

Patron Saints of Nothing



INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF RANDY RIBAY

Randy Ribay was born in Manila and grew up in the Midwestern United States, visiting the Philippines periodically. He received his Bachelor's in English Literature from the University of Colorado at Boulder and a Master's in Language and Literacy from the Harvard Graduate School of Education. His novels include *An Infinite Number of Parallel Universes* (2015), *After the Shot Drops* (2018), and *Patron Saints of Nothing* (2019), which was a finalist for the National Book Award for Young People's Literature. His interest in writing the novel stemmed from his experience growing up Filipino American; he hadn't read many books that explored that experience. He currently lives in Stanford, California with his wife and teaches high school English.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The events in *Patron Saints of Nothing* follow the murder of a Filipino teenager named Jun. Jun's death was tied to Filipino president Rodrigo Duterte's war on drugs, as Jun was believed to be either doing or selling drugs and was killed by a vigilante. These events in the novel refer to the very real anti-drug policy of Duterte's government, which seeks to eliminate illegal drugs in order to make the country safer, but enacts extreme and often unjustified violence in service of doing so. Duterte has sanctioned government murders of individuals suspected to be using or dealing drugs and has also encouraged the public to kill these individuals themselves, offering a bounty for dead suspects. It remains unclear exactly how many people have died because of Duterte's war on drugs, and Duterte's policies have been widely condemned by international organizations such as the United Nations and Human Rights Watch. Duterte's policies, however, seen to be largely popular within the Philippines.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Patron Saints of Nothing is a young adult novel about a Filipino American teenager. Ribay was interested in focusing on this specific experience, which he felt was missing from other young adult novels. In interviews, he's cited Sandra Cisneros's [The House on Mango Street](#) as one of his primary influences. Cisneros's novel follows a young Mexican American girl as she enters adolescence and learns more about her community and the world around her. Ribay's protagonist, Jay, is in a similar position at the start of *Patron Saints of Nothing*, as he must learn about who he is and where he belongs. While there are few

novels about Filipino American teenagers, Ribay is one of many Filipino American authors writing today; others include Erin Entrada Kelly and Elaine Castillo.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** Patron Saints of Nothing
- **When Published:** June 2019
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary
- **Genre:** Young Adult
- **Setting:** Michigan, The Philippines (specifically Manila)
- **Climax:** Jay and Grace learn that Jun was selling drugs
- **Antagonist:** Tito Maning
- **Point of View:** First person

EXTRA CREDIT

Try Again. It took Ribay five years before he secured an agent to represent his work, and during that period, he wrote four drafts of his first manuscript. Even *Patron Saints of Nothing* was rejected by many editors before finding a home at Penguin Random House.

Audience Participation. Ribay has stated in interviews that the intended audience for his work is Filipino Americans and Filipinos. Because of this, he had several Filipinos read the manuscript of *Patron Saints of Nothing* to ensure that he was depicting the novel's events accurately.



PLOT SUMMARY

Michigan high school senior Jay Reguero has just gotten into the University of Michigan but is uncertain about his life path, since he doesn't know what he wants to do as a career. Soon after Jay's acceptance, Jay's dad tells him that Jay's Filipino cousin, Jun, has died. However, Jay's dad won't say how, and there won't be a funeral. Jay is upset; Jun was the only person who Jay felt understood him, and before he died the two wrote **letters** to one another. Jay had stopped responding to Jun years ago, which he now feels guilty about, especially because Jun ran away from home after their correspondence ended.

Jay asks his mom to tell him how Jun died. Apparently, Jun had started using *shabu* (meth) and the police shot him as part of Philippine President Duterte's war on drugs. Jay didn't know about the drug war. His family left the Philippines when Jay was one and Jay is caught between worlds: his mom is white, his dad Filipino. Jay tries to open up to his friend Seth about Jun, but Seth reacts badly, telling Jay that he forgot Jay was Filipino

because Jay acts like all the white kids. This upsets Jay, who feels alone. Jay later receives a DM from an anonymous Instagram. The user claims to be Jun's friend and tells Jay that Jun "did nothing wrong." They forward Jay articles about corrupt murders in the Philippines.

Jay decides that he wants justice for Jun and convinces his parents to let him travel to the Philippines. Jay's dad talks to him first, telling him that they left the Philippines so Jay and his siblings could have a better life. He also warns Jay not to bring Jun up in front of anyone. Jay's Tita Ami comes to pick him up from the airport, and though Jay's cousin Angel is friendly, his cousin Grace is cold. At their house, Jay finds Jun's room bare. He rereads one of Jun's letters, all of which he brought with him on the trip. This letter describes a visit to the slums and shows how unhappy Jun was living with his police chief father, Tito Maning.

That night at dinner, Tito Maning insults Jay's father for letting Jay and his siblings grow up without speaking the native Filipino language of Tagalog. Later, Jay discovers that his letters from Jun are gone. He thinks that the family's maid, María, must have taken them on Tito Maning's orders. Jay breaks into Tito Maning's home office to search for the letters. They aren't there, but Jay does find Jun's name on a list and a note written in Tagalog. He takes a photo of the note before leaving.

The next day, Grace is supposed to take Jay to a museum but instead brings him to the mall, where two girls are waiting: Grace's secret girlfriend Jessa and Jessa's sister Mia. Mia and Jay spend the day together, and Jay tells her about Jun. Mia is a journalism student and offers to help Jay find answers. Jay reveals that the note he found in Tito Maning's room was from a detective who said that he'd located Jun; the detective then asked what Tito Maning wanted to do. Jay wonders whether Tito Maning gave his colleagues the go-ahead to kill Jun. After her date with Jessa, Grace tells Jay that Mia has a boyfriend, to Jay's disappointment. The next morning, the family goes to church. Jun hated the church, as he believed that they weren't doing enough to help the poor or root out abuse.

Tito Maning takes Jay on a tour of Manila. He brings Jay to several national museums and humiliates him about his lack of knowledge about Filipino politics. Tito Maning rails against American colonialism in particular, which Jay knows nothing about. Eventually, Jay asks Tito Maning what happened to Jun. Tito Maning confirms that Jun's death was drug-related and berates Jay for his distrust of Duterte's war against drugs; he claims that none of the American journalists writing about the Philippines understand what's going on. He also says that he found drugs in Jun's room four years ago and told Jun to quit or leave. Jun chose to leave. Tito Maning also says that he never took the letters. Jay can't argue with Tito Maning, because he doesn't know what's true and what's false.

Tito Maning forces Jay to leave his home, so Jay goes to stay with his Tita Chato and her partner, Tita Ines. Tita Chato tells

Jay that Tito Maning actually kicked Jun out of the house after finding marijuana without giving Jun any options. Jun then came to Tita Chato and lived with her for a year, but he unexpectedly left. Tita Chato used to be a lawyer, and she tells Jay that it's impossible to seek justice for Jun. The Filipino courts are corrupt and almost everyone supports Duterte. Later, Jay finds a business card for a bookstore in one of Jun's books and decides to follow up on it with Mia.

Mia visits Jay to tell him that she spoke to the bookstore owner, who gave her Jay's mailing address in the slums. He also mentioned a website Jay was running but wouldn't say more. Mia, Jay, and her professor Brian Santos find a young woman named Reyna living at Jun's address. Reyna tells Mia her story: she was a trafficking victim. Tita Chato runs an organization to help trafficking victims and took Reyna's case. Reyna lived at Tita Chato's with Jun before Tita Chato placed her in another household. However, a man in her new home was abusive and Jun helped Reyna escape. They fell in love and secretly moved in together. Reyna claims Jun wasn't using or dealing drugs—in fact, he helped addicts. But Reyna also says that Jun left her a year ago.

A few days later, Jay goes to the beach with Tita Chato and Tita Ines and considers his place in the Philippines: he both does and doesn't belong here. After finding Grace on social media, Jay realizes that Grace was the one who sent him the DM. She claims it was to figure out if Jay cared about Jun. Jay also realizes that Jun was running a subversive Instagram account, GISING NA PH!, which featured photos of drug war victims and was likely why he was killed. To honor Jun, Grace is now running it herself.

Everyone goes to visit Jay's grandparents. Jay finds Jun's letters in Grace's luggage. When he confronts her, she reveals that she took them to keep a tangible memory of Jun, and Jay offers to share them with her. That evening, Jay confronts Tito Maning, saying that Tito Maning lied about Jun's death. Tito Maning admits that he was keeping tabs on Jun—that's how he knows Jun was doing drugs. Jay accuses Tito Maning of murdering Jun, and Tito Maning reacts violently. He tells Jay to ask his Tito Danilo about Jun if he doesn't believe Tito Maning. Grace and Jay find Tito Danilo at church, where he works as a priest. He tells them that Jun was indeed doing drugs. In fact, Tito Maning asked Tito Danilo to help Jun recover, and Tito Maning even bribed his colleagues to take Jun off the government watchlist. Worse, Jun sold drugs, too. It was a vigilante who killed him, probably someone trying to feed their family with the government reward money. Jun is devastated: he thought learning the truth would bring justice, but instead it's ruined his memories of Jun. Grace blames herself for not noticing Jun's addiction, but she insists that Jun was still a good person. She suggests that they host a belated memorial service and Jay agrees.

At the memorial, everyone shares their memories of Jun. Even

Tita Ami speaks about her son, and Tito Maning comes to comfort her. Jay hopes that confronting Jun's death will force Tito Maning to think about the drug war's harm, and he realizes that no one is just good or just bad. Back at Tita Chato's, Mia visits Jay and tells him that Brian Santos wants her to write an article about Jun. Jay worries that readers will judge Jun for selling drugs, but Jay eventually agrees to the article as long as he and Grace can co-write it. Jay is about to return to the United States and is sad to leave Mia, even though she has a boyfriend.

Jay's dad picks him up from the airport, and Jay tells him that he wants to take a gap year to travel in the Philippines. Jay shares everything that happened with his dad, hoping to improve their relationship through honesty. Jay's father listens, and Jay realizes that truth can heal.



CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Jay Reguero – Jay Reguero is a seventeen-year-old high school senior who was born in the Philippines, moved to Michigan when he was one, and was Jun's cousin. Jay was recently accepted into the University of Michigan but feels conflicted about going to college at the start of the novel; he doesn't know what he wants to study or do as a career. His grief over Jun's death exacerbates his feelings of helplessness and alienation, especially because his mom and dad insist that he doesn't understand the circumstances of Jun's murder, which had something to do with the Philippine drug war. Meanwhile, Jay feels guilty because he stopped responding to Jun's **letters** years earlier and believes that this might have put Jun on the path that led to his death. When Jay learns that Jun could have been wrongfully murdered, he travels to the Philippines to figure out what happened. Everyone in Jay's family seems content to forget about Jun, especially Jay's police chief uncle, Tito Maning, but Jay is uniquely determined to discover the truth. Part of Jay's determination stems from his genuine empathy and kindness. He's a curious, caring person and doesn't think that Jun deserved to die. But Jay is also figuring out his own identity in the process of learning more about Jun—he wants to discover where he belongs, since he feels caught between his American and Filipino heritages and doesn't know much about the Philippines. In the Philippines, with the help of his cousin Grace and Grace's journalist friend Mia, Jay eventually learns that Jun was selling drugs, which means that he wasn't as innocent as Jay believed him to be. At the end of the novel, Jay must come to terms with the fact that no one is just good or bad, and that Jun's death was a tragedy regardless of the circumstances that led to it. Jay ends up choosing to take a gap year and return to the Philippines before going to college. He also begins to open up to his dad about his feelings and about Jun, which suggests that he wants to avoid

the alienation Jun felt prior to his death.

Jun – Jun is Jay Reguero's Filipino cousin, Tito Maning and Tita Ami's estranged son, and Grace and Angel's brother. He was shot and killed by a vigilante prior to the start of the novel. Jun was a deeply intelligent and thoughtful person. He and Jay frequently wrote **letters** to one another when they were young, and Jay notes that Jun was one of very few people he could really talk to. Jun often expressed frustration with the hypocrisy of others, especially his police chief father, the government, and the Catholic church. He believed that the church wasn't doing enough to help people in poverty and that the Philippine drug war was harming more than it was helping. At some point, Tito Maning found marijuana in Jun's room and kicked him out of the house. Jun went to stay at Tita Chato's house, where he fell in love with Reyna, a trafficking victim that Tita Chato's organization was helping. He and Reyna then went to live together in the slums. Around the same time, Jun began an Instagram account to share photos of the drug war's victims, which would have been hugely subversive. At the start of the novel, Jay and Grace believe that this account is why Jun was murdered and that Tito Maning had something to do with his death. However, they later discover that Jun had left Reyna a year before his death and was using and selling drugs. Meanwhile, Tito Maning actually tried to help Jun despite their strained relationship. This revelation complicates Jun's character: he was kind, thoughtful, and frustrated by the government's policies, but he was also hypocritical himself, since he sold drugs that would have hurt other people. Ultimately, learning the truth about Jun forces Jay to come to terms with the fact that a person can be many things at once.

Tito Maning – Tito Maning is Jay Reguero's uncle, father to Grace, Angel, and Jun, and husband to Tita Ami. Tito Maning is also a police chief, strongly believes in the Philippine drug war, and is deeply proud of his country. He's a domineering presence in his family and closely monitors the lives of his wife and children, though Grace and Angel secretly rebel against his orders. Jay dislikes his uncle because Tito Maning frequently insults Jay's dad and Jay for abandoning their Filipino heritage. For a large chunk of the novel, Jay also believes that Tito Maning was either indirectly or directly responsible for Jun's murder. Tito Maning had kicked Jun out of the house years earlier because he found marijuana in Jun's room, and Jay believes that Tito Maning used his governmental position to sign off on Jun's murder. Jay also thinks that Tito Maning stole Jun's **letters** to Jay, though Jay can't figure out why—Tito Maning seems to be trying to think about Jun as little as possible, since he forbade the family from talking about him and didn't hold a funeral. Jay tries to confront his uncle about Jun but is confused by Tito Maning's strong loyalty to the government, which Jay can't effectively argue against given his lack of political knowledge. Eventually, Jay learns that Tito Maning had actually tried to help Jun with his drug addiction

prior to Jun's death and had bribed someone to get Jun off a government watchlist. This discovery forces Jay to accept that people are contradictory: Tito Maning is cruel, but he also loved his son as much as he was able to. At the end of the novel, Tito Maning attends Jun's makeshift memorial, and Jay hopes that openly acknowledging Jun's murder forces Tito Maning to think about how the Philippine drug war is hurting people.

Grace – Grace is Jay Reguero's fifteen-year-old cousin, Tito Maning and Tita Ami's daughter, and Angel and Jun's sister. When Jay first arrives in the Philippines, Grace treats him with cold suspicion and seems to be ignoring Jun's death as much as her mother and father are. However, Jay later learns that Grace often defies her father's orders. She's secretly dating a girl named Jessa and took over Jun's subversive Instagram account after his death, posting photos of drug war victims. In fact, Grace was the one who spurred Jay to come to the Philippines: she sent Jay an anonymous Instagram DM that implied that Jun was wrongfully murdered. She also stole Jay's **letters** (from Jun to Jay) when Jay arrived because they made her feel closer to her now-dead brother. Grace is mature, serious, brave, and clearly admired her brother's subversive political beliefs; she frequently met up with him even after he was kicked out of their house. For most of the novel, Grace assumes that Jun was murdered because of his Instagram account. However, Jay and Grace eventually learn that Jun was using and selling drugs before his death and that this is why a vigilante killed him. Grace partly blames herself for not seeing that Jun was an addict. Like Jay, she must come to terms with the fact that Jun was many things at once, not all of them good. At the end of the novel, she openly acknowledges her brother's death, something she'd hidden from outsiders like Jessa, and defies her father by giving Jun a memorial.

Tita Chato – Tita Chato is Jay Reguero's aunt, sister to Jay's dad, Tito Maning, and Tito Danilo, and the partner of Tita Ines. Tita Chato is Tito Maning's opposite in many ways: she doesn't support the Philippine drug war and took Jun in after Tito Maning kicked him out of the house, which caused her and Tito Maning to cut off contact with one another. In addition, while Tito Maning's relationship with his wife, Tita Ami, is sometimes strained, Tita Chato's relationship with Tita Ines is comfortable and happy. Tita Chato used to be a lawyer and now runs an organization that helps girls escape trafficking. One of her clients was Reyna, who later fell in love with Jun and ended up secretly living with him after Jun ran away from Tita Chato's home. Although Tita Chato is grieved by Jun's death and openly acknowledges the horrors of the drug war, she's also practical and knows that the family can't seek justice for Jun, given the corruption of the Philippine courts. This is something Jay has a hard time coming to terms with.

