happened to Gerard, or his relationship with The Clients—even though Rockaforte and Matricardi continued to dole out odd, shady "assignments" that the Minna Men completed. These jobs—combined with Frank's increasingly paranoid behavior—reminded Lionel and the other Men that they were just pawns in a larger scheme.

Lionel has long wanted to be important to Minna—not just useful, but beloved. Lionel ties the divulging of information to care and empathy: he feels that because Minna would never trust him or the other Minna Men with the truth about his exile, about Julia, or about The Clients, he never truly cared about them. Language and information are how Lionel processes the world—and to withhold those things, he's now realizing, is a profound betrayal.

Lionel recalls one job that he and the others undertook in the early days of L&L's existence—they were assigned to stand guard in broad daylight around an old Volvo parked near the Brooklyn Promenade until a tow truck came to collect it. All day and most of the night passed, and no tow truck came. Danny began to speculate that there was a body in the truck, while Gilbert ventured it was full of money. Danny threatened to give up the assignment and leave—but just then, the tow truck came rumbling down the block. Lionel knew that as Minna Men, they'd inherently failed—even if The Clients didn't get wind of their failure.

This anecdote demonstrates that while the Minna Men have always admired and looked up to Frank, as they grew older, they began to trust him less and less as they craved power and control of their own. Lionel and the other Minna Men know that failing to trust Frank or considering abandoning him is a failure in and of itself—even if the job at hand gets done.

As the assignments increased in frequency, Lionel recalls, he and the others stopped questioning The Clients' involvement and wondering which jobs were for them and which were random. One assignment that took place about a year before Frank's murder, however, was utterly mysterious, and so Lionel knew that The Clients had to be behind it. The Men were charged with destroying the Ferris wheel at a carnival frequented by Brooklyn's Hispanic and Latino residents that had sprung up in an abandoned parking lot on Smith Street using bats, crowbars, and wrenches. Lionel recalls that as he, Gilbert, Tony, and Danny, under Minna's watchful eye, worked cooperatively to destroy the wheel, a group of Latino teenagers looked on from the sidewalk.

This passage demonstrates that The Clients' desires, grudges, and interests are far-reaching and unknowable. Lionel recalls destroying the Ferris wheel—an innocent instrument of happiness and fun—in order to demonstrate how random and cruel the work of being a Minna Man often was. Events like this, Lionel implicitly suggests, are just the tip of the iceberg for men like The Clients.

Now, Lionel sits visiting with Matricardi and Rockaforte. In the antique parlor, Lionel listens as The Clients tell him how much Frank loved him. The Clients, dressed as twins, are sitting close together on the old couch; Lionel swears that when he walked in the room, they pulled their hands apart into their laps. After a moment of silence, The Clients ask Lionel what has happened between him and Tony. Lionel explains that Tony is trying to stop him from solving Frank's murder—but given how ardently they try to reassure Lionel that Tony, too, wants to solve Frank's murder, Lionel begins to believe that Tony and The Clients are in on something together.

As Lionel picks up on the strange undertones in The Clients' relationships with one another, Lethem interrogates ideals of masculinity, sexuality, and brotherhood. The Clients dress like twins and act like brothers—but it's possible that they're lovers as well as partners in crime.

As Lionel grows angry, Rockaforte and Matricardi entreat him not to suspect Tony of Frank's murder, and to work with Tony rather than against him. Tony, they tell Lionel gently, has taken over Frank's role in life. Lionel should not act against Tony, they warn. Lionel, incensed, declares that he is going to keep looking with or without the help of Tony—or The Clients. The Clients urge Lionel to find Julia and bring her to them—they asked to meet with her, and instead, she ran. Now they want to see her. They entreat Lionel to find Julia and learn her secrets—without telling Tony. Anxious, Lionel begins belching and performing tics. The Clients urge Lionel to repress the "freak" within him and instead do what they've asked using the part of him that is like Frank.

It is clear to Lionel that he has been edged out of whatever line of succession Minna and The Clients have planned—and apparently cemented long ago. Lionel resents being treated as lesser than Tony—even as The Clients are effectively sending him out on another of their strange "jobs." The Clients have always seemed intimidating but essentially benevolent to Lionel—but now, he sees that they don't care about anything but their own aims.

When Lionel walks back to his car, he finds Tony sitting in its driver's seat. Lionel walks around to the passenger side and gets in, furious that The Clients set him up and told Tony where he was. Tony smacks Lionel and tells him that he's not a Hardy Boy—he's a "Hardly Boy." Lionel feels trapped in a nightmare. He decides to let Tony play out his aggression until it passes. Tony insults Lionel and calls him terrible names, even threatening him physically, as Lionel tics and cowers.

Tony clearly feels that his position is threatened—he knows that he is in line to succeed Minna, yet he obviously feels he must use intimidation, cruelty, and physical violence to bring the other Minna Men under his control. Lionel, especially, represents a threat to Tony because he is so different—and in many ways more intelligent—than the rest of the Minna Men.

Tony asks Lionel what Matricardi and Rockaforte told him. Lionel says they told him to stay off the case—the same as the doormen at 1030 Park. Tony, incredulous, asks when Lionel was at that building and what he saw inside. Tony demands to know if Lionel told The Clients about visiting that building. Lionel dodges Tony's questions, ultimately revealing only that The Clients want him to find Julia. Tony pulls a gun on Lionel. Lionel realizes that Tony suspects that Lionel is colluding with the Clients—the exact mirror of what Lionel believes. "Wheels within wheels," Lionel thinks as he tries to figure out the opaque connections between The Clients, the Park Avenue Building, Tony, and Julia.

Tony is clearly after something—but Lionel can't figure out what that is. Tony seems ultra-sensitive where Julia is concerned, and given Julia's hint about a relationship with Tony, Lionel begins to believe that there is some larger connection between the disparate threads of this mystery.

Lionel's tics abate as he confronts the gun in front of him. Tony continues questioning Lionel about 1030 Park. Lionel, in turn, asks Tony what's going on with Julia and who Ullman was—but Tony won't answer Lionel's questions straight. Lionel asks Tony outright if Tony killed Minna. Tony tells Lionel to "go fuck [him]self." Lionel, Tony says, knows nothing of how the world really works—he learned everything from Minna or a book, and because Minna was two different men, Lionel learned the wrong things. Frank, Tony says, surrounded himself with clowns and freaks—Tony doesn't plan on making the same mistake. Someone taps on the window—the homicide detective orders Tony and Lionel out of the car.

Tony is obviously angry about more than Minna's death—he seems angry with the world Minna has left for him to handle, tie together, and make sense of. Tony takes out his frustration with his own inability to untangle Minna's "wheels within wheels" by blaming the other men in Minna's orbit rather than speaking ill of his deceased mentor.

The detective frisks Tony and Lionel, confiscates Tony's gun and Lionel's phone, and then grows frustrated when Lionel compulsively tries to frisk him back. The detective takes the keys to the car and orders the two Minna Men to put their hands on the dashboard and sit quietly. He's learning a lot about their neighborhood very quickly, he says, as this part of Brooklyn isn't usually in his jurisdiction. He believes that Ullman, who kept the books for a property-management firm in Manhattan, was offed by Gilbert in a kind of "tit-for-tat"—before the detective can finish his line of thought, however, Tony asks his name. The detective at last reveals that his name is Lucius Seminole. The intriguing name causes Lionel to begin performing tics wildly.

Lucius Seminole, as the detective is revealed to be named, doesn't normally work cases like these rooted in sophisticated networks of crime, betrayal, and loyalty. What's ironic is that Lionel himself—and, by proxy, Tony—seem to have little real understanding of the world they've inherited from Minna or who is spinning the "wheels within wheels."

Seminole asks Lionel about what Julia is up to. She's booked a flight to Boston; Seminole asks what's there. Lionel and Tony both insist that they don't know. Lionel hammers home the fact that they're detectives, not gangsters, and that Gilbert couldn't have killed anyone. Seminole, however, calls Frank a "penny-ante hood" in the pocket of Matricardi and Rockaforte—and suggests that someone other than hospital staff tipped Julia off about Frank's murder. Tony responds to Seminole's accusations by making one of his own: he suggests that Seminole himself is in someone's pocket. Lionel marvels at how the point of another man's gun has brought him and Tony closer together than they have been in years. Lionel wonders if Julia is the one missing her "*Rama-lama-ding-dong*," what exactly that might be, and whether it's in Boston.

Seminole knows all about what Frank was involved in with Matricardi and Rockaforte—but Seminole genuinely doesn't know about the side of Frank Tony and Lionel knew, the side that wanted to run a legitimate business and train a team of real detectives. As Seminole pushes Tony and Lionel for answers they don't have, Lionel begins wondering if Seminole is even asking the right questions—or whether there are deeper, darker parts of this mystery that none of them have even guessed at yet.

Seminole tells Tony and Lionel that he resents the coincidence that this case fell in his jurisdiction—he doesn't want to get tangled in any Italian mob business. As Tony, who takes offense to the statement, and Seminole verbally spar, Lionel begins to perform tics. Seminole orders Lionel out of the car so that he can have a talk with Tony. Tony tells Lionel to go back to the office and wait for him. Lionel, performing tics, utters a goodbye to Seminole and skips down the street. As he continues down the block, he thinks about how his "meta-Tourette's" affects his life—he is always touching touching, counting counting, thinking about thinking.

Lionel is spared from Seminole's investigation for now, but as he takes his leave of Seminole and Tony, he finds himself puzzled by how his disorder affects not only the ways in which other people see and treat him, but the ways in which he himself experiences life. Lionel feels disconnected and left out—even when it's a good thing for him not to be involved.

Lionel takes the subway to the Upper East Side. On the street, Lionel calls Loomis to check in—Loomis has the scoop on 1030 Park. The building, he says, is ultra-exclusive. To just get on the waiting list for an apartment, Loomis says, someone would have to have $100 million at least. The second homes of people who live in this building, Loomis says, are islands. Lionel asks about Fujisaki. Loomis reports that he's getting there—1030 Park is just a collection of mansions stacked on top of one another, with secret passages and sprawling amenities such as private kitchens and swimming pools connecting them. The building is an underground economy" for "old-money people." Fujisaki is the management corporation—and a lot of Japanese people live in the building. Loomis surmises the residents of 1030 Park must "own half of New York."

Loomis has come up with a lot of valuable information about the connection between 1030 Park and the Fujisaki Corporation. Even the way Loomis describes the giant building suggests secrecy, mystery, and conspiracy. As Lionel listens to Loomis's report, he starts to become aware that what he is wading into is more sprawling and more powerful than he ever could have imagined—yet he is determined to solve the case all the same.

Ullman, Loomis says, was Fujisaki's accountant. He asks Lionel why Gilbert would go after such a man. Lionel says that all he knows is that Minna was supposed to see Ullman. Loomis wonders if they were supposed to kill each other. Lionel is unable to answer or even speculate. Loomis comments upon Lionel's shoddy detective work, and Lionel ends the call.

Lionel can't put all the pieces of the puzzle together just yet—there are still too many things that don't make sense. By having another character call attention to Lionel's difficulties solving the case, Lethem is able to parody the detective genre and make fun of detective characters who solve everything all too easily.

Lionel arrives at the Zendo in time for the monks' special session. Kimmery greets him excitedly and shows him to the sitting room, where she provides him with a pillow and a spot to sit in and then sits beside him. The room, Lionel notes, is full of over 20 Zen practitioners. Kimmery closes her eyes and begins to meditate—but as Lionel closes his eyes, he can only think about what the Zendo means and how it ties in with Minna's death. He ponders the concept of One Mind and the joke about the High Lama named Irving.

Lionel is excited to attend class at the Zendo, but not for the same reasons Kimmery is. Lionel isn't interested in important monks or the pursuit of the state of One Mind—Lionel wants answers, which he knows he can only discover on the inside of the Zendo.

When Lionel opens his eyes, he sees more people have gathered in the room—and that Pinched and Indistinct are sitting a row ahead of him. Not wanting his stolen cell phone to go off, Lionel takes it out to silence it—and someone smacks him on the back of the head. Lionel looks up and sees a procession of six bald Japanese men dressed in robes—monks—filing to the front of the room. Once the monks are seated, a seventh man enters the room. He is not Japanese, but American, yet he takes the most important spot at the front of the room. This, Lionel realizes, must be the Roshi. Lionel is again reminded of the joke about the High Lama named Irving—and he begins wondering even more intensely what connects Minna to the Zendo.

As more and more people whom Lionel recognizes—and doesn't recognize—file into the Zendo, it becomes clear that there are a series of opaque but distinct connections between everything that's happened to Lionel in the last several days. Lionel's brain whirs as he begins trying to make concrete connections between the disparate threads of the increasingly strange things he's been through.

Lionel closes his eyes again and tries to meditate—but after a few minutes, a sound at the door startles him. He turns around to see the giant standing by the entrance, eating a Ziploc bag of **kumquats**. Before Lionel can figure out what to do, one of the monks at the front of the room stands and bows to the Roshi, then to the other monks, then to the audience. The giant sits down on a cushion, taking no notice of Lionel. The monk at the front of the room begins speaking about his excitement to be in New York with his friend "Jerry-Roshi." Lionel tries desperately not to perform a tic as he looks closely at the Roshi and finds something familiar in the man's face.

The presence of the giant—and the familiarity Lionel senses in the face of the Zendo's Roshi—push Lionel into even higher gear. It is clear that he is on the cusp of putting things together. Lionel fights the impulse to tic—even though it is often through his verbal repetitions that he assembles information about the world around him.

As the monk continues talking, Lionel's brain makes lightning-fast connections and he stifles the desire to get up and touch the face of the Roshi—who he now realizes looks like Minna. Suddenly, Lionel is overcome by the realization that "Irving equals Lama, Roshi equals Gerard." Frank's brother was the voice on the wire all along. Lionel realizes that Minna used the joke to snag Lionel's unique brain and force it to puzzle over the Irving clue endlessly while the other Minna Men chased their tails. As Lionel's anger and confusion mount, he begins to perform verbal tics, shouting things like "Zengeance" and "Ziggedy zendoodah." The monk tries to ignore Lionel's outburst at first—but as it continues, the monk reprimands him.

As Lionel begins understanding the purpose of the clues Minna left for them—as well as Gerard's connection to the Zendo and, perhaps, to the Fujisaki Corporation—his brain tries to make sense of the information coalescing within it. Unfortunately, it's an inopportune time for Lionel to release a wave of verbal repetitions—he is drawing attention to himself in a room full of enemies and potential threats.

Another monk with a paddle approaches Lionel. The giant stands. Gerard looks directly at Lionel but does not seem to recognize him. The monk with the paddle whips Lionel. Lionel pulls the paddle away from him. Gerard nods at the giant, who lifts Lionel from the floor, carries him outside, and drops him onto the sidewalk. The giant offers the startled Lionel a **kumquat** and asks what's wrong. Lionel replies that he has Tourette's. The giant says that "threats don't work" on him. He orders Lionel down some concrete steps at the side of the Zendo, into a narrow alleyway. Lionel obeys the giant's command. As Lionel continues to perform tics, the giant attacks him, knocking him out.

As Lionel gets into trouble at the Zendo, he narrowly avoids being recognized by Gerard—and being killed by the giant. The giant's misunderstanding of the word "Tourette's" as "threats" externalizes the constant prejudice that Lionel faces as those around him perceive his tics and compulsions as dangerous, off-putting, alienating threats to normalcy.

Lionel wakes from his blackout to the sound of Kimmery's voice. She has Lionel's shoes with her. Kimmery helps Lionel to his feet and hails them a cab. During the ride across Central Park, Lionel passes out again. He wakes up out front of Kimmery's apartment building, and Kimmery helps him inside, to the elevator, and supports him as they ride to the 28th floor. Kimmery hurries from the elevator into her apartment. Lionel asks if they're being followed—but Kimmery, confused, replies that she's subletting the place illegally.