Jay's Dad – Jay's dad (Jay's mom's husband) is the brother of Tito Maning, Tita Chato, and Tito Danilo and the father of Jay, Emily, and Chris. He and his wife left the Philippines when Jay

was one, and he now works as a NICU nurse in Michigan. Jay's dad spearheaded the family's move from the Philippines, which caused a rift in his relationship with Tito Maning. Tito Maning believes that Jay's dad doesn't raise his children with enough awareness of their heritage. For instance, Jay doesn't speak the Filipino language of Tagalog and knows very little about his home country. Jay and his father also have a strained relationship, both because Jay's dad is naturally quiet and reserved and because he doesn't want Jay to fixate on the Philippines. He avoids speaking with Jay about Jun's death, which angers Jay. However, Jay opens up to his dad at the end of the novel, hoping to rebuild their relationship so that they don't end up estranged (the way Jun was with Tito Maning before Jun's death). In turn, Jay's dad learns to listen to his son.

Mia – Mia is the sister of Grace's girlfriend Jessa and the journalism student of professor Brian Santos. Mia and Jay meet because Grace and Jessa needed someone to keep Jay occupied during their date, but Jay and Mia end up becoming friends and allies because Mia helps Jay discover the truth about Jun's final days. Together with Brian Santos, they visit Jun's ex-girlfriend Reyna and Mia encourages Jay to confront Tito Maning about his involvement in Jun's murder. Mia is outgoing, funny, intelligent, and deeply values honesty and truth. Her work as a journalism student puts her in danger because she wants to report on government corruption and the horrors of the drug war. She and Jay develop crushes on one another, but Mia has a boyfriend, so their relationship doesn't progress. At the end of the novel, Mia suggests that she and Jay work on an article about Jun together, which he agrees to in the hopes that doing so will keep Jun's memory alive.

Reyna – Reyna was Jun's girlfriend prior to his death. She was also a victim of sex trafficking and was later aided by Tita Chato's organization, which is how she and Jun met. Tita Chato's organization inadvertently placed her with an abusive man, and while she tried to go to Tita Chato for help, she ended up accidentally confessing everything to Jun instead. Jun immediately helped her find a new place to live and later moved in with her. They kept their relationship a secret because Jun feared he had overstepped his boundaries by getting involved with one of Tita Chato's clients and because Reyna didn't want to depend on Tita Chato's kindness any further, something that confuses Jay. When they find and visit Reyna, Jay and Mia learn that Jun left Reyna a year before his death without explaining why. Reyna was adamant that Jun was not using or dealing drugs, which ends up not being true—eventually, Jay learns that Jun left Reyna because he had become an addict and didn't want to drag her down or endanger her.

Tito Danilo – Tito Danilo is Jay's uncle and brother to Tito Maning, Jay's dad, and Tita Chato. He's a Catholic priest who works in a remote parish. Tito Danilo is kind, gentle, and empathetic. Eventually, Jay learns that Tito Danilo was one of the last people to see Jun before he died. He's also the one to

tell Jay and Grace that Jun had by that point become an addict and was selling drugs. Even more surprisingly, Tito Maning had called Tito Danilo and asked him to help Jun recover. Tito Danilo also reveals that Jun was killed by a vigilante, not by the government. Before his death, Jun was disappointed by Tito Danilo's decision to join the church, because Jun believed that the Catholic church was inherently corrupt. While Tito Danilo is saddened by Jun's death, Jay comes to believe that Jun was partly right about Tito Danilo's hypocrisy, because Tito Danilo believes that the church has no responsibility to the victims of the drug war. At the end of the novel, Tito Danilo assists in the memorial that Jay and Grace hold for Jun and insists that Jun's goodness will be remembered. This helps Jay come to terms with the fact that people can be good and bad at the same time.

Jay's Mom – Jay's mom (Jay's dad's wife) is the mother of Jay, Emily, and Chris. She spent some time living in the Philippines with Jay's dad, but the family moved to Michigan when Jay was one (at Jay's dad's urging). She now works as an oncologist in the same hospital as Jay's dad. Jay's mom grew up in America and is white, so she can't fully understand Jay's situation. At the beginning of the novel, Jay begs his mother to tell him how Jun died, because his father is tight-lipped about even the cause of death. She eventually relents and explains the political situation in the Philippines, including the drug war, which is why Jun was murdered. However, she insists that Jay can't fully understand what's going on in the Philippines. Jay later asks his mom and his dad to allow him to travel to the Philippines alone, and his mom agrees, not realizing that Jay wants to solve Jun's murder. Jay's mom clearly cares a great deal about her son and wants Jay's dad to open up to Jay more. This does end up happening at the end of the novel, though it's because Jay decides to share his feelings with his dad and has little to do with Jay's mom's urging.

Angel – Angel is Jay's twelve-year-old cousin, Grace and Jun's sister, and the daughter of Tito Maning and Tita Ami. Angel is friendly, talkative, and deeply interested in Jay's life in America. Although she and Grace appear to defer to Tito Maning's authority in all matters, Jay later discovers that they're secretly rebellious. For instance, Angel helps Jay when he's looking for the **letters** that he believes Tito Maning stole, and she and Grace continued to see Jun even after their brother was kicked out of the house. She and Grace were deeply saddened by Jun's departure and later by his death, but they decided to keep quiet about it since it upset Tito Maning deeply.

Tita Ami – Tita Ami is Jay's aunt, the wife of Tito Maning, and the mother of Grace, Angel, and Jun. Tita Ami is pretty deferential to Tito Maning, who is a domineering presence in the family. She and Tito Maning definitely see eye-to-eye on most matters, including the drug war. Tita Ami occasionally tries to convince her husband to be kinder to Jay, but she's cold to Jay herself. However, Tita Ami later participates in Jun's memorial service by lighting a candle and speaking about him,

something that her husband had forbidden. Tito Maning ends up being supportive of this memorial, which suggests that he and Tita Ami will finally be able to move on from Jay's death now that they're able to openly grieve him.

Brian Santos – Brian Santos is Mia's journalism professor. He's an investigative journalist and has reported on many serious topics, including child trafficking and the drug war. This puts him in a vulnerable position because the government doesn't like his reporting, but he's brave and ignores the threats he constantly receives. Mia ends up asking him to help her and Jay track down Jun's girlfriend, Reyna, in the slums. Brian Santos is impressed by Jay's tenacity and curiosity and suggests that Jay become a journalist someday. He encourages Mia to write about Jun's story, which she decides to do with Jay's assistance.

Seth – Seth is Jay's best friend in Michigan. He's a stoner and a bit of a slacker, but he's also intelligent and wants to study computer science. Jay and Seth care about one another, but the two rarely talk about their lives or feelings. As a result, Jay feels like he can't talk to Seth about Jun's death or about his grief. Jay does eventually try to broach the topic, but Seth reacts badly; he tells Jay that he'd almost forgotten Jay was Filipino because Jay is "basically white." This only makes Jay feel more isolated and alone, because Seth can't understand his experience. This is a pattern that continues throughout the novel. For instance, Jay wants to message Seth while he's in the Philippines and tell him about everything that's going on, but Seth insults the Philippines by reducing the country to its slums, so Jay doesn't share anything with him.

Em – Em (short for Emily) is the middle sister in Jay's family. She's a current student at Michigan State University studying graphic design, to the disappointment of Tito Maning. She and Jay have a decent relationship, but they're not particularly close, and she doesn't understand his grief at Jun's death. Her dismissive reaction hurts Jay's feelings and solidifies his belief that Jun is the only person who really understood him.

Chris – Chris is Jay and Emily's brother and the son of Jay's dad and Jay's mom. Chris is the oldest of the three siblings and ended up going to Harvard before becoming an engineer. Jay feels pressure to live up to his older brother and was disappointed to be rejected from Harvard. Jay doesn't talk to Chris much, because Chris is often busy with his new boyfriend.

Tita Ines – Tita Ines is Tita Chato's partner. She and Tita Chato agree that the Philippine drug war is harmful and have a happy, loving relationship. She also loved Jun and was saddened by his decision to leave their home, where he was staying after Tito Maning kicked him out of his house.

María – María is a maid and works for Tito Maning's family. She doesn't speak English or Tagalog, which causes Tito Maning to ridicule her to Jay and treat her rudely. Her skin is much darker than anyone in Tito Maning's family as well. At first, Jay believes

that María stole Jun's **letters** to Jay on Tito Maning's orders, and he can't figure out how to communicate with her to get them back. Later, he discovers that María was not in fact the thief.

Lolo – Lolo is the grandfather of Jay, Jun, Grace, Angel, Emily, and Chris, the father of Jay's dad, Tito Maning, Tito Danilo, and Tita Chato, and the husband of Jay's grandmother, whom Jay calls Lola. Jay and his family lived with Lolo and Lola when Jay was born before moving to the United States. Lolo and Lola live in a rural area of the Philippines without cell service or Internet, far from Manila. It's difficult for Lolo and Jay to communicate, because Lolo's English isn't great and Jay doesn't speak Tagalog.

Lola – Lola is the grandmother of Jay, Jun, Grace, Angel, Emily, and Chris, the mother of Jay's dad, Tito Maning, Tito Danilo, and Tita Chato, and the wife of Jay's grandfather, whom Jay calls Lola. She and Lolo live in a rural part of the Philippines far from Manila (which is where Tito Maning and his family live). At the end of the novel, she and Lolo help host a memorial for Jun in their backyard.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Jessa – Jessa is Grace's secret girlfriend and Mia's sister. Jessa is outgoing and loves social media. Her relationship with Grace is her longest relationship so far, but the two have a falling out when Jessa learns that Grace kept Jun's existence a secret from her.

Tomas – Tomas is a driver and works for Tito Maning's family. He's the only person who's immediately kind and friendly to Jay when Jay arrives in the Philippines. Tito Maning and Tita Ami are polite to Tomas but generally dismissive of him.

TERMS

Balibkayan box – The word *balibkayan* literally translates to “return to country” in Tagalog and refers to a Filipino individual who comes back to the Philippines after a period of at least a year abroad. A *balibkayan* box is a box that a *balibkayan* would bring back home to the Philippines with them. The objects in these boxes vary, and they tend to be things that the recipient would want or need or like, regardless of value—for instance, clothes, toys, or nonperishable foods. *Balibkayan* boxes also tend to include objects that can't be purchased easily in the Philippines. In *Patron Saints of Nothing*, **Jay's dad** packs *balibkayan* boxes for **Jay** to take to his family in the Philippines. At first, Jay's **Tito Maning** prevents Jay from unpacking one of his *balibkayan* boxes (part of the tradition of the *balibkayan* box is distributing the items to the recipients). As Jay becomes more confident in his Filipino identity, though, he starts to take part in traditions like the distribution of the *balibkayan* box's items.



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.



TRUTH, ADOLESCENCE, AND JUSTICE

Patron Saints of Nothing centers around a high school senior named Jay Reguero. When Jay's cousin Jun dies in the Philippines, Jay travels there to discover the truth about Jun's final days. In his youthful ignorance, Jay assumes that Jun's death has a simple explanation, that justice is possible, and that those around Jun fall neatly into categories of “good” and “bad.” But as Jay untangles the causes of Jun's death, he comes to learn that things aren't quite so clear cut and that in some ways truth can be painful or dangerous. By presenting Jay's coming-of-age alongside his investigation, the novel suggests that pursuing truth—and accepting that truth can sometimes be messy—is part of growing up and moving forward after tragedy.

At first, Jay naively believes that there's a simple explanation for Jun's death, and that if he just unearths that explanation, then justice will naturally follow. The initial story is that Jun was killed in the Philippines because he was using and/or dealing drugs (his murder was part of President Duterte's war on drugs), but Jay receives a mysterious message from one of Jun's friends, who insists that this isn't true and that Jun did “nothing wrong.” As a result, Jay believes that Jun's death was unjust and must be solved. Later, Jay comes to suspect that Jun's father, a police chief whom Jay calls Tito Maning (“Tito” means “uncle” in the Philippines), is covering up what happened to his son. Jay then works with a young journalist, Mia, to spy on Tito Maning, believing that there's a hidden explanation for what happened to Jun. He's playacting as a detective, but his know-how is rudimentary, and he assumes everyone can be classified as either good or bad. Jay also believes that if he figures out what happened to Jun, justice will be served and Jun's murderer will face consequences for their actions. This belief stems from Jay's youthful naiveté. He knows very little about the war on drugs in the Philippines and thinks that his family “owes” it to Jun to try Jun's case in court in order to enact justice.

But the truth about Jun's death ends up being more complicated than Jay thought, and knowing that truth at first ruins Jay's memory of Jun. While Jun's anonymous friend claimed that Jun was innocent of any crime, Jay begins to discover that Jun was not quite so innocent. For instance, Jay and Mia learn that Jun was living with a girlfriend prior to his death, but he left her without an explanation. Discovering this

forces Jay to acknowledge that Jun has done immoral things. Later, Jay learns that Jun was running an Instagram account dedicated to the victims of the drug war, and Jay believes that this is why Jun was killed. But Jay's Tito Danilo later reveals that Jun was also using and dealing drugs, and that this is why Jun was murdered. It was easier for Jay to believe that Jun was murdered for his activism, but the truth is more complex, as Jun worked against his own cause by selling drugs. Jay feels that by learning what really happened to Jun, he's "lost him all over again," because Jun isn't who Jay thought he was. Meanwhile, Jay assumed that Tito Maning caused Jun's death, first by kicking his son out of the house and then by allowing the police to kill him. But Tito Danilo tells Jay that Tito Maning asked him to help Jun get off drugs and initially bribed the government to take Jun off a watchlist. Tito Maning genuinely cared about his son, meaning that Maning isn't purely villainous. Jay also realizes that even if they somehow tracked down the man who actually killed Jun, justice will never be served. His aunt, a lawyer, explains that courts in the Philippines are corrupt, and that putting the case on trial could cause the family to become government targets. In this case, knowing the truth would be useless, and it might even be dangerous to speak that truth out loud.

While Jay is forced to realize that the truth can be complicated, he also comes to see that it's worth pursuing regardless—acknowledging what happened to Jun helps the family move forward. Jun realizes that, even if Jun sold drugs, this doesn't mean he's an entirely bad person. No one is just "one thing"—even so-called "bad" people do good things, and vice versa. Coming to this more nuanced understanding of human nature allows Jay to partially repair his relationship with Tito Maning. Jay hopes that openly acknowledging how Jun died will force Tito Maning to at least consider how the war on drugs, which his police force is enforcing, is harming others. Jay understands that Jun's situation was morally complex, and he hopes Maning will see his police force's own actions in a similarly nuanced light. After Jay learns that drugs were involved in Jun's death, he and his cousin Grace put on a memorial service for Jun, something that Tito Maning had forbidden. Though the family previously refused to speak about Jun, they openly share their memories of him, and Jay feels his sadness about Jun's death "subside." Without knowing the truth behind Jun's death, the family could never have moved forward, even though that truth wasn't what Jay thought it would be.

When Jay returns home to Michigan, he decides to be more honest with his dad, with whom he's always had a strained relationship. Because Jay just witnessed an extreme example of a strained father-son relationship (Jun and Maning) and learned that people are often more complex than they seem, Jay opens up to his father. He shares his uncertainties about the future, and his father listens and tries to understand—a

healing process that Jay refers to as "salvation through honesty." This, the book suggests, is the ultimate mark of Jay's newfound maturity: Jay is now able to pursue the truth, even when it's uncomfortable and complicated, and to use that truth as a means of moving forward after loss.



RESPONSIBILITY, GUILT, AND BLAME

Patron Saints of Nothing initially appears to be a murder mystery: high schooler Jay Reguero is determined to find his cousin Jun's killer, and he travels from Michigan to the Philippines to do so. Though Jay is aware that the murder could have been government-ordered, his desire assumes that a single person killed Jun and that this person can be blamed for his death. Eventually, Jay learns that everyone, himself included, had some part to play in Jun's death, and no one person is responsible. By presenting a complicated mystery without a clear solution, the novel suggests that everyone may be responsible for those around them, but that doesn't mean there's an easy person to blame.