Kimmery wants to help and protect Lionel—even though he has disturbed the monks' special lecture and drawn the ire of the Roshi and the giant alike, Kimmery still feels drawn to him. This is a stark contrast to the giant's attitude toward Lionel, as Kimmery accepts Lionel as he is rather than othering him for his differences or assuming the worst of him.

Inside Kimmery's apartment, which is spare and small, Kimmery instructs Lionel to have a seat on her bed—a mattress she's set up in the foyer rather than the empty main room, which she says makes her uncomfortable due to its large windows. As Lionel sits down on Kimmery's bed, he feels dazed but safe. He enjoys being in Kimmery's space, and he feels he is beginning to know her as he looks around. As Lionel looks through books stacked next to Kimmery's bed, he finds a pamphlet for Zen Buddhist retreat center in Maine tucked between one book's pages. The heading on the pamphlet reads "A PLACE OF PEACE."

Inside Kimmery's apartment, Lionel discovers that Kimmery, too, has many odd behaviors and ways of organizing her life. The most interesting thing he discovers, of course, is the pamphlet—the language on it exactly mirrors what Julia previously said about running away from Brooklyn to "a place of peace," and Lionel is too jaded to believe in coincidences any longer. He realizes that Julia must be at this second Zen center.

Kimmery's cat walks into the room and sits on Lionel's lap. Lionel begins to perform tics. Kimmery comes back into the room and apologizes for the cat, fearing Lionel doesn't like cats—but he insists the opposite is true. Lionel privately recollects on a cat he once owned. The cat, Hen, enjoyed Lionel's unique attentions at first—but eventually became startled by his jerks and utterances. As Lionel's tics urged him to pat and tap the cat in strange ways, the cat became agitated and skittish. After six months, Lionel rehomed the cat.

As Lionel recalls the cat he loved yet frightened away, he reflects on the ways in which his Tourette's unintentionally pushes those he most cares for away. Others tend to misunderstand how Lionel's care, curiosity, and attempts at connection manifest.

Lionel asks if Kimmery has lived in the apartment long. She tells him she's only been here a month—she just broke up with the "**Oreo** Man." Kimmery says she doesn't like the apartment very much and is hardly ever here. Lionel asks if she locked the door when they came in; Kimmery observes that Lionel is really frightened of the giant. Lionel asks if Kimmery saw the man take him outside—she says that she didn't.

It seems impossible to Lionel that Kimmery could have failed to see the giant remove him from the Zendo—yet he doesn't linger too long on this peculiarity. This is yet another parody of the noir genre, as detectives in mystery novels typically pursue any and all details that seem amiss.

Lionel tells Kimmery that he knows who the Roshi really is. He tells her that Roshi Jerry is involved in a murder. Kimmery insists that such a thing can't be true. Lionel asks what the cat's name is. Kimmery tells him that it's Shelf—but that it's not her cat, and that she's just watching it for a friend. She's in a self-described "period of crisis"—and that's why she's so into Zen. Lionel begins to realize just how rootless Kimmery is—she is not detached in a Zen sense, she's merely alienated from her own life. Lionel begins to perform tics. Kimmery is intrigued, though, rather than off-put.

Kimmery is so naïve that she is unable to see that there might be flaws—or even danger—in the Zendo. This is in spite of the fact that the Zeno is the place she's sought peace, calm, understanding, and refuge in a tumultuous time. Kimmery, then, is not as wise or as rooted as she pretends to be within the walls of the Zendo—she is simply looking, like so many others, for a sense of connection.

Lionel tells Kimmery that Roshi's real name is Gerard Minna—he is the brother of Frank Minna. Kimmery asks who Frank Minna is. Lionel replies that Minna is a man who was killed. Kimmery is distressed, and she takes the cat into her arms. Lionel begins telling Kimmery about the circumstances of Frank's murder—including the fact that Gerard set his own brother up. Kimmery insists that Roshi has taken a vow of silence—he couldn't have been speaking over a wire yesterday, because he isn't speaking at all. Roshi is, she insists, a gentle man.

It is jarring for Lionel to realize that Frank Minna is not the center of everyone's universe, when Frank was indeed the center of his own life for so long. Kimmery's refusal to accept or understand anything remotely negative about Gerard or the Zendo further reminds Lionel that the things he's investigating and working through are of little importance to the larger world. This speaks to the futility of answers to the mysteries of one's life.

Frustrated and furious with Gerard, Lionel begins performing tics. Kimmery, still intrigued, leans in closer to Lionel and asks what it feels like when he performs tics. Lionel insists that he doesn't feel anything—he's just uttering words that don't mean anything. He compulsively reaches out to tap Kimmery, and she touches his hand back. Lionel, embarrassed by the attention, asks Kimmery what she knows about 1030 Park. She replies that a lot of the Roshi's students do work service in that building. Kimmery, a little perturbed, says she realizes now that Lionel doesn't really have an interest in Zen—he just wants to make trouble. Lionel retorts that he came to the Zendo *because* of trouble.

Kimmery helps Lionel put together a few more pieces of the puzzle concerning the connection between the Zendo and the Fujisaki Corporation, headquartered at 1030 Park. Kimmery, however, still refuses to believe that there's anything else nefarious going on in or around the Zendo. Just as Lionel has had a hard time accepting new information about Minna's secret life, Kimmery has a hard time accepting information about her own idol, Roshi Jerry.

Kimmery says no matter the circumstances, she's glad she's met Lionel—he is "strange in a good way." Lionel doesn't respond. Kimmery tells him that he doesn't have to censor himself—he can say whatever he needs to. Lionel realizes that Kimmery is touching his hand. She turns off the light and moves closer to him. Lionel touches Kimmery's leg. Soon, they are kissing. As Lionel grows aroused, he find that his impulse to perform tics is squashed.

As Kimmery and Lionel become intimate, Lionel feels grateful at first for Kimmery's blasé appreciation of his differences. Still, however, he can't fully surrender to the experience given everything else that's going on within him.

As Kimmery unbuttons Lionel's pants and takes his penis in her hands, she urges Lionel to talk and make sounds freely. Lionel allows himself to speak free-associatively, uttering the phrases "One Mind" and "Fonebone," the latter a reference to wacky cartoon characters Lionel loved as a child—cartoon characters he now feels represents his clumsy, erratic state of arousal. Lionel, already dreading the "bic tic[s]" that he knows will come after he climaxes, asks Kimmery to promise him she'll stay away from the Zendo for a few days. Kimmery agrees. Lionel and Kimmery stop talking and begin having sex.

Lionel previously shared the ways in which he uses sex as a way of feeling grounded, relaxed, and removed from the need to tic—but there is still a part of him that feels ridiculous (or afraid of being ridiculed) as he engages in sex. Kimmery seems to encourage and appreciate Lionel's tics, wanting to understand his full self—but Lionel fears there will always come a point at which his differences are too much for others to bear.

Later, Kimmery falls asleep. Lionel gets up from bed, taps Shelf a few times, and locates Kimmery's keys in the kitchen. He leaves her apartment key with her, but takes all of the others, knowing that one is bound to let him into the Zendo.

Lionel didn't come to Kimmery's apartment planning to use her in his pursuit of answers at the Zendo—but now that he's uncovered the connection between the Zendo and the "place of peace" in Maine through Kimmery, he knows he can't pass up the opportunity to get the rest of the answers he needs.

AUTO BODY

It is one in the morning when Lionel steps out of a cab in front of the Zendo, checking to make sure he has not been followed. He feels like Minna for a brief moment—but then begins to feel like a "coloring-book outline of a man." Lionel enters the nearby townhouse to confront the night doorman, Dirk, and ask him about the giant. The doorman confirms that the giant coerced him into getting Lionel's attention—but that he had never seen him before the previous night.