As Jay digs into Jun's death, he realizes that in a way, everyone is responsible for it—including Jay and his family—but no one person can shoulder blame. In part, Jay's truth-seeking stems from a place of guilt: he's concerned that he is indirectly responsible for Jun's murder. He stopped responding to Jun's **letters** years ago, something which clearly hurt Jun. Around this time, Jun ran away from home, which effectively cut off all communication between the cousins for good and put Jun on the path that led to his death. Jay now worries that there's something he and his parents "could have done" for Jun, even from a distance, and he feels guilty about his earlier dismissal of his cousin. Like Jay, Jun's family dismissed hints about Jun's unhappiness and allowed that unhappiness to continue. Jun's father, Tito Maning, kicked Jun out of the house after finding weed in Jun's room. Though Tito Maning later tried to get Jun help for his developing drug addiction, his initial dismissal of his son—who was miserable as a teenager—set the events in motion that would eventually lead to his death. Even worse, Tito Maning's enforcement of the government's anti-drug policies as a police chief helped create an unsafe environment for runaways like Jun. Meanwhile, Jun's sister, Grace, worries that she should have seen "signs" of Jun's addiction and helped him. This guilt isn't productive, and Grace might never have seen how unhappy Jun was; Jay notes that family members are adept at hiding things from each other. But it's true that Jun needed someone to listen to him and that no one—including Jay—was able to. With this, the book suggests that while the family shouldn't be blamed for Jun's death, they nevertheless can't be completely absolved of that death either.

Jun's death was also the result of systemic problems, including widespread poverty and governmental corruption in the Philippines, so no one person can be identified as "guilty." As it turns out, Jun's murder wasn't government-ordered after all.

His actual murderer was an unknown vigilante, who would have been paid by the government for the kill. Jay's Tito Danilo tells him that this murderer was likely trying to "feed his family" and that someone would have killed Jun eventually, since Jun was selling drugs. In the most literal sense, this vigilante is responsible for Jun's death, but it's difficult to put all the blame on him, since so many factors would have led to the confrontation between him and Jun: the government's policies, Jun's family dynamics, Jun's own decisions, and the vigilante's poverty. Learning the identity of Jun's murderer should have closed the case, but it doesn't do that for Jay, since the murderer really wasn't the sole party responsible. If anyone is actually "responsible" for Jun's death, the book suggests, it's Rodrigo Duterte, president of the Philippines; Duterte's war on drugs has led to thousands of government-sanctioned murders. But of course, Duterte wasn't directly involved in Jun's death, and as Jay learns, the Filipino people endow Duterte with power—his policies are popular, and few Filipinos believe the murders should stop. There's no way to blame a single governmental individual for Jun's death, even if the government as a whole is responsible. This is unfortunately convenient for the government, but it also means that Jay will never find easy, straightforward answers. Even though the war on drugs led to Jun's death, there are countless factors involved, and it's not as simple as one man ordering a murder.

Because there's no simple explanation for Jun's death—at least not one that definitively places blame on one person—Jay doesn't know, ultimately, who was "responsible." All he can do is honor Jun's memory and take responsibility for the things in his control. Jay decides to contribute to an article about Jun to share his story, and he chooses to open up to his own father, hoping to avoid the same family dynamics that led to Jun's unhappiness. With this ending, the novel implies that even if there's no one person to blame for taking the life of another, everyone should take responsibility for their role in each other's lives.



CULTURE AND BELONGING

The protagonist of *Patron Saints of Nothing*, Jay Reguero, was born in the Philippines but moved to the United States when he was one. As a result, he feels stuck between two worlds and two cultures. The fact that he's about to graduate high school exacerbates this feeling, as he isn't sure what he wants to do after he finishes school or where he wants to live. Meanwhile, other people constantly try to tell Jay where he does and doesn't belong, both in the United States and during his trip to the Philippines. After the events of the novel, Jay decides to take a gap year after high school and travel in the Philippines to better understand his identity and heritage. With this ending, the novel suggests that it's up to an individual to decide where they belong, and that it's okay for the answer to be complicated.

At home in the United States, Jay feels some degree of alienation from those around him. He has just been accepted into the University of Michigan but isn't excited about going to college. He has no idea what he wants to do career-wise, but he feels that he's expected to know. There's no one he can talk to about this, because he and his best friend, Seth, never have "deep" conversations. Jay feels alone, because he doesn't know where he belongs or what his future will look like. Later, Jay's alienation becomes cultural as well as personal. After Jay learns about his cousin Jun's death, he begins reading about drug war in the Philippines and is alarmed to realize how much he doesn't know about his home country. Seth amplifies this alarm when he refers to Jay as being "basically white" because Jay acts the same as white boys at school. This upsets Jay, who feels that Seth can't understand him or his experience. Even Jay's parents can't fully understand the specific position he's in. Jay's mom, who is white, insists that Jay doesn't know and can't fully grasp what's happening in the Philippines. Meanwhile, Jay's dad says that the family left the Philippines so that Jay could have a life in the United States, so Jay shouldn't fixate on his home country. Jay's older siblings are no longer living at home, so Jay is stuck in between his parents, who can't seem to relate to his feelings of isolation and alienation.

Later, after traveling to the Philippines with a plan to investigate Jun's death, Jay feels some degree of cultural dissonance, even as he also believes he belongs there. Jay doesn't speak Tagalog or know much about the Philippines, which leads him to believe that he only knows "half of [himself]." When he stays at his Tito Maning's home, these barriers lead to him being intentionally left out of conversations and resented by his uncle, who feels that Jay's father abandoned his Filipino culture when he moved to the United States. In fact, his uncle thinks that because Jay doesn't know the Filipino language of Tagalog—his "mother tongue"—he can't know himself. As a result, Jay feels alone even when he's with his Filipino family.

After Jay learns that Jun was murdered, he immediately wants to learn who killed him and seek justice. However, others—including his aunt—constantly tell him that not only doesn't he understand the situation in the Philippines, but that he *can't* understand it because he grew up in the United States. This frustrates Jay, as he feels that doing the right thing should "transcend nationality." Still, Jay's lack of understanding about Filipino politics does in fact prevent him from separating truth and lies: when he confronts Tito Maning, Jun's father and a police chief, about Jay's death, Tito Maning begins to defend the government, and Jay can't tell whether Tito Maning is telling the truth or lying. Jay's separation from the Philippines leads to him feeling not only alone but helpless. At the same time, Jay feels that he belongs in the Philippines as much as any of his family does. He resembles everyone else in the country, and he was born in the country, even though he moved away when he was too young to really remember. Still, he feels like

“that first year mattered,” because he recognizes the Philippines on some innate level, even if he doesn’t necessarily remember it. Although Jay feels isolated from his family in certain ways, he also feels that he belongs in the Philippines, which leads to some internal confusion. Jay is at home in two countries, but he doesn’t quite fit in in either place.

Ultimately, Jay realizes that only he can decide where he belongs, and that the answer isn’t necessarily simple. While he doesn’t end the novel with a perfect understanding of the Philippines, he comes to identify himself both as Filipino and American and decides to return to the Philippines for a gap year before—possibly—going to college. Jay embraces his own in-between identity and uses it to assert his belonging in two different places, something he had to decide to do.



DEATH AND MEANING

Patron Saints of Nothing centers around the death of Jay Reguero’s cousin Jun. Jay is initially crippled by grief but resolves to find out who murdered Jun,

and more importantly, to travel to the Philippines and figure out why Jun died. Jay seems to believe that Jun’s death will then mean something—that Jun won’t have died for nothing if the mystery of his murder is solved, and that some positive resolution will follow. But ultimately, Jun’s death doesn’t end up “meaning” anything—at least not in the way Jay wants it to—and Jay must learn to remember and honor Jun anyway. By demonstrating Jay’s growing understanding about death, the novel suggests that even if someone’s death served no larger purpose, it’s still important to remember and mourn them, even though the loss might be harder to accept.

When the novel begins, Jay believes that death has a deeper meaning or happens for some larger purpose, and so he thinks that this must be true for Jun’s death, too. Early on, Jay recalls a childhood memory in which he attempted to care for a stray puppy while visiting the Philippines. The puppy ended up dying, and Jay was distraught about it. Jay’s mom comforted him by telling him that when “one thing dies [...] another is born.” At the time, this doesn’t stop Jay from being sad, but it does inform his attitude toward death throughout the novel: he wants something good to come out of a bad situation. While visiting the Philippines, Jay finds out that Jun was running an Instagram account that shared photos of victims of the government’s war on drugs. This account would have been hugely subversive, both because of the general public’s apathetic attitude toward those victims and because the government is trying to hide how many victims there are. Jay assumes that Jun’s activism via this social media account put him on a government watchlist and later got him murdered. If that’s the case, Jun died a martyr, fighting for some larger cause. This would prove Jay’s mother right: something good *can* emerge from something bad, and death often has a deeper meaning or reason behind it, which makes it easier to accept.

In the end, Jun’s death doesn’t end up having “meaning” in the way Jay hopes it will. In general, Filipinos’ attitude toward death isn’t the same as Jay’s. Jay remembers that after the puppy died, his extended family was unmoved: they didn’t think much about the puppy, and Jay’s uncle, Tito Maning, quickly and simply disposed of the body. Jay imagines that none of his cousins would have been told growing up that death has meaning. He encounters this attitude throughout the novel—his extended family grieves Jun, but they don’t seek out the hidden meaning behind his death the way Jay does. That’s likely because they don’t think Jun’s death has any inherent meaning. Later, Jay finds out that Jun didn’t die a martyr as he initially believed. Jun’s Instagram account may have put him on a government watchlist, but a vigilante killed him because he was selling drugs, so the Instagram account didn’t seem to factor into the murder.

Jun’s death therefore had no larger meaning, and he didn’t die for a cause he believed in—in fact, he may have been actively hurting that cause by selling drugs, something Jay has a hard time processing. As readers learn, Jun was concerned with systemic problems, whether that meant the Catholic Church’s hypocrisy, or the causes of the war on drugs (such as widespread poverty). He wanted addicts to be rehabilitated and drug dealers to be put to work, since most are just trying to feed their families. He also wanted the government to be held responsible for the murders they sanction. None of that changed because of his death, and again, he may have been part of the very system he wanted to dismantle. Selling drugs certainly complicates his moral position as someone who wanted drug addicts to be rehabilitated. In other words, his death wasn’t meaningful in any simple way. Nothing good seemed to immediately stem from it, and it was mired in moral complexities. That makes it harder for Jay to accept and process.

However, Jay is still able to find ways to honor Jun, even if his death doesn’t have “meaning” and is therefore harder to accept. In many ways, Jun’s subversive Instagram account—which his sister decides to take over—provides a manual for how to honor the dead without deriving any larger conclusions from their deaths. The Instagram account features victims of the war on drugs so that people will remember they exist and think about them, but it doesn’t imply that they died for a reason—in fact, it implies the exact opposite. No matter who they were or what they were doing when they died, the victims’ lives had value, while their deaths were tragic. Along with his journalist friend Mia, Jay decides to co-write an article about his experience learning Jun’s story and about Jun’s connection to the drug war. Jay hopes that if they publish it, Jun will live on to some degree. His death still won’t “mean” anything, but his family will remember him and so will strangers. The article will honor the person Jun was but won’t suggest that his death served a larger purpose. Meanwhile, Jun’s family, spurred by Jay and Jun’s sister Grace, decide to host a memorial service

for him, something they weren't initially going to do. At this service, people honor Jun by sharing their memories of him and his many contradictions. Their grief stems from the fact that they loved and now miss Jun. Though the family is Catholic, no one claims that Jun's death was part of a larger plan, which would make it easier to process. Instead, the family focuses their efforts on honoring his memory, which the novel implies is important whether or not his death had some profound meaning or purpose.



SYMBOLS

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



THE LETTERS

When Jun and Jay are children, they write letters to one another. Though Jay eventually stops responding, he saves these letters, which come to represent his memory of Jun. In the letters, Jun shares his hopes, fears, and frustrations about his family and the political climate in the Philippines. When Jay travels to the Philippines, he takes the letters along, but they're stolen from his bag when he arrives. He at first believes the culprit is his uncle, Tito Maning, but he can't understand why Tito Maning would want the letters—he's a police chief, and Jay suspects that he may have been involved in Jun's death, but the letters wouldn't have anything to do with that. Still, the letters do reflect Jun as a person, which would complicate Tito Maning's job and conflict with his image of Jun as a drug addict.

Later, however, Jay discovers that Jun's sister, Grace, stole the letters. The family had been trying to forget about Jun, never mentioning him. The letters helped Grace remember her brother and served as a physical reminder of his life, making him "alive again in a way." This memory becomes more complicated once Jay and Grace learn that Jun was, in fact, a drug dealer, which they hadn't previously believed. This means that Jay wasn't necessarily the pure soul they remember. The letters take on a new meaning: they reflect Jun as he really was, not as they saw him or as others remember him. Through the letters, Jun becomes "alive again" in an entirely new way—if anything, Jay and Grace understand and see Jun more clearly now than they did when he was alive.



QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Penguin Books edition of *Patron Saints of Nothing* published in 2020.

Prologue Quotes

☞ At that point in my life, I had encountered death only in fiction. I had heard about other people's relatives dying. But I had never seen death up close. I had never held it.

"Listen," Mom said in that moment, hugging me closer. So I did. Baby birds chirped just outside the window. "One thing dies, and another is born. Maybe the puppy's soul now has wings."

Related Characters: Jay Reguero, Jay's Mom (speaker)

Related Themes: 

Page Number: XV-XVI

Explanation and Analysis

Here, 10-year-old Jay tries to care for a neglected puppy during a trip to the Philippines but is distraught when the puppy dies anyways. Because this is Jay's first experience with death, it affects him deeply. Jay's mom's impulse is to soothe her son's pain by suggesting that death isn't all bad. To comfort Jay, she tells him that good things can directly stem from tragedy: the puppy died, but its "soul" flew away and created the baby birds. This means that the puppy's death had meaning and purpose, as it was part of the broader circle of life. Obviously, this isn't true—the birds would likely have been born before the puppy died, and the puppy's death has nothing to do with their existence.

When the novel picks back up again years later, it's clear that Jay had permanently internalized the message. As the novel progresses, Jay (now a teenager) imagines that his cousin Jun's tragic death has some innate meaning or purpose, the same way the puppy's death had meaning and purpose according to Jay's mom. But as Jay painfully learns, Jun's death was the result of many complicated factors and didn't "mean" anything, nor did anything good come out of it. (Jun died because he was selling drugs and was targeted by the government in the midst of their war on drugs.) Assuming that Jun died for a reason only ends up hurting Jay, who struggles to process a meaningless death.

However, Jay eventually realizes that even though Jun's death didn't "mean" anything or generate anything good, there's still good in a world without him. It's possible that this is what Jay's mom is trying to say in this passage: by having Jay listen to the baby birds, she might be reminding Jay that good things still exist amidst the bad, and that life goes on after death.

An Improvement to Society Quotes

☝ “Do you lie to your patients?” I ask.

She raises her eyebrows. “Not to my patients, but sometimes to their families, yes.”

“You serious?”

She nods. “Sometimes my patients want me to lie for them. Nothing out of line. Mostly they want me to say something in a way that will give their loved ones relief. Or at least, something that won't leave them with too much despair.”

I shake my head. Unbelievable.

“If I have a patient who is dying slowly and painfully, and he asks me to tell his family that he won't suffer in his final moments, what am I supposed to do?”


“If they ask, tell the truth.”

“Even if the truth does nothing but cause the family anguish?”

“They deserve to know.”

“Or do they deserve peace?”

Related Characters: Jay's Mom, Jay Reguero (speaker)

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 22

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Jay and his mom argue about whether Jay should be able to know how his cousin Jun died—Jay's mom thinks that they should respect Jun's family's wish not to discuss it, suggesting that the truth can do more harm than good.

Jay is horrified by his mom's willingness to tell white lies in her medical practice and immediately dismisses her reasoning as “unbelievable.” But from Jay's mom's perspective, if someone doesn't want their family to know that they're hurting, and if their medical outcome is going to remain the same regardless, a doctor would be cruel to tell the patient's family the truth if the patient didn't want their family to know. If the patient is going to be in unavoidable pain, the doctor can at least spare the family “anguish” and set them at “peace.”

But from Jay's perspective, it's possible that the family won't be able to fully process the patient's illness and death without knowing exactly how they died or what their final moments were like. It's also possible that the family would be able to spot the lie, and this could drive a rift between the patient and their family in the patient's final days. And it might not be the doctor's decision to make, or even the patient's—maybe “the truth” is something that belongs to

everyone equally.

As the novel progresses, Jay comes to question his own staunch perspective in this passage. At first, he believes that learning the truth about Jun will bring justice for Jun and healing for Jay and the whole family. But Jay later learns that Jun died because he was using and selling drugs, which complicates Jay's idealized image of his cousin. The truth ends up causing Jay pain, the same way it would cause the hypothetical family pain in this passage. At the same time, though, knowing the truth about Jun enables Jay to move on from his death—the truth isn't what he wanted or thought it would be, but it's still ultimately healing. The novel thus affirms that Jay and his mom are both right in this passage: the truth *can* hurt, but sometimes that hurt is necessary for closure.

☝ She takes a deep breath. “Jay, it's easy for us to pass judgment. But we don't live there anymore, so we can't grasp the extent to which drugs have affected the country.”
[...]

“So I'm not allowed to have an opinion? To say it's wrong or inhumane?”

[...]

“That's not what I'm saying, Jay.”

“What are you saying?”

“That you need to make sure that opinion is an informed one.”

There's obviously no way to argue that point without sounding like an idiot, but knowing that doesn't dissolve my newfound anger. “So what's your informed opinion?”

“That it's not my place to say what's right or wrong in a country that's not mine.”

“But you lived there. You're married to a Filipino. You have Filipino children.”

“Filipino American children,” she corrects. “And it's not the same.”

Related Characters: Jay Reguero, Jay's Mom (speaker), Jay's Dad

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 25-26

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Jay is horrified to learn that people can be legally murdered for using or selling drugs in the Philippines. But Jay's mom insists that because Jay no

longer lives in the Philippines—and only lived there for a short time after he was born—he can't rely on his emotional response to the government's drug war and doesn't have the context to come to an "informed," nuanced understanding of the situation there. This moment is one of many times when Jay is framed as being disconnected from his home country and Filipino identity. Here, his mother suggests that he's not Filipino enough to have an opinion about the drug war: "'Filipino American [...],' she corrects. 'And it's not the same.'"

As the novel progresses, Jay will come to terms with his in-between cultural identity, but this isn't something he's processed yet, as demonstrated by his instinct to call himself and his siblings "Filipino" in this passage. Jay's mom thinks that Jay's identity is simple, but in reality, it's not something she can fully understand, the same way that Jay can't fully understand the situation in the Philippines.

A Narrower Country Than Expected Quotes

☝☝ "Man," he says, shaking his head, "I forgot you're Filipino." "Huh?"

"You're basically white."

I stop, stung. "What do you mean by that?"

[...]


He lets out an exasperated sigh. "I just meant you act like everyone else at school."

"You mean like all the white kids?"

"Dude, our school's all white kids, so, yeah."

Except it's not. The majority are, for sure, but his generalization—spoken with such confidence, such ease—makes me feel like he's erasing the rest of us.

Related Characters: Jay Reguero, Seth (speaker)

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 37-38

Explanation and Analysis

Jay has just told his best friend, Seth, that Jay's cousin Jun died in the Philippines. This passage demonstrates the alienation that Jun currently feels: he was born in the Philippines, but his best friend doesn't acknowledge that aspect of his identity, saying, "I forgot you're Filipino. [...] You're basically white." Jay doesn't feel at home in either Michigan or the Philippines, so Seth's observation that Jay appears to belong at their school is hardly a compliment.

The reason Jay is "stung" is not only that Seth refuses to acknowledge Jay's identity, but also that Jay's identity is effectively invisible to others. Seth seems to think that Jay's Filipino heritage is just a fun fact about Jay—something to easily "forget" and then remember—but it's an innate part of Jay, and if people don't recognize it, they're not recognizing Jay as a person. Seth doesn't seem to recognize that their entire school isn't white, and that not everyone has had the same experiences as him. Even if Seth has things in common with Jay and cares about him, he's unable to understand Jay's experience or even acknowledge his own ignorance. Instead, Seth treats the whole conversation casually, calling Jay "dude" and acting "exasperated" by the fact that Jay was hurt by his statement about Jay being "basically white." Furthermore, Seth's "confident" attitude implies a lack of empathy on Seth's part.

Readers are likely meant to contrast this tense conversation with the easy conversations and thoughtful letters between Jun and Jay. Jun didn't share all of Jay's experiences, but he always asked thoughtful questions and tried to understand Jay, unlike Seth.

Let Me Go Quotes

☝☝ The article included the fact that four low-level officers were eventually charged for killing that seventeen-year-old, but their punishments were minimal and only happened after massive protests. But what about the other victims who never got a hashtag? What about Jun?

Would there be justice?

Definitely not if nobody even knows what truly happened.

So maybe that's it—maybe I can find out. If his friend is right, maybe there are witnesses; maybe there's video; maybe there's a flawed report.

Related Characters: Jay Reguero (speaker), Jun

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 43

Explanation and Analysis

Jay has just received an anonymous message on social media from someone who claims to be Jun's friend and affirms that Jun hadn't done anything wrong—meaning that Jun hadn't used or sold drugs, as Jay's family holds. The friend sent Jay an article about an unarmed 17-year-old was murdered by the police, and Jay realizes that Jun might have been wrongly killed like this, too.


This passage demonstrates Jay's black-and-white worldview: he believes that criminal justice is possible, and that bad people will be punished for their crimes if someone brings the truth to light. But Jay already knows that this righteous outlook isn't true: the article he reads clearly states that the officers who wrongly killed the 17-year-old got off easy, even though many people were angry about the boy's death. The officers' punishments hardly amounted to "justice," and Jay acknowledges himself that "other victims" weren't even given this minimal recompense. Meanwhile, Jay wants to "find out" what happened to Jun in order to get justice, but he's fully aware that such justice isn't likely. He seems to think that the truth can overcome even bureaucratic barriers—a belief that perhaps stems from his grief over Jun's death and his hope that Jun's death will have meant something. If he can get justice for Jun, Jay thinks, Jun's death will have served at least a political purpose, since it will demonstrate that the drug war is harmful to innocent people.

Jay immediately steps into the role of a detective, hoping to find "witnesses," "video," and "a flawed report." He assumes that if he has evidence, he can prove that Jun was wrongfully murdered and punish Jun's killer. His determination leads readers to believe that the novel will be a detective story, and that at the end, Jay will use clues to find Jun's killer and bring Jun to justice. This never ends up happening, because Jun wasn't entirely innocent—he was murdered for using and selling drugs by an unknown vigilante during the country's war on drugs. There's no way to seek justice for his death, because drug-related murder is legal at this time in the Philippines, and because even the vigilante can't be held entirely responsible. In this passage, Jay assumes that the truth about Jun's death is a mystery with a simple solution, and that Jun's death will have some sort of profound meaning of purpose. Ultimately, though, Jay comes to terms with the idea that the truth can be painful and hard to face, and that death can be meaningless.

Things Inside Quotes

☝☝ "It's easy to romanticize a place when it's far away [...] Filipino Americans have a tendency to do that. Even me. Sometimes I miss it so much. The beaches. The water. The rice paddies. The carabao. The food. Most of all, my family." He closes his eyes, and I wonder if he's imagining himself there right now. After a few moments, he opens them again, but he stares at his hands. "But as many good things as there are, there are many bad things, things not so easy to see from far away. When you are close, though, they are sometimes all you see."

Related Characters: Jay's Dad (speaker), Jay Reguero

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 53-54

Explanation and Analysis

Jay has just convinced his parents to let him travel to the Philippines, which worries his dad, who doesn't want Jay to fixate on their home country. The reason the family moved away, he says, was so that Jay and his siblings could have a better education, and Jay isn't familiar with the Philippines' problems.

Throughout the novel, Jay feels alone in his identity. He's Filipino American and feels that he can't fully belong anywhere; crucially, he assumes that this is a singular experience. But even though Jay's dad grew up in the Philippines (unlike Jay), it seems that he *would* understand Jay's alienation to some degree. After all, that alienation is what Jay's dad is describing here: on the one hand, Jay's dad misses his country dearly, especially its small joys (the beaches, the food) and familiarity (his family). But on the other hand, he knows he couldn't be fully content if the family still lived in the Philippines, because he's conscious of the country's "bad" elements. Jay's dad doesn't specify what these "bad things" are, but it's reasonable to assume he's referring at least in part to the Filipino drug war, which is central to the novel.


This speech doesn't sway Jay, partly because of its vagueness but likely also because Jay's dad doesn't offer any solutions. He seems to suggest that it's better to forsake the Philippines than to romanticize it, but this strategy clearly hasn't helped his own homesickness; he can't even talk about home without having to "close his eyes" (getting lost in his memories, or perhaps holding back tears). Later in the novel, Jay will come to terms with the fact that in order to claim the Philippines as his home, he also has to claim its unpleasant elements and learn to reconcile them with the "good things" about the country. His dad was seemingly unable to do this, so it's a process Jay has to go through on his own.


The Strength of My Conviction Quotes

☝ I feel like I should have taken her baby and given it to an orphanage or something. I told Grace this later, but she said there was nothing could do, that I am too young to take care of a child. She also said that there are probably millions of children that need to be taken care of and even if I was old enough I could not take care of them all. Even though she is young, I know she is right. And that makes me feel like my chest is hollow.

But, it seems to me that there are so many older than us who are able to take care of those in need. If everyone did a little bit, then everybody would be okay, I think. Instead, most people do nothing. And that is the problem. Does that make sense, Kuya?

Related Characters: Jun (speaker), Grace, Jay Reguero

Related Themes: 

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 64

Explanation and Analysis

When Jun is about 11 years old, he writes to Jay about a recent incident: Jun and his family were at the mall when a poor woman approached them and held out a sick-looking baby. But Tito Maning quickly ushered Jun away, leaving Jun feeling guilty for not helping the woman.

Grace underscores that there was nothing Jun could have done to help the woman or child. Someone “older” like Tito Maning could have intervened and helped the child, but Jun himself had nothing to do with her situation, given his young age. But Jun feels responsible for things outside of his control: even though he knows he can’t help the “millions of children” in the baby’s situation, he feels like he has to do “a little bit.” Jun is deeply empathetic, but he doesn’t yet know where to focus his empathy, and he only has a vague sense of wanting to help “those in need.”

As a teen, Jay will eventually realize that the best thing he can do is take responsibility for the things he can change in his own life and in the lives of those connected to him. Sometimes this means giving money; sometimes it just means listening to someone’s story. Unfortunately, there’s no way to singlehandedly generate the kind of widespread systemic change that Jun initially believes would make “everybody [...] okay.” The novel suggests that while no one can be singlehandedly responsible for the life of someone else, small acts of kindness add up.

In this letter, Jun feels a responsibility to “take care” of

people, but ironically, he’ll later be responsible for directly harming others by selling drugs. But the letter is nevertheless a reminder that at his core, Jun wanted to help those around him, which solidifies Jay’s later belief that no one is solely good or solely bad.

☝ But adults lie, I guess. That's what they do.

Sure, there are a bunch of reasons they do it, and people would probably say most of them are pretty good. When you’re a kid, they lie and say you did a great job in a game even if you sucked. Then you grow up a bit and your mom and dad lie to you about how strong their relationship is and how much they love each other after they have a big fight.


[...]

Sometimes I feel like growing up is slowly peeling back these layers of lies.

[...]

I imagine the moment when Tito Maning will pick me up from the airport. Standing straight, I’ll greet him, look him in the eye, and then ask him point-blank how his son died. [...] I will hold his gaze until he gives me an answer, and if he lies, I will demand the truth.

Related Characters: Jay Reguero (speaker), Jun, Tito Maning

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 65-66

Explanation and Analysis

On his way to the Philippines, Jay has just seen how technologically advanced the Seoul airport is, which makes him realize that while he’s been told the United States is the greatest country, that can’t possibly be true. This gets him thinking about all the other lies adults have told him.

This passage is reminiscent of Jay’s earlier conversation with his mom, when he was horrified that his mom sometimes lies to her patients’ families to spare them emotional pain. That kind of lie falls in the category of the “good” lies Jay lists here, which include encouraging a child. Notably, though, Jay himself doesn’t seem to think these white lies are “good” or worthwhile. *Adults* would call those lies “good,” but Jay’s phrasing implies that he disagrees.

In fact, Jay thinks that becoming an adult means being able to recognize “layers” of white lies and pluck out the truth—naively implying that there will always be a simple “truth” to uncover. Jay’s mention of a fight between parents

is a prime example. The parents in this hypothetical (which could be based on Jay's experience with his own parents) might genuinely love each other. That doesn't mean they should constantly fight, and it doesn't even mean that their marriage will last. But the "truth" of their relationship is probably complicated, and they might not even think that they're lying to their child. The distinction between "lies" and "truth" is therefore blurred.

Jay's mention of Tito Maning further proves that even if Jay believes that he's "growing up," he's caught up in a childish worldview. Though Jay doesn't know this yet, the answer to "how [Jun] died" is a genuinely complicated one, because there's no single person responsible for killing him. (Though a vigilante killed Jun, the murder was government sanctioned.) Jay seems to think that the power of truth is so strong that Jay will be able to sense when Tito Maning is lying and "demand the truth." But Jay will later learn that it's sometimes impossible to distinguish lies from truth, and that the truth sometimes isn't better or more moral than a lie.

family left the Philippines when Jay was one year old. That means that even though Chris spent some formative years in the Philippines—he was at least five when they left—Jay's dad was looking ahead to America during those years. To Tito Maning, Jay's dad's refusal to teach his son anything but English implies that the Philippines is just a stepping-stone for Chris on the way to America.

While Jay's dad believed that learning both Tagalog and English would have confused his kids, Jay is more confused by the fact that he *doesn't* know Tagalog despite being Filipino American. His ignorance makes him feel more out of place in both the U.S. and the Philippines, because he feels like he doesn't fully belong in either country.

From Tito Maning's perspective, you can't "understand who you are" without knowing your home country's language. And while Jay's journey in this novel is partly about understanding the Philippines' politics and history, the book is a coming-of-age novel, and Jay does begin to learn more about himself. This means accepting his knowledge gaps and in-between identity, but it doesn't mean that Jay doesn't know who he is.


Every Single Surviving Word Quotes

☝☝ He sighs. "It is a shame. When your kuya was first starting to speak, I said to your tatay, 'You must teach him Tagalog and Bikol,' and do you know what your tatay said to me?"

"No," I respond, not wanting to know.

"The boy does not need to be confused," he says in a feminine, mock-American accent meant to imitate my dad. "Christian will be going to America, so he needs only good English." He lets out a sarcastic laugh. "And what is the result? None of his children knows their mother tongue. And if you do not know your mother tongue, you cannot know your mother. And if you do not know your mother, you do not understand who you are."

Related Characters: Jay Reguero, Tito Maning (speaker), Chris, Jay's Dad

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 95-96

Explanation and Analysis

This passage is a conversation between Jay and Tito Maning and takes place during Jay's first dinner at Tito Maning's house. Tito Maning is disgusted with Jay's ignorance about Filipino history and blames Jay's dad, who decided to raise his children—including Jay's brother, Chris—without teaching them about Filipino history or languages.

Chris is more than four years older than Jay, and Jay's

Not an Answer to the Question Quotes


☝☝ The next drawer, much to my surprise, is crammed full of Toblerone bars and packages of those Ferrero Rocher chocolates that are wrapped in gold foil.


[...]

The last two drawers, one on each side of the desk, are the kind that contain hanging file folders. I pull out the one on the left, and it's so light that I already know it's empty. Sure enough, there's only dust and stray folder tabs. I try the one on the right—but it won't budge.

There's a small keyhole, so I search through the other drawers for a key. I don't find one, but there are plenty of paper clips. I straighten one out and then poke the thin metal into the keyhole. I have no idea what I'm doing, of course, but it always looks so easy in the movies. Maybe if I keep poking it will hit a release?

Related Characters: Jay Reguero (speaker), Tito Maning

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 105-106

Explanation and Analysis

This passage takes place as Jay breaks into Tito Maning's office in search of Jun's letters. The most noteworthy thing about Tito Maning's office is that it's not really noteworthy at all. Jay clearly expects to find a smoking gun that proves not only that Tito Maning stole the letters but that he had something to do with Jun's death. Instead, Jay is "surprised" to find pretty innocuous, everyday things: fancy chocolates, spare folders, and paperclips.