Lionel is beginning to get the answers he needs—and he feels empowered as he compares himself to Minna, his father figure and ultimate guidepost for masculinity. Yet embodying Frank rather than being himself only leaves Lionel feeling like an "outline of a man"—a shell of a person. Still, Lionel believes that he has at last embodied the vision of power, stealth, and masculinity needed to complete the task before him—he doesn't understand that he will need to find his own version of those things before his journey is done.

Lionel goes to the Zendo and uses Kimmery's key to get inside. Lionel ascends the stairs to the Roshi's private headquarters and enters the spare bedroom. Gerard is sitting on a flat mattress on the floor, meditating. Lionel, reminded of Marlon Brando in *Apocalypse Now!* begins to perform tics, crying "*Thehorrorthehorror*." Gerard opens his eyes and greets Lionel by his full name. Lionel asks if they are alone in the building; Gerard confirms that they are. Lionel closes the bedroom door and begins asking Gerard about his "hired killer." Gerard warns Lionel not to speak without thinking—though he admits he knows that Lionel has "difficulties in that area."

Lionel has at last gotten to what he believes will be the ultimate moment of revelation in his journey of investigating Minna's death—the excitement is almost more than he can bear. Right off the bat, however, Gerard is evasive and dismissive, invoking Lionel's Tourette's in a cruel manner.

Lionel says he knows about 1030 Park, Fujisaki, and the giant. Gerard, however, is nonplussed. Gerard tells Lionel that Lionel is just as ignorant as Frank was. Gerard laments that Frank kept Lionel and the other Minna Men "charmed and flattered" yet ultimately in the dark. Frank, Gerard reveals, had a hand in managing the building at 1030 Park—a dazzling amount of money, he says, was involved. Lionel repeats Loomis's assertion that the residents of 1030 Park have second homes on islands. Gerard smiles and states that for every Buddhist, Japan is a second home.

Gerard almost seems to take pity on Lionel as he helps fill in some of the blanks about the disparate connections between the many parts of the mystery surrounding Frank's death. Gerard clearly had issues with his brother and believed that Minna was ultimately doing the orphans of "motherless Brooklyn" a disservice by binding them to him.

Lionel asks Gerard what his role in all this is. Gerard smiles and says that Frank never exposed him to any danger—Gerard has never met anyone from Fujisaki. Ullman, Gerard says, was Frank's partner in "fleecing" the Japanese. Gerard's role, he says, was providing labor for the building in exchange for payment on the mortgage on the Zendo. Fujisaki, Lionel surmises, sicced the giant on Frank and Ullman—but Lionel cannot believe that the giant just happened to use the Zendo as his meeting-place the night before. Gerard replies that the Fujisaki Corporation is powerful—yet the violence they use to stay powerful is done at a distance, and thus, they have employed the giant as a hitman.

As Gerard helps Lionel piece together the connections among Fujisaki, Ullman, Minna, and the giant, Lionel can't help but feel a deep sense of suspicion that Gerard is leaving out some crucial information. Lionel doesn't know everything yet—but he knows enough to realize there is more to the story than Gerard is willing to share with him. Lionel has gotten some answers—but ultimately they are futile and don't tie up the larger mysteries at hand.

Gerard urges Lionel to tell Tony to stay out of the business related to Fujisaki. Lionel feels a surge of care for Tony, who he realizes has placed himself in great danger in his efforts to emulate Frank. Lionel asks how Matricardi and Rockaforte play into everything. Gerard asks if Lionel remembers when Frank had to go "upstate," implying that Frank angered them and left Brooklyn to escape their retribution. Gerard urges Lionel to avoid the "dangerous" Clients. Lionel asks if anyone else at the Zendo is involved in Gerard's shady business, but Gerard replies that Kimmery is safe and uninvolved. Wary of asking any more questions, Lionel thanks Gerard and takes his leave of the Zendo, taking the "Tourettic" subway back to Brooklyn.

Though Lionel begins understanding more and more about the machinations between the Minna brothers, Fujisaki, and The Clients, he still has more questions. Unable to get them all answered, Lionel seeks a different, deeper sense of understanding on the "Tourettic" subway. By noticing the ways in which the exterior world around him is similar to the interior world within him, Lionel is able to feel more a part of the world—even as his own immediate sphere becomes more opaque, confusing, and dangerous than ever.

It is nearly 2:30 in the morning when Lionel approaches the L&L storefront from the opposite side of the street. As Lionel peers across the road, he sees that Tony and Danny are inside. He decides to watch them for a while—he trusts neither of them. Lionel is surprised when he sees a female bartender he knows from a nearby tavern going inside L&L. A moment later, Danny emerges with her. They get into an L&L car, start the engine, and drive away. Lionel watches as Tony hurriedly takes out some papers from a drawer and spreads them across the counter—Tony clearly doesn't trust Danny either. As Lionel looks down the block, he sees the "hulking shadow" of the giant move in a parked car outside the L&L storefront. Lionel and the giant are both staking the place out.

As Lionel realizes that he and the giant are both staking out L&L, he feels certain that Tony is next in line to be offed by the giant. At the same time, Lionel isn't willing to do anything drastic just yet—he doesn't want to put himself between Tony and the giant, knowing that there are still answers he needs that the two men may have for him.

Lionel watches Tony roots through drawers in a desk, frustratedly moving from pile of paper to pile of paper. The giant **snacks** on something as Tony moves to the file cabinets. Lionel knows he needs to hide—and decides to take cover in one of the spare L&L cars parked on the block. Just as he's about to make his way to one, Danny's car comes back down the block. Danny parks, gets out alone, and returns to the L&L storefront. Lionel watches Tony and Danny converse, but his mind begins to wander as he thinks about the giant, food, and Kimmery. After a few moments, Tony leaves the storefront—but he returns moments later with a plastic shopping bag, which he places in the front seat of one of the cars.

It is clear from what Lionel is able to observe in the L&L storefront that Tony is up to something—something that he wants to keep from Danny. Lionel now realizes that it's not just him, but everyone, that Tony doesn't trust. Lionel isn't quite sure what all of this means yet—but the giant's presence makes it clear that Tony and perhaps Danny's lives are in immediate danger.

Lionel decides to go to Zeod's himself for a **sandwich**. As he walks in, Zeod greets him and remarks that he and Tony must be working on "something important" for Frank to be out so late. Lionel asks Zeod to tell him what Tony bought, and Zeod tells Lionel that Tony bought a "whole picnic"—beer, four sandwiches, Cokes, and a carton of cigarettes. Zeod notes that Tony looked very serious. Lionel asks what kind of sandwiches Tony ordered, and as Zeod describes them, Lionel grows hungry. He feels compelled to get the exact same four sandwiches as Tony—and tells Zeod to make them for him. After Zeod hands Lionel the sandwiches, Lionel asks Zeod not to mention that he was in here to anyone else.

Lionel is uniquely vulnerable to the pull of food—it is the primary thing that calms his tics. But here as he is presented with an array of food, he feels compelled to order as much as he can in order to replicate Tony's order. Lionel is uniquely distressed—and he perhaps believes that mirroring Tony's order and consuming the same food as Tony will allow him to get closer to his distant colleague and perhaps protect him from the designs on his life.

Lionel walks back toward L&L and ducks into one of the free cars. He slumps down in his seat and begins eating one of the **sandwiches** from Zeod's. He feels that he's on a real stakeout—but he doesn't know what he's waiting to see happen. Lionel lets the many unanswered questions about the events of the last couple days run through his brain as he eats sandwiches and drinks Coke to stay awake until 4:30 in the morning.

Lionel tries to find comfort and familiarity in food, mirroring his behavior during the doomed stakeout that opened the novel. This time, however, Lionel is determined to remain more actively aware of what's happening around him—and what the consequences of letting his guard down even for a second could be.