The mysterious locked drawer is probably more in line with what Jay expected, so Jay immediately shifts into detective mode and enacts the kind of spy maneuvers that he's seen in movies. He looks for a hidden key and then tries to pick the lock, assuming that there will be an easy "release." All of this is vaguely ridiculous and again demonstrates Jay's black-and-white worldview. He thinks that discovering the truth about Jun's murder will be like a detective story, so that means that it'll end the way a detective story ends: the killer behind bars, justice served. Much like how he thinks there will be an easy "release" for the drawer, there will be an easy solution to the mystery.

Later, Jay will discover learn that Jun's death was far more complex than Jay had anticipated, as Jun was killed for dealing drugs. No single person can be blamed for his death (a single vigilante did kill Jun, but the murder was government sanctioned due to the war on drugs), and justice will never be served. Jay's spy maneuvers in this passage demonstrate his naiveté but also speak to his grief; he wants Jun's death to have a clear solution and some sort of profound meaning attached to it so that Jun didn't die in vain.

A Visit Quotes

●● He stops. Reaches up and pulls the sack off his head.

It's Jun. His hair's a mess, tangled with sticks and dirt, and the lower half of his jaw is missing, a gory mess in its place. His eyes meet mine. Two stars in a clear winter sky.

"What happened to you?" I ask.

The exposed muscle and sinew where his lower jaw used to be twitches as he continues moving toward me.

"I'm sorry for what they did to you. I'm sorry I lost your letters. I'm sorry I was too afraid to speak to Tito Maning again tonight. But please tell me, what happened to you?"


He doesn't answer. He can't. Instead, he stops a step away. Then he reaches out and places his palm against my chest.

I wake.

Related Characters: Jay Reguero (speaker), Tito Maning,

Jun

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 139-140

Explanation and Analysis

This passage is a dream, though Jay doesn't initially realize it. A man is in Jun's room, writing at his desk with a sack over his head. At first, Jay assumes it's Tito Maning, but then he realizes that it's Jun. Jay seems to be imagining Jun's dead or resurrected body, which would explain why Jun's hair is dirty and has sticks in it. Jay is also frustrated by his very real inability to ask Jun for the truth about how he died, which explains why Dream-Jun has no jaw and therefore no ability to speak. Dream-Jun seems to *want* to talk to Jay—his jaw is "twitch[ing]," which implies attempted speech—but physically "can't."

Later, Jay will take this dream as a manifestation of his own guilty conscience, and indeed, it's easy to see guilt at play here. First, Jay apologizes for losing Jun's letters, which wasn't even his fault—the letters were stolen from his luggage. He also apologizes for not confronting Tito Maning about Jun's death. But Jay does *not* apologize for the fact that he stopped responding to Jun's letters years ago, something that genuinely hurt Jun and that may have put Jun on the path that led to his death (this is Jay's fear, anyway). Jay feels indirectly responsible for Jun's death, but that's not something he's willing to confront in this dream, so he instead focuses on smaller wrongs. Jay doesn't even want to find out if Dream-Jun is angry with him, because he wakes up just as Dream-Jun touches him. It therefore remains unclear whether this touch was going to be violent or comforting.

Crucially, Jay keeps asking Dream-Jun "what happened to [him]." Throughout the novel, Jay assumes that there's a simple answer to the question of how and why Jun died—so simple that if Jun could just emerge from the grave and tell him, the mystery would be solved. Moreover, Jay wants Jun's death to have meant something. This doesn't end up being the case, as Jun's death was the result of many complicated factors. Jun probably *couldn't* explain them all even if he was given the opportunity to do so, and they certainly don't amount to anything "meaningful."

That Last Part Aloud Quotes



☝☝ Since he already knows, I may as well ask about the contents of the note on the back of the list I found in his desk, about how he told his subordinate who located Jun to proceed. But I feel drained, lost. A compass missing its needle. What would be the point when I can't sense whether anything he says is truthful or not?

Tito Maning reaches the car and turns to me. "I am disappointed my brother did not teach you to respect your elders."

He expects an apology. I stay quiet.

"You do not live here. You do not speak any of our languages. You do not know our history. Your mother is a white American. Yet, you presume to speak to me as if you knew anything about me, as if you knew anything about my son, as if you knew anything about this country."

Related Characters: Jay Reguero, Tito Maning (speaker), Jay's Mom, Jun

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 159-160

Explanation and Analysis

Jay has just confronted Tito Maning, asking him what happened to Jun, and Tito Maning responds by berating Jay for his ignorance. This passage begins to demonstrate the blurriness between truth and lies in this novel. Jay initially assumed that he'd be able to tell if Tito Maning was lying to him. But he now realizes that he has no way of knowing whether or not Tito Maning is telling the truth. If Jay asked Tito Maning about the note and the list he found in Maning's office (the list had Jun's name on it), Jay might not get an honest answer, and even if he did, Jay still wouldn't be able to distinguish truth from lies. But at this point in the novel, Jay still naively assumes that there is a simple truth about Jun's death that Tito Maning is hiding from him. Later, Jay will learn that the truth about Jun's death is far from simple and is the result of many complicated factors, since Jun was dealing drugs and a vigilante killed him during the government's war on drugs.

Though Tito Maning is purposely trying to be cruel to Jay here, his arguments are rooted in truth. It's true that Jay doesn't speak Tagalog, doesn't know much about the Filipino drug war, and didn't know much about Jun, either—the cousins lost contact years ago. At the same time, Tito Maning is using this information to imply that Jay doesn't belong in the Philippines, which only contributes to Jay's feelings of unbelonging as a Filipino American and the

sense that he isn't fully at home in either country.

Fail Him in Death Quotes

☝☝ Tita Chato puts out her cigarette. "What happened to Jun is a tragedy, whether or not he was a drug pusher." She pauses, gathering her thoughts, then continues. "But he is dead. We cannot bring him back to life. You need to accept that. There is nothing we can do about it except mourn."

I clench my jaw.

She's not all that different from Tito Maning. Though her words were delivered with more compassion, they were the same: I am not truly Filipino, so I don't understand the Philippines. But isn't this deeper than that, doesn't this transcend nationality? Isn't there some sense of right and wrong about how human beings should be treated that applies no matter where you live, no matter what language you speak?

I'm alone in this. Somebody needs to clear Jun's name even if nothing comes of it. We failed him in life. We should not fail him in death.

Related Characters: Jay Reguero, Tita Chato (speaker), Tito Maning, Jun

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 173-174

Explanation and Analysis

Tita Chato has just told Jay that even if they find out who killed Jun, they can never bring Jun's killer to justice because courts in the Philippines are corrupt and President Duterte's anti-drug policies are popular. Even if Jun was innocent, no one would care about his death because they support the government's general policies and believe that a few mistakes are inevitable.

Jay assumes that Tita Chato's attitude toward Jun's death has to do with "nationality." This is partly true—the current state of Filipino politics means that the public wouldn't care very much about Jun's death, since people would assume that Jun used or dealt drugs. But Jay wrongly assumes that Tita Chato is giving him this advice solely because she thinks Jay doesn't "understand the Philippines." In reality, all Tita Chato is saying is that solving Jun's murder won't bring Jun "back to life," and knowing the truth might actually do more harm than good. It's better to accept the fact that Jun's death was a "tragedy" and mourn him instead of trying to seek impossible justice. Even if it would be morally "right" to seek justice for Jun, it wouldn't benefit anyone.

But Jay isn't willing to accept that Jun's death was random and tragic. As a child, his mom taught him that good things can come from tragedy (as seen in the anecdote about the puppy in the prologue), so Jun wants to prove that Jun died as the result of government negligence or a cover-up. Presumably, Jay thinks that if he can "clear [Jun's] name" and prove that Jun wasn't a drug dealer, this would help the situation in the Philippines by demonstrating that Duterte's anti-drug policies harm innocent individuals. Tita Chato has already told Jay that people wouldn't care about Jun's death even if his death was a mistake, but Jay dismisses this. In part, his determination not to "fail Jun" stems from his own guilt about Jun's death; Jay stopped responding to Jun's letters years ago and now worries that this neglect caused Jun to feel isolated and run away from home.

Moreover, Tita Chato is suggesting that Jun's life had value even if he did deal drugs. Jay is adamant that Jun *didn't* deal drugs, and he thus believes that Jun's death was a simple case of government corruption. Later, Jay learns that Jun was indeed a drug addict and dealer, and Jay has a hard time coming to terms with this reality. He had set out to prove his cousin's innocence, but instead he ends up proving his guilt, and he has to acknowledge that Jun's life meant something anyway—which is all Tita Chato is trying to say here.

Jay for his ignorance and disrespect, and Jay still doesn't know the truth about Jun's murder.

Earlier in the novel, Jay and his mother argued about the value of telling a painful truth or a comforting lie—Jay's mother, a doctor, said that she sometimes lied to the family of her patients to spare them emotional pain, and Jay was horrified by this. Interestingly, he adopts his mom's position in this passage by arguing that sometimes speaking up and telling the truth hurts rather than helps. He's probably not worried that he hurt Tito Maning—Jay has little sympathy for his uncle—but since nothing good came out of demanding the truth from Tito Maning, Jay is rethinking his position on truth now.

Meanwhile, Mia is adopting Jay's earlier position and arguing that truth is beneficial even when it's painful, since hiding from one's feelings isn't useful or productive. But Mia *isn't* saying that the truth is always a good thing. Instead, she's saying that "silence" is always a *bad* thing because it means that important truths remain unsaid. According to Mia, truth is a necessary evil, which is a more nuanced perspective than the one Jay held earlier in the novel. At the time, Jay argued that people would always *prefer* to know the truth.

Mia isn't necessarily arguing against Jay's mom. In fact, Mia might even support lying to a patient's family, because Mia is in favor of the truth specifically when that truth generates important conversations that people have been avoiding. Dumping a harmful truth on someone's family wouldn't necessarily generate conversation, and that's not the situation Mia lays out here. The novel therefore implies that both Jay's mom and Mia are right in different ways—the truth can be unnecessarily painful, but depending on the context, silence can hurt just as much.


Let's Do It Quotes

☝☝ She shakes her head. "I think it's good that you finally talked to him about your cousin. I think you were brave."

I drop my eyes to the edge of the table. That's not the word I'd use to describe how I felt during that conversation. It's not the word I'd use to describe how I feel when I think about the calls and texts from Dad, still unanswered. "Don't you think it's sometimes better not to say anything, not to dredge up those feelings for no reason?"

"No," she answers immediately. "If you have something to say, you should say it. If you are to figure things out, you can't hide from them. Silence will not save you."

Related Characters: Jay Reguero, Mia (speaker), Jay's Dad, Tito Maning

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 186

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Mia is congratulating Jay for finally confronting Tito Maning about what happened to Jun, even though the conversation ended with Tito Maning berating

The Wide Eyes of the Lost Quotes



☝☝ "Tell me, Jason Reguero, are you willing to die to find out what happened to your cousin?"

I clench my jaw as I consider my answer. Part of me wonders if this is all that serious. It's not like I'm writing some investigative piece that will be published for millions to read. Finding out the truth about Jun isn't going to change the world.

But then again, this feels important and part of me is sick of never doing anything of significance in my life. I go to school. I do homework. I play video games. I'll be going to college in the fall, where I'll pretty much do four more years of the same—and for what? If I died right now I will have died having done nothing and having helped nobody.

"Yes," I finally say, trying to imbue the word with the heaviness of the conviction I feel in my soul.

Related Characters: Jay Reguero, Brian Santos (speaker), Jun

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 195

Explanation and Analysis

Mia's journalism professor, Brian Santos is helping Mia and Jay find Jun's most recent address in the slums, and he has just revealed that he constantly receives death threats because of his reporting on the Filipino drug war. He knows that finding Jun's address could spell danger for Jay, which is why he asks Jay if he'd be willing to die to learn the truth about Jun.

Jay seems to misinterpret Brian Santos's question. Santos isn't suggesting that the truth about Jun will be an important truth—that's not something he could know in advance. Jay is right that Jun's story won't necessarily be newsworthy or have a large impact, but Jay still imbues the truth with a great deal of personal "significance." Jay seems to imply that his own life has been pretty meaningless up until this point, filled with video games and homework, but learning the truth about Jun will be "help[ful]" in some way. Essentially, Jay wants Jun's death to have meant something, and he wants the truth about Jun's death to reveal that meaning. Jay knows that the truth about Jun's death won't "change the world," but he does think that it will give the tragedy a deeper purpose, which is why he agrees that he'd die for it.

In the end, Jay will learn that Jun's death wasn't significant or meaningful in the way he expects it to be—Jun was killed for dealing drugs. But Brian Santos will later encourage Mia to write an article about Jay's experience learning the truth, and Jay hopes the article will honor Jun, which is different from expecting his death to be "significant."


A Universe Where People Do Not Die for Doing What is Right Quotes

☝☝ I knew it. I fucking knew it.

The Jun who hugged me after that puppy died, who became a best friend more than a cousin, who wrote me letters for years, whose heart was bigger than anyone else's I've ever known—there was no way he would have sold drugs. He was too good. He was the best of us. He wouldn't have been able to live with himself knowing and feeling the pain and destruction those drugs would have caused.

Related Characters: Jay Reguero (speaker), Jun

Related Themes: 

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 212

Explanation and Analysis

and Jun's ex-girlfriend, Reyna has just told Mia and Jay that Jun did not deal drugs, which is what everyone previously assumed he was killed for. With this, Jay assumes he has found out the ultimate truth about Jun, one he "knew" deep down. This truth isn't just that Jun was innocent of any drug involvement, but also that Jun was a fundamentally "good" person. The fact that Jun didn't deal drugs confirms his goodness, and his small acts of kindness—such as comforting Jay after the puppy died when they were kids—take on new significance. Jay's mention of letters is also significant, as those letters represent the person Jun was. Jay believes that he now understands that person, which is why he mentions the letters here; a drug dealer couldn't have written them, because they speak to how good Jun was. This reflects Jay's black-and-white worldview: he still believes people are either fundamentally good or fundamentally bad.

Of course, while Reyna believes she's telling Jay the truth now, the actual truth is more complicated. Later, Jay will learn that Jun *did* deal and use drugs—unbeknownst to Reyna, it was the reason that Jun walked out on her—which renders this passage ironic in hindsight. Jay will have to come to terms with the fact that no person is wholly good or wholly bad. Jun's letters still represent who he was, but Jay has to accept that Jun was more complicated than Jay initially believed.



To Flood Quotes

☝☝ But standing here with my feet in the water, listening to the sound of Tagalog and maybe other languages mixed with laughter and the crashing of the waves, smelling the chicken inasal or pork inihaw grilling behind me as swallows flit past overhead to their nests high in the surrounding cliffs, I feel like that first year mattered in a way I've never felt it did before.

[...]

It strikes me that I cannot claim this country's serene coves and sun-soaked beaches without also claiming its poverty, its problems, its history. To say that any aspect of it is part of me is to say that all of it is part of me.

Related Characters: Jay Reguero (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 226-228

Explanation and Analysis

While visiting a beach with his Tita Chato and Tita Ines, Jay goes into the ocean alone and begins thinking about his place in the Philippines and his cultural identity.

This passage explicitly recalls an earlier conversation between Jay and Jay's dad. During that conversation, Jay's dad told Jay that it's easy for a person to romanticize the Philippines when they're far away, but it's hard for one to forget the Philippines' problems when they're actually in the country. At the time, Jay didn't understand what his dad meant, but Jay is now explicitly forced to reckon with the beauty and the ugliness of the Philippines simultaneously. He feels a deep sense of belonging at the beach, even though he moved away from the country when he was one; he now feels that his "first year" was foundational for him on some level. He still doesn't understand Tagalog and the "other languages" spoken around him, but he can appreciate the smells and sounds and sights of his country. This fixation on the beauty around him certainly seems like the romanticization Jay's dad was warning about earlier (even though Jay is romanticizing the Philippines while he's actually in the country).

However, Jay also has experience with the problematic parts of the Philippines, including the drug war and trafficking, which is what he begins to think about in this passage (he has just met his cousin Jun's ex-girlfriend, Reyna, who is a trafficking survivor). He realizes that in order to truly "claim" the country as his own, he has to reconcile both its beauty and its "problems." This is something Jay's dad was seemingly unable to do, but unlike his father, Jay doesn't see the country's beauty and ugliness as mutually exclusive. Throughout the novel, Jay's worldview has been overly simplistic, as he tends to believe people and places are either bad or good. But this passage suggests that his black-and-white worldview is beginning to shift slightly, which reflects small but significant progress in his coming-of-age journey.