His brain addled by sleep and wordplay, Lionel decides to use his phone to call L&L. Danny answers, and Lionel asks for Tony. Tony is angry at Lionel for leaving him alone with Seminole—but Lionel tries to warn Tony that he's in danger. Tony, however, meanly calls Lionel a "freakshow" and dismisses him. Lionel again warns Tony to hide from Fujisaki—he says that the two of them are a family and need to look out for each other. Tony hangs up on Lionel.

Lionel's well-intentioned call to Tony results only in the angry Tony shaming, belittling, and cruelly dismissing Lionel. Lionel has learned from Minna the value of brotherhood, camaraderie, and loyalty—but it is clear that not all of the Minna Men have taken the same values away from their mentor.

Long after the sun is up, Tony comes out of L&L and gets into a Pontiac—the car he dropped the Zeod's bag in earlier. Lionel realizes it is nearly half past seven in the morning. As Tony pulls onto the road, followed by the giant, Lionel follows suit, tailing them both at a safe distance. Lionel follows the two cars to the Brooklyn-Queens Expressway, where they head north. Near the airport, Tony tries to lose the giant's tail—but the giant and Lionel both manage to pull back across the highway and follow him north. Lionel realizes that they are headed out of town.

Lionel's stakeout turns into a chase—but he has no idea what's in store as he takes off after Tony and the giant. Lionel is leaving the familiar if not safe environs of New York City, suggesting that a new chapter in the investigation is about to rapidly unfold.

Lionel enjoys the soothing highway driving as he follows Tony and the giant through New York and into Connecticut. When Tony pulls off to a rest stop, the giant's car keeps on going. Lionel realizes that the giant has intuited where Tony is headed and is now going there himself. Lionel believes they are all headed for the "place of peace"—the Zen retreat in Maine. After stopping for gas, a bathroom break, and a map, Lionel gets back on the road. He decides to use his cell phone to call Kimmery. He tells her that he's headed to Maine—he is pursuing the giant. Kimmery says it's creepy that Lionel took her keys, so Lionel apologizes and promises to bring them back. He tells Kimmery he misses her, but Kimmery doesn't return the sentiment.

Lionel is oddly calm as he begins to put together some pieces of the puzzle before him, intuiting that whatever showdown is about to happen—and whatever revelations are about to unfold—will be centered around the Zen retreat in Maine. Lionel feels that the answers he's been searching for will inevitably come to him—and he's feeling excited rather than frightened or anxious.

When Lionel tells Kimmery that he's headed for Yoshii's, and that he would love to go with her some time, but Kimmery says that she needs to get off the phone. Lionel asks her to stay on the line. She tells Lionel she thinks he's using the investigation as a way to stave off his sadness and guilt about Frank's death—she doesn't think he's a real detective. Lionel tells her that real detectives aren't like they're depicted in books and movies. The conversation turns jocular, and Kimmery begins telling Lionel a *koan*—a Buddhist joke with no punchline.

In this passage, Kimmery raises a real narrative concern: whether Lionel's determination to solve Frank's murder is rooted in a pure detective's desire for the truth, or whether Lionel needs to focus on the case in order to prevent himself from feeling his own feelings of guilt and blame.

Kimmery tells Lionel that Roshi Jerry always says guilt is selfish. Lionel asks Kimmery not to quote Gerard to him on the subject of guilt. Kimmery asks if Roshi could really be guilty of something, and Lionel says that he's headed to Maine to find out. Kimmery urges Lionel to be careful. Lionel reminds Kimmery of her promise not to go to the Zendo.

Kimmery's naïveté prevents her from seeing the seriousness of what's happening all around her at the Zendo. She still believes that the Roshi is wise and true—and that the Zendo itself is a place of refuge rather than a meeting place of criminals and thugs.

Lionel drives through Boston, where the traffic and dense buildings make him nervous. To soothe himself, he calls Kimmery again. She is less enthusiastic on this call and tells him that he's calling her too much—she doesn't want anything "crazy" in her life right now, she says, having just gotten out of a relationship. Lionel tells Kimmery that he's different from other men—but Kimmery maintains that while she likes Lionel, she finds him too intense. Lionel says Kimmery is confusing him. She hangs up the phone. Lionel continues calling her back again and again until she asks him to stop. Even then, however, he can't stop pressing the redial button—he is his "syndrome's dupe" once more.

Lionel continues to call Kimmery to calm and comfort himself, needing to find refuge in language and communication in order to feel rooted, grounded, and safe. Unfortunately, Kimmery doesn't understand Lionel's tics and compulsions as well as he thought she did. Lionel fears that his Tourette's will keep him isolated from everyone he cares about, no matter what he does.

Unable to get through to Kimmery, Lionel begins dialing the numbers of the Essrogs in Brooklyn he's memorized over the years. He is unable to say anything but "Essrog, Essrog, Essrog" into the phone. Lionel feels he lives his whole life wound tight—but unlike an airbag, which explodes and expands, he is repacked each time he gives in, becoming almost instantly ready to explode—or to perform a tic—again. At last, Lionel's "dialing tics" stop and he focuses his attention on the remainder of the drive to Maine. As he crosses the Maine state line and drives through small, touristy villages, he searches for the "place of peace."

Lionel's compulsion to make phone calls is a way of coping with the anxiety and loneliness he feels as he marches toward the place where he might find the answers to the questions he's had all his life. The idea of encountering a moment of revelation at last is both exhilarating and terrifying to Lionel. To cope, he seeks the comfort of communicating with other people in whatever way he can.

At last, Lionel arrives in a town called Musconguspoint Station—a ferry to Muscongus Island makes the rounds twice a day, and Yoshii's, the Buddhist retreat, is on a hill near the ferry landing. Some cheesy signs advertise Yoshii's as "Maine's only Thai and Sushi Oceanfood Emporium." Lionel parks in the **restaurant** lot—there is no sign of Tony's car, or the giant's. He gets out and urinates off the edge of a cliff looking down over the sea, performing tics and shouting wildly. He wonders if he is the first Essrog to set foot in Maine.

Lionel is full of uncontrollable curiosity, excitement, and anticipation as he arrives in Maine. As he considers the idea that he might be the first Essrog to ever step foot in Maine, he feels intrepid and important rather than lonely and isolated.

Back in the parking lot, Lionel checks to see if anyone heard his outburst—but there is no one nearby except for some men on the docks below. Lionel walks down and gets the attention of one of the men, who is helping a small crew unload heavy-looking cartons from a boat. Lionel, excited by the ocean air, begins to perform tics. He asks if it's a cold day to be out, and the boatman explains that since **urchin** season runs from October through March (the coldest months of the year), a day like today is relatively easy. Lionel asks if the boatman knows anything about the restaurant up the hill. The man tells Lionel to talk to someone called Mr. Foible and nods toward a shack at the end of the dock—Foible, the boatman says, is the one who deals with the Japanese.

Immediately upon his arrival in Maine, Lionel begins searching for clues and answers. He has come this far, and he is not going to let anything stop or intimidate him now. Maine is clearly the place where the heart of the mystery lives and where Lionel will encounter the answers to the questions he's been asking for years.

Lionel enters the shack and encounters Mr. Foible, an older man with a drunk's face. Lionel extends a $20 bill toward Foible and asks about the restaurant up the hill, inquiring as to who owns it. Foible asks why Lionel wants to know, but Lionel says he wants to buy it. Foible replies that Lionel could never get it away from its owners. Lionel asks what would happen if he made the owners "an offer they couldn't refuse." Foible squints at Lionel suspiciously and asks if he's a Scientologist. Lionel says he isn't. Foible is relieved—Scientologists, he says, bought an old hotel on Muscongus Island—he prefers the Japanese to the scientologists.

When Lionel mentions making "an offer [one] couldn't refuse," he's directly referencing Mario Puzo's novel The Godfather and Francis Ford Coppola's film adaptation of the book. By engaging with other crime and mystery stories, Lethem parodies noir, detective, and gangster dramas even as he unspools a deeply complicated and convoluted mystery of his own.