Another Day in the Minefield Quotes

 A man holds a photo of himself kissing another man on the beach.

A large family posing together beneath a cross together holds a photo standing in for the father.

All of these people, dead—yet alive again in these images thanks to my cousin. In all of this, there is both beauty and sadness, light and darkness, pain and something that might be healing.

Maybe Grace is right. Maybe it is worth it.

Related Characters: Jay Reguero (speaker), Grace, Jun

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 242

Explanation and Analysis

This passage takes place after Jay discovers that his cousin Jun was running a subversive Instagram account prior to his death. The account posted pictures of family members holding up photos of their loved ones, all of whom were killed by police as part of the drug war.

At this point in the novel, Jay believes that Jun's death "meant" something. Grace's revelation (that Jun died because of the account) confirms that Jun died for a noble cause, which makes his sacrifice—and Grace's, as she's now maintaining the account on his behalf—"worth it." Jay therefore imbues the Instagram account with a great deal of significance, crediting it with making the drug war victims "alive again." But Jay will later learn that Jun's death didn't actually mean anything, at least not in the way he expected it to. It turns out that Jun was killed for dealing drugs, not for the Instagram account, which means that he worked against his own activist cause.

In this passage, Jay seems to think that the Instagram account gives meaning to the victims' deaths, which confirms his initial hypothesis that Jun's death had some sort of profound meaning or purpose. If people remember the victims' humanity—represented by the pictures of their loved ones—then their deaths had meaning. But in reality, the account is making the opposite point. It suggests that the victims' deaths were meaningless and tragic, which is precisely why their humanity should be remembered. The account honors the victims' lives, but it doesn't suggest that their deaths were meaningful or "worth it."



Bravery As if It Were My Own Quotes

☝ She laughs at the memory and I laugh with her. “Kuya Jun had a way of making people pay attention, of making them realize that others existed outside of themselves and getting them to care. But I don't...and I failed him. I stayed quiet whenever Tatay yelled. I left the room whenever they argued. I never asked Nanay to let him live with us again. I never even protested when they told us there would be no novenas, no vigil, no lamay, no funeral.”

[...]

I'm not sure what to say. Maybe I should tell her it's not her fault, maybe that it's all okay because he's with God now? I try to channel Jun because I think he always spoke the truth as he felt it, but I don't have that ability. I offer no reassurance, no wisdom. I only hug her tighter and start to cry with her.

Related Characters: Jay Reguero, Grace (speaker), Tita Ami, Tito Maning, Jun

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 262

Explanation and Analysis

Grace has just shared a memory about Jun with Jay: when Grace was younger, a classmate looked up her skirt and Jun called him over so that Grace could explain to the classmate why it upset her.

Grace's guilt in this passage closely resembles Jay's own. Grace feels guilty for not sticking up for Jun while he was alive (and even after he was dead) the way he did for her in the anecdote she just shared, and Jay feels guilty for not responding to Jun's letters, which might have heightened Jun's feelings of isolation. Jun was good at “car[ing]” for people and demonstrating that care, and Grace and Jay were not. Though neither Grace nor Jay are singlehandedly responsible for what happened to Jun, it's true that Jun's tensions with Tito Maning led to Jun being kicked out of the house, and those tensions might not have risen so high if Grace had intervened. Similarly, if Jay had been aware of what was going on in his cousin's life, Jun might not have felt so alone and might have been more content to live under Tito Maning's roof.

Significantly, Jay doesn't reassure Grace that the situation wasn't “her fault.” After all, Jay's quest to find out what happened to Jun has centered around determining whose fault Jun's death was: who killed him and/or who ordered the kill. Jay has always believed that he'll feel less guilty if he finds out who killed Jun, because discovering the murderer will confirm that Jay didn't indirectly cause Jun's death.

Because Jay knows that Grace didn't literally murder Jun, Jay should be able to easily reassure her that she didn't hurt or dishonor her brother, which is the reassurance that Jay also wants.

The fact that Jay *doesn't* reassure Grace suggests that he's finally understanding the complexity of Jun's final days. Throughout the novel, Jay has wanted Jun's death to have a simple explanation, but Jay is now beginning to realize that there isn't one. Even though he doesn't yet know the real reason why Jun died, he does know that his and Grace's passivity (in part) led to Jun's isolation. Even if they can't be blamed for Jun's death, that death was the result of at least a few factors, so there's not one single person to blame.

Meanwhile, Jay is finally realizing that there's no consolation or “reassurance” for Jun's death. Jay wants Jun's death to be meaningful in some way, but he can't even tell Grace that Jun's death has a religious meaning in this passage. All he can do is mourn with her, which is the novel's overarching point: a person's death doesn't have to have some grand purpose or meaning for them to be worthy of mourning.

New Life Quotes

☝ Tito Danilo continues. “And later, he started selling.”

“But why?” Grace asks, desperate.

“Shabu is a hunger suppressant. You see, it is cheaper than food, so many of the poor start for this reason, and then they become addicted. As for why he started selling? Your guess is as good as mine. Maybe to make money to keep feeding his addiction.”

I close my eyes, as if doing so will rewind the story erasing everything Tito Danilo has just told us. As if it will stop the warping truth. I can't reconcile this version of Jun with the one I had come to know to love, to admire.

Related Characters: Jay Reguero, Grace, Tito Danilo (speaker), Jun

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 281

Explanation and Analysis

This passage is a conversation between Tito Danilo, Grace, and Jay. Tito Danilo reveals to Grace and Jay that Jun was not only using drugs prior to his death but selling them as well. This is why Jun was murdered; his death had nothing to do with his activism against the government's war on

drugs, as Grace and Jay previously assumed.

Jay is alarmed here because if Jun was selling drugs, that means he was working against his own activist cause. Jun wanted to rehabilitate addicts, but instead he ended up enabling their addiction by selling drugs. Jay always knew Jun as a deeply kind, empathetic person who was easy to “love” and “admire.” This new information certainly complicates the “truth” Jay had believed about his cousin: that Jun was fundamentally good.


This passage implies that Jun wasn’t in a good place when he started using *shabu* (meth), since according to Tito Danilo, many poor people who are close to starvation turn to *shabu* to stave off hunger. Jay already knows that Jun was living in the slums prior to his death, so it’s not out of the question to think that he could have been near starvation himself. In this passage, Tito Danilo is describing a systemic cycle: poverty drives addicts to use, using leads addicts to sell in order to “feed [their] addiction,” and selling allows addicts to continue using. In this context, Jun’s decision to deal *shabu* doesn’t seem like a villainous crime but rather like an inevitability. This means both that there’s no one person to blame for Jun’s death and that Jun didn’t die a martyr. His death was therefore a meaningless tragedy.

Jay’s worldview is still overly simplistic, so he would rather “erase” what he’s learned about Jun than deal with the knowledge that Jun was flawed. Jay struggles to believe that his idealized “version of Jun” might not have been totally accurate, and that there’s no one person to blame for what happened to Jun. Later, Jay will have to accept Jun’s complications in order to mourn his cousin.

☛ I nod and let my gaze drift upward. A bird flits across the rafters to a nest high in the corner. It reminds me of when I heard the baby birds chirping outside the window the day that the puppy died in my hands. What was it Mom told me in that moment? Something about death making way for new life. But what new life has come from Jun's death? I don't know.

I imagine souls trapped overhead, bouncing against the steepled ceiling like invisible balloons whose strings have slipped from careless hands.

Related Characters: Jay Reguero (speaker), Jun, Jay’s Mom

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 284-285

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Jay recalls an earlier memory from his first

visit to the Philippines: a dog gave birth to a single surviving puppy, and though Jay tried to care for the puppy, it ended up dying. At the time, Jay’s mom comforted Jay by telling him to listen to the sounds of baby birds, because when “one thing dies [...] another is born.”

Throughout the novel, Jay expected Jun’s death to have meaning, as his mother indirectly promised it would. Now, having learned from Tito Danilo that Jun used and sold drugs, Jay realizes that Jun’s death was random and tragic and that nothing good has come of it. Jay’s mom’s comfort no longer seems logical, so it’s fitting that the bird Jay spots in the rafters is a twisted version of the baby birds he heard as a kid. *This* bird is living in the church where Tito Danilo serves, presumably because this was the safest place for its nest. Instead of being comforting, the bird’s strange placement is a reminder of how dangerous and unpredictable the outside world can be. There’s nothing natural about this particular bird’s life, which subverts that the wisdom Jay’s mom gave him years ago: no natural circle of life justifies death, because this bird has to live an unnatural life to *avoid* death. Jay’s mom also told him that the dead puppy’s soul might “have wings” like the baby birds. But in this passage, Jay imagines souls not as bird-like creatures but as unnatural helium balloons.

Jay emphasizes that no “new life” emerged from Jun’s death. But it’s possible that he misinterpreted his mom’s wisdom. By asking Jay to listen to the baby birds, she may have been suggesting only that good things still exist after a tragedy. Death might not “make way for new life” directly—as in, there’s no cause-and-effect relationship between the two—but part of moving forward after tragedy is acknowledging that life goes on. As the novel comes to a close, Jay will have to accept the fact that Jun’s death didn’t serve any particular purpose and that it was a tragedy; after doing this, he’ll be able to move forward with his grieving process and his own life.

To Resurrect Quotes

☛ In the car with Tito Danilo and Grace on the way back to Lolo and Lola’s, I think about how there’s a new grief in remembering Jun now, knowing what eventually happened, knowing that he was more than my idea of him in ways I do not like, knowing that there’s probably so much more I’ll never know.



I was determined to find the truth. And I did—at least a piece of it. But was it worth it? What do I even do now?

This didn’t play out how I thought it would.

I expected the truth to illuminate, to resurrect.

Not to ruin.

Related Characters: Jay Reguero (speaker), Lola, Lolo, Grace, Tito Danilo, Jun

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 288

Explanation and Analysis

This passage takes place after Jay has learned that his cousin Jun used and dealt drugs and that this is why Jun was murdered. Jay's quest throughout the novel was to find out "the truth" about how and why Jun died. But Jay expected that truth to be simple, much like the truth in a detective story would be. Crucially, he also expected that truth to be final—once he learned what happened to Jun, the mystery would be solved. Now, Jay realizes that the "truth" about Jun's death has only generated more questions. Jay knows what happened to Jun—he was murdered by a vigilante for dealing drugs—but because Jun's actions seem out-of-character, Jay *doesn't* know what kind of person Jun really was, and there are a million other things "[he'll] never know" as a result.

Earlier in the novel, Jay and his mom had a conversation about the value of truth; she argued that lying is sometimes necessary to spare others pain, and at the time, Jay vehemently disagreed. Now, he realizes that the truth may not have been "worth" learning after all. Instead of clarifying Jun's life, the truth only complicated—or even "ruined"—what Jay thought he knew about his cousin. Jay's shock stems from his black-and-white worldview. Someone older and more well-versed in tragedy (and in Filipino politics) might have expected that the truth about Jun's death would be complicated.

Jay says that he'd hoped the truth would "resurrect," which suggests that Jay's truth-seeking was at least partly a manifestation of his grief. He'd wanted the truth to return Jun to him in some way, or at least to highlight the kind of good person Jun was. For instance, if Jun was killed because of the subversive Instagram account that he ran—as Jay and Grace previously believed—then Jun would live on as a martyr who died for his activist cause. Ultimately, Jay's truth-seeking was a way to delay mourning, but now he has no choice but to move forward.

All the Darkness in the World Quotes

☞☞ "Jun died a tragic death before his time. But that does not extinguish the good that he did on this earth. It lives on in the lives that he touched, and like a single candle's flame, it can grow and make what is dark light." He pauses to let that sink in. "I invite each of you now to light your own candle from his, signifying that his goodness, his love, has multiplied through the ways he touched each of us, will continue to multiply through those we will go on touch."

Related Characters: Tito Danilo (speaker), Jun

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 296-297

Explanation and Analysis

Tito Danilo speaks these words at the impromptu memorial service that Grace and Jay organize for Jun. Before inviting everyone to speak about Jun, Tito Danilo acknowledges the tragedy of Jun's death. Throughout the novel, Jay has expected Jun's death to have some sort of profound meaning or purpose. He initially thought that Jun died because he defied the Filipino government with his activism, which would have made Jun a martyr. But the family now knows that although Jun was an activist, this isn't why he died. He was murdered by a vigilante for using and selling drugs in the midst of the government's drug war, making his death a meaningless tragedy.

In this passage, Tito Danilo acknowledges the meaninglessness of Jun's death. This is significant coming from a priest—Tito Danilo is implying that Jun's death wasn't necessarily part of God's plan for Jun's life, since Jun died "before his time." In other words, Jun's death would have been meaningful and purposeful had it happened at the right time (much later in life), but Jun died far sooner than he was supposed to, so his death doesn't have that kind of deeper purpose. However, Tito Danilo also suggests that the family can nevertheless honor Jun by remembering the good Jun did while he was alive and trying to do good for others, "multiply[ing]" Jun's "goodness" in the process. During the memorial, they'll multiply Jun's goodness metaphorically by lighting a candle, but they'll multiply that goodness in tangible ways later on.

On the surface, Tito Danilo might appear to be suggesting that Jun's death has inherent meaning—he's saying that Jun's life was meaningful, as was the impact he had on his loved one's lives, so this makes his death meaningful by extension. Crucially, Tito Danilo is not suggesting that Jun's death *caused* anything good to happen. Jay expected Jun's


death to serve a grand purpose (e.g., that he brought about positive political change by dying for his activist cause), but Tito Danilo is saying that the family can honor Jun while still acknowledging the purposelessness of his death.

☝ *I don't want to believe there was another side to you. But I don't have any choice, do I? I will try not to judge because I have no idea what you were struggling with in your heart, what complicated your soul. None of us are just one thing, I guess. None of us. We all have the terrible and amazing power to hurt and help, to harm and heal. We all do both throughout our lives. That's the way it is.*

[...]

When I turn around to rejoin the others, I stop short—Tito Maning is standing in the shadows just outside the back door. At first, I wonder if he's about to come over and put an end to the memorial. But his arms are crossed and he's posted up against the house like he's been there for a while. Then I remember how Tito Danilo said that Tito Maning called to ask for his help to save Jun. Truly, none of us is one thing.

Related Characters: Jay Reguero (speaker), Tito Maning, Jun

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 299-300

Explanation and Analysis

This first part of this passage comes from a letter Jay writes to Jun and reads at his impromptu memorial, which Grace and Jay organized against Tito Maning's wishes. In the letter, Jay discusses his disappointment at learning that Jun dealt drugs.

Jay's letter demonstrates how much he's learned over the course of the novel. He came to the Philippines determined to find out the truth about Jun's life and death, assuming that the truth would prove that Jun was never involved in drugs. The real truth about Jun sends Jay into a tailspin—Jun was a drug user and dealer, which led him to be murdered by a vigilante. Ultimately, though, Jay ends up with a more nuanced understanding of human nature, which is reflected in his letter. Previously, Jay believed that people were either wholly good or wholly bad. But because of Jun, Jay realizes that this is a false dichotomy; instead, people can do both good and bad things, and no one is totally innocent, which means that Jay can't "judge" anyone fully.

Notably, Jay also acknowledges that while he knows some

part of what happened to Jun, he'll never know the whole truth—why Jun turned to using and selling drugs, and what "complicated his soul" enough to allow him to justify his deeds. The truth is far messier than Jay initially believed, and there may never be definitive answers. In fact, there might not be a single overarching truth at all.

Jay is able to act on this newfound understanding of people's complexity when he notices Tito Maning, who presumably heard Jay read the letter. Jay's first instinct is to assume the worst of Tito Maning, or—using the language from Jay's letter—to assume that he's just "one thing." Specifically, Jay is afraid that Tito Maning is going to stop the memorial, since he's the one who vehemently opposed holding a funeral for Jun. But while Jay may never see eye-to-eye with Tito Maning, he now realizes that Tito Maning loved Jun in his own way, so Tito Maning can't be entirely villainous. That doesn't justify his worst deeds, but as Jay says, it confirms that no one is just good or just bad.