Foible points to the $20 bill. He tells Lionel that when the Japanese ask favors, the smallest bill they pull out of their wallets is a hundred. Foible recalls the days when the Japanese mob, or Yakuza, used to pay his baymen off for a haul of *uni*, or **urchin eggs**: the national food of Japan and "the whole story" around these parts lately. Japanese law states that diving for urchin is illegal—only hand-raking is allowed. Maine, however, has some of the best urchin in the world—and no laws against diving for them. The Japanese have come to bid on loads, pay in cash, and trade in unbelievable amounts for the precious seafood. The people who own the restaurant, Fujisaki, bought Foible out years ago—now, he sells to them exclusively and doesn't have to deal with the Yakuza.

As Lionel meets with Foible, he discovers a huge part of the puzzle unfolding rapidly before him. The Fujisaki Corporation, he now understands, trade in the shady but lucrative uni business. Barred from certain practices in their homeland, the Fujisaki men have come here to make their profits. Again, Lethem brushes up against overt Orientalism here, implying invasion and coopting of resources by a shadowy, unknowable East Asian conglomerate. This portrayal has drawn ire from Asian and Asian American cultural critics.

Excited and intrigued, Lionel begins performing tics as he asks more about Fujisaki. Foible observes that Lionel seems to have Tourette's. Lionel calms himself and asks if the Fujisaki men live here. Foible reports that they come and go around the world in a bunch—they just came in on the ferry, actually, this morning. Lionel asks where Foible's second boat is. Foible says a couple of guys asked to rent it an hour ago. Lionel asks if one of the men was big. "Biggest I ever saw," replies Foible.

Foible is one of the few people Lionel has encountered who understands what Tourette's is. He's also one of few who empathetically understands Lionel through the lens of his disorder without judging or shaming him because of it.

Lionel realizes that Tony and the giant have gotten to Maine first. He drives to the ferry landing where he spots their two cars in a small parking lot encircled by a coin-fed gate. On the outside of the one-way exit is a strip of flexible spikes and a sign warning about tire damage. Lionel wonders what Tony and the giant are doing out on the boat. Lionel feels his beeper buzz. He returns to his car, gets out the cell phone, and calls the number—he recognizes it as Matricardi's. Matricardi asks if Lionel has gotten what they want. Lionel says he's working on it.

As Lionel inspects his surroundings and tries to figure out what he's dealing with, he pays extremely close attention to the layout of this new place. Lionel is a person with a profound need to make sense of his surroundings and feel enmeshed within them even in the most ordinary circumstances—now, that need is intensified even further by the profound disorientation he's feeling on all sides.

Inside the **sushi** restaurant, Lionel is greeted by a hostess in a Japanese robe. Lionel is the only customer so far, and he requests a table near the windows overlooking the water. He is shocked when his waitress emerges from the kitchen—it is Julia, who has shaved her head. She, too, wears a Japanese robe. She brings Lionel a menu and says that she doesn't want to know what he's doing here. He quietly explains that he followed Tony and Minna's killer, the giant, to Maine. Julia tells Lionel to get lost, but he asks to talk to her. She tells him to talk to himself.

Julia is hiding out at Yoshii's—but whether her transformation is the disguise or whether the image of femininity she inhabited as Minna's wife was the deception remains unclear. She is not happy to see Lionel—she is trying to stay out of harm's way and remove herself from the storm brewing back in Brooklyn.

Julia asks where Tony is. Lionel says he's on the boat with the giant. Julia says she's waiting here for Tony—but she can't wait much longer. Lionel says he thinks Tony is trying to get to Fujisaki before they get to him. Julia flinches and warns Lionel not to say that name around here. Lionel asks Julia if she's afraid of Fujisaki or of the clients. Julia says that she's not hiding from the Italians. Lionel asks who is, but Julia calls him a freak and refuses to answer. Lionel asks to order some **uni**. Julia tells Lionel that he wouldn't like it. The door opens—the Fujisaki Corporation walks into the dining room and sits at a large table.

Julia is clearly terrified—and she obviously sees Lionel's presence as a liability, or a threat to whatever plan it is she's made with Tony to save both their skins. Julia lashes out at Lionel cruelly—and Lionel, in ordering off the menu, seeks refuge (and understanding) in food.

There are six Fujisaki men in sleek, fitted suits and cool sunglasses—to Lionel, they embody the image that the Minna Men always "strained" for but never achieved. Overwhelmed, Lionel performs a tic: "*I scream for ur-chin!*" Embarrassed, Julia quickly scrambles to fetch Lionel his lunch. A few members of the Fujisaki corporation look at Lionel, but mostly they are uninterested in him. Lionel watches as Julia takes their order—he realizes that these men are the same men he saw dressed as monks at the Yorkville Zendo, their saggy flesh and tufts of underarm hair now hidden beneath expensive suits.

Though Minna pushed his men to be a team, as Lionel spots the men Fujisaki Corporation aligned together for the first time in their sleek, syndicated getups, Lionel sees that the Minna Men never were (and never could have been) a cohesive unit in the way that these men are.

Julia brings Lionel a plate of **uni** garnished with wasabi and pickled ginger—as well as a bowl of coconut soup, something she says that he will actually like. Lionel samples the uni, enjoying the sharp and strange explosion of flavors—but when he eats too much spicy wasabi, he makes a noise which draws the Fujisaki Corporation's attention again. Lionel turns to the soup and feels comforted by the warm broth. Julia brings Lionel his check. He sees that she has scrawled a message at the bottom: "THE FOOD IS ON THE HOUSE. MEET ME AT FRIENDSHIP HEAD LIGHTHOUSE TWO-THIRTY. GET OUT OF HERE!!!"

Normally, food is a way for Lionel to focus his attention away from his anxiety and his Tourette's and attain a sense of control and calm. With the exotic uni, however, Lionel finds his senses even more engaged rather than pleasantly dulled. This speaks to the strangeness of Lionel's situation, the urgency of his proximity to the answers he wants, and his resultant ability to find comfort or oblivion in food.

As Lionel walks out of the restaurant, one of the Fujisaki men grabs his arm and asks him if he liked the food. Lionel looks at the man—it is the same man who, as a monk, paddled him for shouting during the lecture. The man is drunk, but still recognizes Lionel as "Jerry-Roshi's unruly student." The man claps Lionel on the shoulder and suggests he come to the retreat to unwind. Lionel claps the man back—and he's then compelled to clap each of the men on the back. The men poke Lionel back. Lionel begins performing tics wildly, calling out "Monk, monk, stooge!" in place of duck, duck, goose. The paddle-wielder tells Lionel it's time for him to leave. "*Eat me Fujisaki!*" Lionel screams as he heads out the door.

As Lionel comes up against the powerful men of the Fujisaki Corporation, he is so anxious that he's unable to control his offensive tics. As Lionel calls out "Eat me, Fujisaki!", deploying one of his oldest tics, he invokes eating—which holds an association with comfort and denial. Lionel's direct challenge to the Fujisaki men demonstrates his hatred of them.

When Lionel emerges, he sees that the second boat has returned to the dock. He heads down there, where he spots something moving in the parking lot. As Lionel gets closer, he sees the giant standing between his own car and Tony's, reading papers from a manila folder. Clearly dissatisfied with what he's reading, the giant tears up the papers and hurls them into the bay. The giant pulls out a wallet, removes paper money from it, and hurls the wallet into the water too. The giant turns around and spots Lionel. Lionel realizes that the giant has killed Tony. Lionel runs away uphill—but the giant gets into his car and tails him.

As Lionel realizes that the giant has taken Tony out on Foible's boat in order to kill him, he feels little emotion—yet he realizes that the giant is just as dangerous as he's always been. Lionel knows that he needs to get himself away from the giant—he won't get the answers he wants to about the man and his motives, but survival is more important at this point.