Patron Saints of Nothing Quotes


☝ But I keep talking because I'm determined to resist falling into the same pattern as always. This is my life, and I want my family to understand it in a way none of us truly understood Jun's. If we are to be more than what we have been, there's so much that we need to say. Salvation through honesty, I guess.

[...]

We are not doomed to suffer things as they are, silent and alone. We do not have to leave questions and letters and lives unanswered. We have more power and potential than we know if we would only speak, if we would only listen.

Related Characters: Jay Reguero (speaker), Jay's Dad

Related Themes: 

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 317-318

Explanation and Analysis

This passage takes place after Jay returns home to Michigan from his transformative trip in the Philippines investigating and mourning Jun's death. Though Jay and his dad have had a strained relationship in the past, Jay tells his dad everything that happened in the Philippines—including the fact that he wants to take a gap year and travel to the Philippines before going to college.

Earlier in the novel, Jay and his mom got into an argument about the value of honesty. She claimed that it's acceptable

for her as a doctor to lie to the families of her patients (at the patients' wishes) in order to spare the families emotional pain, and Jay disagreed. At first glance, Jay's position doesn't seem to have changed much; he's telling his dad the truth because "honesty" is a force for good. In fact, Jay seems to believe that Jun's unhappiness—which eventually led to his death—was in part caused by dishonesty, or at least by Jun and Tito Maning's inability to communicate openly with one another. Jay's "pattern" with his father could turn into a similarly harmful dynamic if he doesn't open up.

Jay *isn't* saying that honesty is a purely good thing. He's not

dumping truths on his dad but rather starting a conversation; he wants the two of them to "speak" to and "listen" to each other in turn so that neither of them "suffer[s]...alone." That's very different from believing that truth is always for the best—Jay knows how painful the truth can be, and the reason he thinks truth is important and "power[ful]" in this instance is because it allows him and his father to heal together. As Mia showed Jay earlier in the novel, truth matters when it leads to open and honest communication. Jay's reference to Jun's "letters" suggests that he wishes he'd had this type of communication with Jun.



SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

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

PROLOGUE

One sunny day, Jay Reguero sat on the floor of his dad and uncle's childhood bedroom, holding a dead puppy and crying while his own mother held him. At the time, Jay was 10 years old and on his first trip to the Philippines—he was born there, but he and his immediate family had soon moved away. After arriving at his grandparents' home in the rural Bicol region, Jay had discovered that his grandparents' unnamed dog recently gave birth and a single puppy survived. The puppy's mother was ignoring it, so Jay had tried to care for it himself, feeding it milk.

However, the puppy had refused to drink, probably because it was sad about its siblings and its neglectful mother, and it slowly died. Back then, Jay had only read about death or heard about other people's dead relatives. This was his first experience witnessing death. As Jay's mom comforted him in the bedroom, she told him to listen to the baby birds outside and said that when "one thing dies [...] another is born."

When Jay went back outside, his Filipino uncles and aunts laughed at him. They weren't trying to be mean, but they found it funny that a dog's death made Jay sad. Dogs die all the time—Jay's cousins wouldn't have needed their mom's comfort. Jay's Tito Danilo (Tito means "uncle") said to take comfort in God, and his Tito Maning said to stop crying. Tito Maning took the puppy's body away and returned empty-handed. He then tried to pet the puppy's mother, but she wouldn't let him.

This anecdote, which seems to be a memory of Jay's, establishes the themes and stakes of the book, as the rest of the novel portrays Jay processing another, more personal death. This passage also introduces Jay as a Filipino American who's spent minimal time in the Philippines (this is the first time in about 10 years that he's been there). Much of the book centers around Jay trying to make sense of this identity—he feels neither fully American nor fully Filipino, and he doesn't feel that he belongs in either place. It's possible to read the mother dog's rejection of its puppy as a metaphor for Jay's sense of unbelonging in the country where he was born—his separation from his "mother country."



Here, Jay's mother introduces—both to the novel and to Jay himself—the idea that death has an underlying meaning or purpose rather than being arbitrary. To comfort her distraught son, she suggested that the puppy's death was part of the broader circle of life. As the novel unfolds, Jay will likewise strain to find some sort of comforting meaning or purpose in the death of a loved one, but he will also find that death, loss, and grief are not as simple as his mother describes.



Tito Danilo tries to help Jay by urging him to seek spiritual comfort. Like Jay's mom, he wants to help Jay find meaning in the dog's death (using it to strengthen his connection with God or perhaps believing that all things, including the dog's death, are part of God's plan). Meanwhile, Tito Maning's callous attitude towards the dog's death and Jay's grief foreshadows his behavior after his own estranged son, Jun, dies years later. This passage also further highlights Jay's separation from Filipino society by suggesting that if Jay had grown up in the Philippines, he would have been exposed to death by now. While Jay's Filipino family members are clearly referencing dogs when they talk about death happening all the time, such language foreshadows the later war on drugs in the Philippines that makes human death commonplace and unremarkable. That the mother dog doesn't allow Tito Maning to pet it suggests that the novel isn't merely saying that Tito Maning's attitude toward death is different from Jay's American view, but rather implies that Maning's actions truly are cruel and unnatural.



Jay's cousin Jun hugged him, telling Jay that he was sad, too. Jun was born days after Jay, but he acted wiser than his years. Jay wanted to ask what Tito Maning did to the puppy and its siblings, but he didn't think he could deal with the answer, so he said nothing. A few days later, Jay returned home to Michigan. Wrapped up in his life, he forgot about the Philippines.

Not only is Jun mature for a 10-year-old, but he's also empathetic, and he offers Jay a human connection that the other Filipino family members don't. Meanwhile, the fact that Jay doesn't ask what Tito Maning did to the puppies is noteworthy. He wants to know the truth, but he feels that the truth (and the responsibility that knowing the truth may force upon him) would be too painful for him to handle—an idea that will reappear for Jay throughout the novel. The fact that Jay forgets about his trip so quickly and becomes wrapped up in his normal life in America further emphasizes his separation from his Filipino heritage and family. This quick forgetfulness combined with the fact that Jay hasn't visited the Philippines before age 10 also implies that his parents are similarly disconnected from the Philippines.



WISDOM FROM ON HIGH

Now in the present day, Jay and his friend Seth sit on the roof of their old elementary school at night. Seth is huge and looks older than he is, whereas Jay looks young for a high school senior. Four years ago, Seth figured out how to get up here on the roof. Back then, Jay was scared of heights and getting arrested, but this is their spot now. Seth pulls out a joint and offers it to Jay, who refuses as usual. Jay isn't anti-smoking, just worried about getting caught. The two sit and think about the future—spring break and graduation are approaching.

This passage draws a parallel between Seth and Jun. Seth looks older than he is, and readers already know from the puppy incident in the previous chapter that Jun acts older than he is. Jay's reasons for refusing the joint portray him as scared of the consequences of breaking "the rules," which is at least somewhat at odds with stereotypes about teenagers. The boys are high school seniors, which means they're in a kind of in-between state between adolescence and adulthood. It makes sense that they're both fixated on the future, because their lives are about to change significantly.



Seth pulls something out of his bag and tosses it to Jay: it's a University of Michigan hoodie. Jay responds unenthusiastically, which confuses Seth, who expected Jay to be more excited about having been accepted to attend Michigan. Seth asks if Jay is still upset about all the colleges that rejected him, which Seth thinks is dumb, since Jay had applied almost exclusively to Ivy League schools. Jay responds that he only applied to Ivies because of his parents. If he'd applied somewhere like Central, where Seth is going, they would've freaked out. In fact, when Jay texted his family earlier in the day about getting into Michigan, his sister and mother were proud, but Jay's dad made a joke about how Michigan is no Harvard. And Jay's brother, who actually did get into Harvard, didn't respond at all.

Jay's unenthusiastic reaction to the University of Michigan hoodie speaks to his uncertainty about his place in life and what he wants to do with his future. Choosing where to apply based on his parents' wishes rather than his own makes clear that he hasn't grappled with who he is or what he wants; he hasn't taken responsibility for himself. For Jay, this tension between pleasing his family and forging his own path will run throughout the work. Jay's father's passive-aggressive "joke" shows that Jay's parents' expectations really are quite forceful, and it also highlights the lack of communication and connection between Jay and his father.



Jay tells Seth that he isn't upset about the Ivies, which is true. Actually, his lack of enthusiasm is a result of not knowing what he wants to do career-wise, when everyone else expects him to. Jay knows Seth wouldn't understand; Seth may be a stoner, but he knows that he wants to study computer science. Besides, he and Seth never talk about their feelings. Instead, they give each other space when they're upset. When Seth's parents got divorced, Seth was sad, but he and Jay never discussed it.

Jay isn't just isolated from his Filipino relatives and his own family. He also is disconnected from his best friend, who he assumes wouldn't understand his experience. That Jay and Seth's entire relationship seems to be built around not sharing their feelings creates a contrast that makes Jay's relationship with Jun more extraordinary, as Jun's empathy when the puppy died meant that Jay and Jun were able to discuss their mutual sadness. In contrast, Seth couldn't even express his sadness about his parents' divorce.



The only person Jay could *really* talk to was Jun. They used to write each other **letters**. Jay thinks that if Jun ever returned to school then he is probably also graduating this year, but Jay has no way of knowing—he screwed things up with his cousin a while back. Seth sits next to Jay smelling like weed, which Seth's parents won't even care about. Seth tries to comfort Jay about Harvard, not realizing that this isn't why Jay is upset. Eventually, Seth just starts talking about video games.

Up until this moment, the novel has contrasted the strength and openness of Jay and Jun's relationship with Jay's other relationships. Now, suddenly, the novel complicates Jun and Jay's relationship by revealing without explanation that their relationship has been broken and that Jun for some reason left school. The novel, then, sets up Jun as the person who offers the lonely Jay a chance at real connection, while also making Jun into a mystery who Jay doesn't really know at all. Meanwhile, the novel continues to highlight Jay's isolation. Jay's comment that Seth's parents wouldn't care about him smoking weed emphasizes that Jay's own parents would care, again emphasizing the pressure Jay feels from his parents. And Seth's failure to understand the reasons behind Jay's sadness only increases the novel's portrayal of Jay as being all alone.



UNANSWERED

On Saturday afternoon, Jay is playing video games when his dad approaches and asks him to pause. Jay ignores him, certain that his dad just wants to talk about college. He shoots a T-rex onscreen and cheers. Jay's dad tells him that Tito Maning called with news: Jun is dead. Jay's character dies onscreen as Jay processes the information. Now he can see that his dad's eyes are red, and he realizes his dad, a nurse, should still be at the hospital along with Jay's mom. Instead, he's home during work hours.

Once more, the novel highlights Jay's lack of connection or communication with his father. But this passage makes clear that Jay's adolescent college problems won't be the novel's focus, and the juxtaposition between the fake video game deaths Jay interacts with onscreen and the real death Jay's dad is trying to tell him about reminds readers—and Jay—that there's a whole world outside of Jay's growing pains.



Jay's dad says that Jun died yesterday, but he won't say how it happened. Jay is confused: was it an accident? His dad asks if it matters, and Jay doesn't know if knowing the truth of how Jun died would really help. Worse, Jay doesn't know how to grieve, since he and Jun became distant years ago.

Jay's dad's refusal to reveal how Jun died furthers the mystery around Jun's death. Meanwhile, Jay's dad poses an important question when he asks Jay if it matters how Jun died, and it's significant that Jay can't answer him. Jay doesn't know if knowing the truth would help him or hurt him. Years ago, Jay didn't want to know what Tito Maning did to the puppies' bodies for the same reason: he thought that the knowledge might be too painful.



Jay feels numb; Jun is dead and Jay is just playing video games. Jay asks if their family will attend the funeral, but his dad says that Jun's father, Tito Maning, doesn't want a funeral because of the way Jun died. Jay's dad leaves and Jay grows angry. He thinks about all of Jun's **letters** and about the fact that he never answered the last one.

The shock of Jun's death makes Jay feel even more acutely that his own (somewhat stereotypical American high-schooler) concerns of college and video games are meaningless or unimportant. In addition, now it is also clear that Jay caused the rupture in his relationship with Jun. Jay now blames himself for that failure, though the novel still hasn't revealed why Jay stopped responding to Jun's letters.



HOW HE LIVED

After sitting silently for a while, Jay knocks on his parents' door and asks his dad to tell him what happened to Jun. There's no response from inside the room, and Jay wonders if his dad is crying. It's unlikely, because Jay has never seen his dad cry. Jay heads to his own room and opens a shoebox under his bed. After the trip to the Philippines when Jay was 10, he and Jun became pen pals, and all of Jun's **letters** are in this box.

That Jay knocks on his dad's door to talk and gets no response, combined with the fact that he's never seen his father cry, makes clear that it isn't just Jay who is at fault for his cut-off relationship with his father. His father also clearly has issues with communication and emotional openness, which he seems to have passed down to Jay. That Jay still has all of Jun's letters shows how much he cares about them (and about Jun), and therefore amplifies the mystery of why Jay stopped responding. In this moment, Jay is trying to understand Jun, to find some truth or meaning about Jun, by going back through these letters. The letters are the only remaining way to access Jun's thoughts, hopes, and fears, and therefore the letters come to represent who Jun was as a person.



As Jay searches for Jun's final **letter**, he wonders where his own letters to Jun are. There are definitely fewer of them, because Jay was bad at responding. He used to ask Jun if they could email instead since letters took so long, but Jun eventually told him that his dad (Jay's uncle, whom he calls Tito Maning) didn't let his kids have email accounts. Jay eventually finds Jun's last letter from four years ago, which Jun sent just before he ran away from home. Instead of reading it, though, Jay reads some other random letters. It's hard to remember that Jun is dead.

Jay's search for Jun's final letter, only to then put off reading it, portrays Jay's way of dealing with the truth of Jun's death: he's inching toward facing it, but not ready to. Tito Maning's decision to forbid his children to have email accounts again highlights how strict he is as a father, which in turn gets connected to Jun's choice to run away from home. Finally, Jay's reluctance to read the final letter seems also to be motivated by Jay's guilt at his own failings at keeping in touch and how those failings may have contributed to Jun's running away and eventual death.



Jay tries to call his brother Chris, but Chris doesn't answer; he's always busy with his new boyfriend or his engineering work. Jay then calls his sister Em, who's at college now, and she answers. Their relationship has always been strained, but Jay misses her sometimes. He asks if she's heard the news—his family doesn't communicate well, so he's not sure. Em thinks he's talking about getting into Michigan, and she jokes that they'll be rivals now. But Jay tells her that Jun is dead. At first, she doesn't remember who Jun is, and she asks is he the one who ran away from home?

Clearly, Chris's lack of response to Jay's earlier text wasn't exactly out of character for him. And in fact, this passage proves both that Jay is pretty distant from his siblings and that his siblings are distant from their parents, since Em hadn't heard about Jun's death yet. Jay's inability to communicate with his dad is starting to make sense in context—this family clearly isn't used to opening up to or connecting with each other. Jay is looking for connection, but not finding it.



Em then asks what happened in a too-curious tone. Jay says that their dad won't say, and she speculates that it might have been an overdose, murder, or suicide. Jay is mad that she's treating the topic lightly, so she begins talking about college instead. Jay gets off the phone quickly, realizing that no one but him knew Jun. He considers calling Seth, but he doesn't. He just wants someone to hold him the way his mom held him as a kid. He doesn't know why the news is making him so upset; he hasn't heard from Jun in years and never tried to reach out, even when he heard that Jun had run away from home.

Jay finally reads Jun's last **letter**. In it, Jun says that he hasn't heard from Jay in months. Jun is tired of his police chief father (Tito Maning) acting like he knows what's right and wrong, and he's tired of his schoolmates fixating on shallow things when people in their country are starving. Jun doesn't want to ignore others' suffering, and he asks if Jay also feels this way. He wonders if Jay wants to stop writing, which is fine, but he hopes that Jay will respond.

Jay reads the **letter** several times, feeling guilty that he never tried to figure out where Jun went after he ran away or why he left. He searches the letter for clues as to how Jun died, but there aren't any. He closes the shoebox like a coffin and goes to bed, thinking all the while that Tito Maning should give Jun a funeral no matter how he died.

The novel shows here just how complete Jay's isolation is. It is not just his imagination that his connections to others are weak: in this hard time for him, his father won't tell him the truth, his sister lacks empathy, and he's never had the sort of friendship with Seth that would make talking to him an option. Jay's wish that his mother would hold him also highlights his in-between status as an adolescent: he wishes he had the parental support he got as a kid, but he isn't a kid. At the same time, Jay is forced to confront his guilt that he has made Jun endure the same sort of isolation that Jay now feels. Meanwhile, Em's curiosity about Jun's cause of death deepens the mystery of what actually did happen to Jun.