Lionel gets into his car just as the giant catches up with him—it seems that the giant wants to push Lionel off the cliff with his car, but Lionel reverses out of his path. In his rearview, Lionel can see that the giant has a gun. Minna and now Tony, Lionel knows, died quietly—he believes that he is set to die more noisily. Lionel, in his car, leads the giant on a wild goose chase toward the ferry's parking area. He smashes through the gate at the entrance toward Tony's car, desperate to get his hands on Tony's gun. The giant is too close, though, and Lionel decides to take a chance and drive over the spikes at the exit.

Lionel's chase with the giant is dangerous and deadly—yet Lionel remains focused and uses his careful attention to the spike mechanism out front of the parking lot to trap the giant. Lionel's unique way of seeing the world's details and using them to his advantage helps him to get out of the mess with the giant.

Lionel brakes over the spikes and comes to a halt—the giant rear-ends him, and Lionel watches as the giant's airbag inflates. He hears the giant's gun go off. The giant's windshield splinters. Lionel reverses, plowing into the driver's side of the giant's car and pushing it backward into the spikes. Lionel senses no movement from inside the car—he can tell that the giant is unconscious beneath his airbag. Lionel's Tourette's brain, however, compels him to even out the job. He moves forward and into position, then reverses into the passenger side of the giant's car.

As Lionel neutralizes the giant by causing him to crash his car—and possibly even killing him—Lionel cheekily suggests that his need to ram both sides of the car and create a sense of evenness is due to his Tourette's, not his rage and desire for the giant's oblivion. Yet Lethem leaves the determination of Lionel's true motivation up to the reader.

Lionel's car is wrecked, so he switches his belongings into Tony's Pontiac. The keys are in the ignition, and he drives it out of the lot toward Friendship Head, an outcropping 12 miles away. Lionel parks the car and takes stock of his injuries—he is tired, cold, and has a bit of whiplash, but he is all right. He is early to meet Julia, so he calls the local police and tells them about the scene at the Muscongus Island ferry parking lot. He tells the police that they'll find the wallet belonging to the man the giant killed in the water nearby. Lionel wonders to himself if guilt is "a species of Tourette's"—like Tourette's, it seeks to infiltrate everything and to control its bearer completely.

Lionel is bent on securing justice not just for Minna but for the felled Tony as well. Lionel's rage toward the giant has brought out the worst in him—now, he hands control of the situation over to the authorities, choosing to process his own guilt, sadness, and loneliness on his own. By pointing out the parallels between guilt and Tourette's, Lionel is better able to foresee what his guilt will require of him—and how he might conquer it.

Lionel calls The Clients and tells Matricardi that Tony is dead. He tells The Clients that he has one piece of information for them—in exchange for it, he wants L&L's dealings with them done. He tells Matricardi that Gerard Minna is living in the Yorkville Zendo, and that Gerard is responsible for Frank's death. Matricardi says this information is of interest to him and Rockaforte—and that they will respect his wishes. Lionel considers what he knows about guilt—but he concludes that when it comes to vengeance, he still has a lot of thinking to do.

Lionel gives the Clients what they want—but he also gets something he wants out of giving up some choice pieces of information. Lionel knows that in informing on Gerard Minna's location, he is condemning the elder Minna brother to death—but Lionel is so desperate for justice for Frank that he acts in the heat of the moment, only considering afterward what role vengeance will play in his life going forward.

FORMERLY KNOWN

Lionel tells Julia's story, which he learns in full during their meeting at the lighthouse. Julia refers to herself as "the girl" and to Frank and Gerard as "the brothers" as she tells Lionel her tale. She was born in Nantucket to "hippie" parents. Her father traveled often and left behind tapes about Eastern thought. Julia began to conflate her father and the voice on the tapes when her father stopped coming home from his trips. At 18, Julia went to art school in Boston but dropped out after two years. She briefly moved back home, then returned to Boston, where she worked as a waitress and attended Zen meetings. One year, she visited a Zen retreat in Maine and loved it so much that she decided to stay full-time and work as a waitress at a nearby seafood restaurant. There, she met two brothers.

As Julia tells Lionel her story, she detaches herself, Frank, and Gerard from reality by referring to the three of them as "the girl" and "the brothers." This creates both a linguistic and emotional remove from the story, allowing Lionel to focus only on the facts. As Lionel gets the answers he's wanted all along, however he perhaps finds them to be lackluster compared to what he expected: Frank's great mysterious past is simply a story of common desires and betrayals.

The older brother, named Gerard, was flattering and charming. He frequently told stories both funny and frightening about being a mobster in Brooklyn. The girl became the older brother's lover—but he stopped coming to the retreat. One day, however, he returned with his younger brother, Frank, in tow. The two men made a donation to the Zen center and moved into a pair of rooms at the retreat center. The older brother no longer wanted to see Julia. Julia began paying more attention to the younger brother, who had no interest in Zen. Soon, she became *his* lover. The younger brother told Julia about the pair of "aging Brooklyn mobsters"—Rockaforte and Matricardi—who pushed him and his brother out of Brooklyn after the brothers began stealing a percentage of the illegal goods the mobsters trafficked.

As Julia recalls her own deep interest in the brothers' dangerous lives, she admits to being pulled into a web beyond her own understanding. Though Julia knew that both Gerard and Frank were trouble, she found herself drawn to them, nonetheless. Julia's interest in the archetypes of mobsters mirrors Minna (and Lionel's) interest in the archetypes of detectives.

Gerard grew distant as Frank became more invested in Julia. Frank shared with her about his dreams of starting a detective agency. Together, Julia and the younger brother began referring to the older brother as "*Rama-lama-ding-dong*." When the younger brother got word that his mother was in the hospital, he asked Julia to return to Brooklyn with him, and Julia agreed to do so. On the way, they were married in Albany. By the time they got to Brooklyn, the brothers' mother was dead. The younger brother was brought before The Clients to answer for his deeds. He begged for his life, claimed to be done with his older brother, and promised to work for the gangsters for life. The gangsters vowed to kill the older brother—but they let the younger brother live.

This passage fills in some of the blanks concerning Gerard and Frank's tenuous existence in Brooklyn. Both of them were deeply in the pockets of The Clients—yet while Frank was allowed to keep his life in exchange for service to Matricardi and Rockaforte, Gerard remained a target (and, the story implies, still is one to this day). This explains Gerard's desire to live in hiding and isolation at the Zendo—he was undercover and distanced from the mistakes of his past and the danger of his present.

Julia hated life in Brooklyn and found herself growing distant from the younger brother—Frank cheated on her relentlessly, and she retreated into solitude. One day, the younger brother announced that his older brother had returned to New York to run a Zendo in Yorkville—a Zendo subsidized by a powerful group of Japanese businessmen he'd men in Maine: the Fujisaki Corporation. The Fujisaki men were spiritual, but they were in disrepute and thus banned from monkhood in Japan. In America, however, the men could be both monks and crooks: they could make money and still be "men of wisdom and peace."

This paragraph draws parallels between the Minnas and the Fujisaki Corporation. Frank Minna longed to be a detective, and Gerard longed to be a Zen master—yet neither brother wanted to renounce the wealth and the thrills associated with the underworld. The Fujisaki men are the same: they long for personal fulfillment, yet don't want to abandon the wealth and power they can obtain through illegal dealings.

Julia's story concluded, Lionel returns to the present. He is standing with Julia at the lighthouse, his collar up like Minna would have his. He has Tony's gun in his pocket. Lionel puts the rest of the story together: Frank got involved in a scam siphoning money from Fujisaki's management company with the help of Ullman. Julia confirms this theory. Gerard, Lionel believes, pinned Frank and Ullman with the crimes against the Fujisaki to save himself—and, Lionel believes, was forced to order the killing of his own brother to save his own skin with the Fujisaki men. Then, Lionel continues, Gerard sought to eliminate Tony and Julia—his remaining links to Frank. Gerard, Lionel says, called Julia the night of Frank's death—not the hospital. Julia says that Gerard arranged Yoshii's to be a safehouse for her.

Lionel proves himself a careful and apt detective as he pieces together the rest of the story concerning Frank and Gerard's confusing, fatal ties to the Fujisaki Corporation. In the underworld, where the thirst for more money and more power tears lives, families, and futures apart, Lionel now sees, there are no winners. Frank and Gerard destroyed their relationship by prioritizing fealty to shadowy men and corporations over one another. Now that Lionel has unraveled the mystery, he still doesn't feel he understands the world any better—he is only more confused by the cruelties and betrayals of the people he thought he knew.

Lionel realizes that Tony wanted to take over Frank's position as a player in both the Fujisaki's fortune and The Clients'. Lionel asks if Julia and Tony were together, and Julia reveals that she's slept with all the Minna Men except for Lionel. Lionel is disappointed and slightly jealous—but still feels he needs to rescue and protect Julia. They are, he feels, the same: "disappointed lovers of Frank Minna, abandoned children." Lionel tells Julia about Kimmery—but Julia dismissively tells Lionel no woman will ever truly want him.

If Lionel had imagined for himself any kind of connection or bond of a sexual nature with Julia, he knows now that that fantasy is definitively a dead end. He does, however, feel that he and Julia still have a remaining connection of a different sort: they are the two people who have been most profoundly let down and hurt by Frank Minna, a "disappointed lover[]" and an "abandoned child[.]"

Julia reveals that she and Tony had heard Fujisaki was flying into Maine today—they planned to tell them about Gerard, but Lionel got in the way. Lionel tells Julia that it was the giant who got in the way—Gerard sent him up to Maine. Julia insists Gerard would never have wanted her dead. Julia says she's never seen this giant man—she chalks this up to Lionel's imagination. Julia pulls out a cigarette and lighter and asks Lionel to light it for her. Lionel takes them and lights the cigarette out of the wind—when he turns back around, Julia has a gun on him.

It is too painful for Julia to believe that Gerard would have sacrificed her out of fealty to the Fujisaki Corporation's wealth and power. She would rather believe that Lionel is insane than even consider the idea that her former lover would betray her, even though the latter is obviously true.

Julia tells Lionel that Frank once told her Lionel was useful because he was "so crazy" that people assumed he was stupid. She says she's made the same mistake—everywhere Lionel goes, someone who wants Gerard dead is dead, and she doesn't want to be next. Julia believes that it was Lionel—not the giant—who killed Frank. Lionel begins performing tics. He begs Julia to put the gun away. When she refuses, he pulls out Tony's own gun. The two hold their guns on one another for a long while. Lionel realizes the only thing he and Julia have in common, in fact, are the guns that they have trained on each other. Lionel assures Julia that he's not the killer.

Julia doesn't know who to trust or who to believe. Her years and years of involvement with the Minna Men have left her with an inability to tell friend from foe—and she would rather believe the worst in what she can see than put faith in something she can't directly observe or understand.

Julia asks what she should do. Lionel suggests they both go home—they're alive, and they've made it through the madness of the last few days. Julia continues to tease Lionel. Lionel throws his gun into the water. As Julia watches, confused, Lionel rushes her and pulls her gun away from her, then throws that into the ocean too. Lionel realizes he needs to throw five things into the ocean. He tosses Minna's beeper, then the cell phone. He has nothing else to throw. He asks Julia for something from her purse. Instead, she walks away. Lionel takes off his right shoe, kisses it goodbye, and throws it. After saying goodbye to Julia, Lionel drives, shoeless, back to Brooklyn.

The ending to the novel's big standoff is relatively anticlimactic. Lionel's heroic movements trigger a compulsive tic, reminding him that no matter how deeply he dissolves into mystery and detective work, he will not be able to escape the fundamental truth of who he is or the patterns that make his mind unique. The reemergence of his kissing tic, which he worked so hard to suppress throughout his youth, hammers home that central fact.

GOOD SANDWICHES

Lionel eventually becomes aware that Gerard Minna is dead—the "debt of [his] life" has been collected. Lionel feels a kind of guilt for his role in the larger plot surrounding the Minna brothers' death—but often tries to tell himself that the "*Rama-lama-ding-dong*" simply died peacefully in his sleep.

Lionel has gotten in deep with the underworld of New York City. While he knows how things work and assumes that The Clients must have had Gerard killed for his crimes against them, Frank, and Tony, he chooses to push aside the grimmer realities of what he's learned and feign ignorance.

A few weeks later, Danny, Gilbert, Loomis, and Lionel sit at a table in the L&L storefront in the middle of the night playing cards. Gilbert has been released from lockup—no evidence connects him to Ullman's murder. Loomis is now a driver for L&L. Danny is their de facto leader—but Lionel still has no clue what Danny does or doesn't know about Gerard and Fujisaki. L&L is now a clean detective agency—so clean that it has no clients. They still operate as a car service in order to scrape by.

Here, Lethem shows that although things have moved on, the Minna Men—what's left of them, anyway—are working to preserve their mentor's legacy while making the sacrifices to keep the business legitimate—a move that Frank, who was in too deep on all sides, could never afford to make.

Lionel is always making assertions—this, he observes, is something he has in common with detectives in detective stories. He points that assertions and generalizations—for example, the exhausted, cynical gaze of the detective—are Tourettic in nature: a way of handling, understanding, touching, and confirming the world.

In this passage, Lionel draws a comparison between himself and the tropes of detective fiction. The Tourettic impulse to understand, control, and in a way possess the world around one at any cost, is similar to the impulse of the detective archetype. Both types, Lionel suggests, are heavily tied to a desire to touch and understand the larger world—no matter what that understanding reveals about society and the people in it.

The Yorkville Zendo's students trickle away after Gerard's "disappearance." Frank Minna, Lionel says, had Minna Men—Gerard Minna only had Zen stooges. Wallace takes over the Zendo as *sensei*, or apprentice-instructor. Both Frank and Gerard's enterprises—L&L and the Zendo—are steered past corruption. Lionel learns about the changes at the Zendo from Kimmery when he sees her two weeks after his return from Maine in order to give her back her keys. Kimmery also tells Lionel that she is moving back in with her ex-boyfriend. After Kimmery delivers the news, she asks Lionel if he is okay. "Okay," he replies, repeating the word over and over again, performing tics wildly.

In informing the readers of the aftermath of the novel's events, Lethem ties up his loose ends—and demonstrates the ways in which many of the climactic, tumultuous, emotionally significant plot points of the novel simply fizzle out after the main action ends. This narrative trick ties in with the overarching theme about the futility of answers: sometimes, the answer to a mystery is anticlimactic and unfulfilling, as is everything that follows in the solution's wake.

Lionel often dreams of Minna. Though he misses him, Lionel has no desire for vengeance, having once visited the labyrinth of the underworld and come out the other side. He tries to pretend that he never rode this train—that the labyrinth is not there. He enjoys the work he does for L&L as a driver, and takes pleasure in visiting obscure, out-of-the way restaurants, such as a small **falafel** spot called Mushy's at JFK Airport, after many of his drives.

Lionel decides to take comfort and refuge in life's small things rather than concern himself with vengeance and destruction. The invocation of the symbol of food, however, ominously foreshadows that while Lionel might find temporary comfort in these distractions, the very real threat of the underworld and its dark, sprawling pull remain palpable in Lionel's life, in the lives of those around him, and in the city in which he lives.

Lionel feels sorry for those who lived than those who died—such as Julia. Guilty as he feels about what happened to her, he never tries to look for her. Lionel is haunted by other ghosts, too, such as the specter of Ullman—a man who never even appeared in Lionel's long, winding trip through the underworld. Lionel tries to remind himself that he can't feel guilty all the time about the fates of people he never happened to meet. All that's left to do, Lionel says, is to "tell your story walking."

In the novel's final lines, Lionel laments all of the unknowable things and the impossible-to-save people one encounters throughout life. At the same time, however, he uses a piece of wisdom gleaned from his mentor Frank to explain his intention to move on with his life and stay on the side of the light. All the while, he keeps about him a profound awareness of what he's seen, encouraging the reader to "tell your story walking"—that is, to accept what's happened and to keep moving forward.

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