Having failed to connect to any family or friends, Jay finally re-reads Jun's final letter. In this moment of total isolation, he makes an attempt to connect to Jun by reading his words. The letter again highlights both Jun's empathy for others and his isolation from his own family, all while also further painting Tito Maning as the strict "bad guy" of this family saga. Jun is also clearly looking to connect with Jay in the letter, but the fact that Jay never responded makes clear that Jay wasn't willing or able to offer such connection.



With Jun dead, Jay endures the guilt of his failure to write back. This guilt also makes him want to figure out why Jun died, to find some meaning in or explanation for Jun's death. The image of Jay closing the shoebox on the letters "like a coffin" is interesting. In one sense it implies a kind of sad finality and inability for Jay to connect with the dead Jun. On the other, closing the coffin is a part of a funeral ceremony, and Jay has just gone through a private kind of funeral for Jun by reading his letters, by remembering him. And Jay's belief that Jun's cause of death shouldn't have stopped him from having a funeral is a statement of love, that his cousin deserves remembrance by his family no matter what.



AN IMPROVEMENT TO SOCIETY

Jay wakes up the next morning at 5 a.m. and hears his mother downstairs—she's returned from her shift at the hospital where she works. He goes to talk with her to see what she knows about Jun's death. Jay finds her in the kitchen, with her blond hair pulled back in a ponytail and still dressed in her scrubs—she's an oncologist and Jay's dad is an NICU nurse. When Jay was a kid, his parents worked opposite shifts, but now they work together and are closer as a result. Jay's mom sees Jay and hugs him, sorry that she couldn't be home earlier. Jay had wanted to be held, but he doesn't feel any better now.

Jay immediately asks why Jun won't have a funeral, and Jay's mom hesitates. Finally, she says that Tito Maning doesn't want to discuss the manner of Jun's death and that they should respect his wishes. Jay needs to know the truth, though, if only to confirm that it wasn't Jay's fault; that Jun's death wasn't the result of Jay's failure to write. Jay thinks about Jun's **letter** and realizes that this is what Jun was saying: everyone ignores others' suffering. Jay asks if his mom lies to her patients, and she says she'll lie to their families at the patient's request—if the patient will die painfully, is she supposed to say that? Jay thinks the family would deserve to know the truth, but she thinks they'd want peace instead.

Jay continues to insist that he needs to know how Jun died, and Jay's mom realizes that Jay won't drop the subject, the same way his dad wouldn't. This confuses Jay, because his dad always drops things. She makes Jay a cup of tea, warning him the truth will hurt, then asks if Jay knows what *shabu* is. Apparently, it's the name for meth in the Philippines. She reveals that Jay's dad doesn't know the whole story—he probably doesn't want to—but he told her that Jun started using *shabu* after he ran away. A few days ago, Jun was shot by the police.

Jay's parents' work schedule explains a lot about the family's dynamics and lack of connection. Further, that they have shifted their schedules as Jay got older makes clear that they think that, now that Jay is an adolescent and not a child, he doesn't need as much care. When the puppy died, Jay's mom was able to comfort him by telling a simple story to give the dog's death meaning. But even though he craves such comfort now, she can't deliver it, implying that such comfort isn't as easy to come by now that he is older. Finally, the reference to Jay's mom's blond hair suggests that she is white, which may be another reason for Jay's sense of feeling in-between and disconnected from both American and Filipino culture.



Here Jay confirms that his determination to find out the truth about how Jun died stems at least partly from guilt about whether he deserves some blame. Meanwhile, Jun's death is starting to prompt changes in Jay, who realizes that both his own and his mother's behavior involve the sorts of negligence toward others that Jun was criticizing. Whether Jay's interpretation here is entirely fair (especially to his mother) is a bit beside the point; the point, rather, is that Jay is starting to change, to care. Jay and his mom's disagreement about how to handle the truth is a significant one. She's saying that the truth can sometimes hurt more than it can help, while Jay argues that the pain would be worth it to know the truth. The novel will continue to explore these ideas, not necessarily to prove one correct, but rather to see the interplay of these tensions about the truth and the healing and pain that truth can cause.



Jay's mom's description of his dad is significant in a variety of ways. First, it reaffirms how distant Jay is from his dad, since he doesn't see his dad as his mother does at all. Second, it simultaneously suggests that Jay and his dad are actually similar in many ways—they both don't drop things—which in turn implies that there is the potential for Jay and his dad to forge a stronger connection. Third, it suggests that there is much going on in his broader family that the adolescent Jay doesn't understand, and that Jay's dad did insist that Tito Maning tell him to at least some degree what happened to Jun. Meanwhile the novel's portrayal of Jun becomes more complicated. Jay saw him as wise beyond his years and remarkably empathetic, and he now must also process that Jun was a drug user.



Jay is confused: why would the police shoot Jun for using drugs? Jay's mom is shocked that Jay doesn't know about Philippine president Rodrigo Duterte's drug war. She explains that Duterte was elected in 2016 (three years ago) after he claimed to be able to eliminate crime by getting rid of drugs. Once he was president, he demanded that addicts surrender themselves and said that if they didn't, both police and citizens could shoot them without a trial. No one knows how many people have died so far. It's probably over 20,000 people, but the government says just a few thousand.

Jay is horrified that everyone in the Philippines is okay with Duterte. But his mom says that she and Jay can't understand what's going on because they no longer live in the Philippines. Most Filipinos think the policies are a necessary evil. Jay is annoyed that he's not allowed to condemn the policies, but Jay's mom insists that Jay's opinion should be informed. For her part, she can't judge what happens in a country that isn't hers. Jay argues that she lived in the Philippines, is married to a Filipino, and has Filipino children, but she argues back that her children are Filipino American. Jay asks his mom what his dad thinks, and she says he's just glad his kids are in the U.S.

Jay remembers reading Elie Wiesel's [Night](#) as a sophomore and listening to Wiesel's Nobel Peace Prize speech. In the speech, Wiesel said that people should speak out against wrongdoing; if they don't, they're enabling it. Jay's English class almost unanimously agreed with Wiesel, even though none of them ever spoke up when they saw bullying at school. Now, Jay wonders whether he should've spoken up for Jun and whether there was something he and his family could've done to prevent Jun's death. He's horrified that everyone thinks of Jun as just an addict. Maybe Jun wouldn't have turned to drugs if Jay had written more often, and maybe he wouldn't have died.

Jay's ignorance of the drug war in the Philippines is a further example of both his own and his parents' separation from Filipino culture, and of his own lack of connection with his dad. (It's also, it should be admitted, a way for the author to sneak in some exposition about the drug war.) Jay's ignorance might also be taken as an indication of Jay being a typical American teenager, fixated on his own problems and ignorant about the rest of the world. Meanwhile, the novel now has made clear that the truth about Jun isn't as simple as Jay thought it would be—there's a whole host of not just personal but also political factors involved.



Jay's mother is arguing that only someone who belongs to a culture can truly understand it and therefore judge it. Jay disagrees, as he believes that he can see what's right and wrong about the Filipino policies without understanding everything that is going on in the Philippines. The novel doesn't resolve this argument about culture, belonging, and responsibility here—but it is a tension worth keeping track of as the story develops. Meanwhile, this exchange gives a further glimpse of the cause of his father's separation from his own Filipino family and culture: he came to the US to give his children a better life, and he has cut himself off from the Philippines to make that hope a reality.



Elie Wiesel's argument refutes Jay's mother, as her logic would dictate that nobody who wasn't German should have judged or fought against the Holocaust. Jay takes Wiesel's directive more personally though, and he has come to agree with Jun's criticism of other students—and people—who don't seem to see or care about other's suffering. He realizes how his own laziness and unwillingness to connect has made him at least partly to blame for Jun's suffering, and his dismay at others seeing Jun as just an addict suggests that he has begun to harbor the notion of finding and revealing the "truth" of Jun's character. Jay is changing and growing, though it's also worthwhile to note that one might argue that Jay's ideas here are perhaps a bit too simple, a bit immature and adolescent.



A NARROWER COUNTRY THAN EXPECTED

On Sunday night, Jay is browsing the Internet in his room. His parents assume he's doing homework, but school seems pointless now. Instead, Jay is doing research about Jun's death—it feels like penance. But he can't find a mention of Jun's legal name online, which is weird, since Tito Maning is a police officer. All Jay finds are articles about the drug war. Apparently, the international community has condemned Duterte, but they've done little else.

Online, there are tons of photos of Filipinos cradling loved one's corpses on the street. Jay feels that he needs to confront the horror of it all, even though it reminds him of Jun. Most Philippine websites praise Duterte, which makes sense to Jay once he learns that Duterte's main critic was jailed for drug charges (on Duterte's orders). Jay does find a subversive Philippine Instagram account entitled "GISING NA PH!" The account opposes the drug war by posting photos of Filipinos with pictures of their loved ones, all of whom were killed by police.

Later, Jay's mom and dad come to Jay's room, although his dad clearly doesn't want to be there. Jay's dad is friendly to his patients but distant at home. Jay's mom asks if Jay wants to talk, but Jay doesn't—he wants to take action. Eventually, Jay's parents leave him alone, warning him not to stay up too late doing schoolwork. Jay's dad even says there's more to life than school, which Jay thinks is hilariously out-of-character. The family came to the U.S. for the kids' education, after all. Jay overhears his dad saying that he doesn't understand Jay.

On Monday morning, Jay is late to school and hasn't done his homework, since he no longer feels like school matters. Seth wonders why Jay didn't respond to his texts all weekend and why he's acting like a jerk now. Jay brushes him off and walks out of school entirely, saying he isn't feeling well. Seth follows, to Jay's annoyance. It's sunny out, which is the opposite of how Jay feels. As the boys walk out on the street, Jay notices how different the suburban landscape looks from the photos Jay saw of the Philippines.

Jay's obsession with Jun's death stems both from grief and guilt; the fact that research feels like "penance" confirms that Jay feels partly responsible for Jun's death. Jay's realization that the international community hasn't done anything about Duterte makes clear that Jay wants someone to be held responsible for what happened to Jun, but also communicates just how little Jun has known, up until now, about his birth country..



The information Jay finds confirms that the situation in the Philippines is complicated. Duterte seems to engage in dictatorial behavior, as it's implied he trumps up charges to imprison his critics. But the Philippine population seems divided about Duterte's war on drugs: some in favor, some against. Though even that dichotomy is hard to measure, as those in favor might in fact just fear Duterte. What seems clear is that Jun doesn't know enough about the Philippines.



There's lots of father/adolescent-son failure to connect going on here. From Jay's father's behavior with his patient's it's clear that he is a caring person, but there seems to be an uncrossable bridge between Jay and his father. Jay responds even to his father's caring comment by noticing its hypocrisy. Jay's determination to do something about Jun's death again demonstrates his guilt and grief, and perhaps also an adolescent idea that there is something simple that can be done to fix all this.



In the aftermath of Jun's death, Jay is searching for what matters. That he now is blowing off school at least partly mirrors Jun's own dropping out years earlier. Jay can't enjoy his own life when he now knows about the suffering in the Philippines. Meanwhile, Jay is basing his image of the Philippines off of his limited research. Still, Jay is a teenager who's grieving: that's why he's a jerk to Seth, and that's why he can't focus on school.



Frustrated, Jay says that there are so many bad things in the world and everyone ignores them. Seth argues that people have their own problems to worry about, like school and jobs. Seth asks if Jay wants to talk about anything, and Jay admits that his cousin died and tells Seth how. Seth is apologetic and says that he's read about how crazy Duterte is. Jay is annoyed that Seth knows more about the drug war than Jay ever did.

Seth says that he forgot Jay was Filipino, since Jay is “basically white.” This comment stuns Jay, and he asks what Seth means. Trying to backtrack, Seth says that he doesn't see color. Jay knows that's not what Seth was trying to say, even though the comment is pretty problematic regardless, since it implies both that white is “default” and that differences are bad. Seth says that Jay acts like everyone at their school, which is majority-white. Jay is hurt by this and walks away. Seth doesn't understand why Jay is mad, but this makes sense to Jay, because Seth literally *can't* understand. Jay thinks there's clearly not much depth to their friendship.

LET ME GO

Jay spends the rest of the day sleeping and fakes being sick the following day so he can skip school. His mom knows what's going on but allows him to stay home from school. That afternoon, Jay gets a message on Instagram from a blank account with a low-resolution profile photo of a Filipino man. The message is just a link, which Jay ignores, but then the anonymous user follows up with another link and a picture of Jun, in which Jun looks older and has tattoos. The user, who claims to be Jun's friend, says that Jun did “nothing wrong.”

Jay tries to figure out who made the account but can't. He opens up the links from the first message, which include an article about a 17-year-old Filipino boy who was shot. The police claimed that the boy fought back, but camera footage proved that this wasn't true. Instead, the police handed the boy a gun. The boy dropped it and raised his hands, saying he had a test the next day. There are more stories like this, in which someone is accused and killed, and then their murder is covered up. The Philippine government denies wrongdoing, claiming that people hide their true selves from their family. The article also discusses Duterte's system of financially rewarding regular people for turning vigilante and killing drug users.

Jay's sudden frustration about people's selfishness is clearly the result of his own guilt: now he's taking Jun's concerns as his own as a kind of atonement. Seth's response might be taken as selfish, and yet it's also true. Still, in this moment Jay does open up to Seth, but with the unhappy result that he realizes even more fully how much he doesn't know about his birth country and culture.



In this moment, Jay is forced to confront the degree to which he doesn't belong. His best friend doesn't see him for who he is—and in fact claims that he can't see Jay's heritage, denies that Jay even has a different heritage, and implies that whiteness is the standard against which everything else must be measured. Seth's comment is the second time in a handful of days that Jay has been told that his Filipino heritage doesn't count—the first was when his mom told Jay that he was Filipino American and therefore couldn't judge what was happening in the Philippines. Jay's mother and best friend are—without intending to—telling him that he belongs nowhere at all.



Jay's mother “gives him space,” which communicates her care for him but also doesn't offer real connection. The mysterious Instagram message, meanwhile, gives Jay exactly what he (perhaps without realizing it) is hoping to hear. Jay doesn't want to believe that Jun did drugs or committed other crimes, and was purely a victim of Duterte's drug war. This desire is partly a result of his adolescent way of seeing the world in relatively simple terms, but, also, Jay has feared that his own negligence may have contributed to Jun becoming a target in the drug war—but if Jun was innocent, so is Jay.



Jay has been hurting because he feels guilty that his failure to answer Jun's letters may have contributed to Jun acting in a way that made him a target of Duterte's drug war. The Instagram message seems to absolve him of that guilt. At the same time, the novel describes the way that the Philippine government absolves itself of all guilt for the death of the innocent by arguing that anyone might be a secret drug dealer. While Jay has taken perhaps too much responsibility for Jun's death, the Philippine government refuses any responsibility for the deaths it causes.



Jay thinks that maybe Jun was wrongfully killed as well and that Jay might be able to find the truth and bring him justice. In order to do so, he has to get to the Philippines. It's not totally out of the question: even if Jay has to miss some school, spring break is coming up, and Jay's parents could easily pay for his flight. The only problem will be convincing them.

Jay now sees himself as a detective in a murder mystery—as a finder of truth and dispenser of justice. In part, this feels like an attempt to prove, once and for all, that Jay's neglect of Jun didn't cause Jun's death. It's also a way to give Jun's death some meaning and significance. If Jun can prove that Jun was wrongfully murdered—and, by extension, that the drug war is wrong, since it harms innocent people—then something good will have come out of Jun's death.



GROUNDING

When Jay presents the trip idea to his parents (saying it could be a graduation gift), his mom says no. Jay's graduation present was supposed to be a computer, but Jay says he wants to travel, like his parents did—they met when Jay's mom went to the Philippines. Jay's mom agrees that he can travel, but not to the Philippines, given what happened. They could go to Spain instead. Jay realizes that his mom is suggesting a family trip. Jay's dad says that he can't take off work, so his mom says it'll be her and Jay. Because he'll have a hard time solving Jun's murder with his mom around, Jay says that he wants to travel alone. His parents are unconvinced.

Jay's mother is trying to protect Jay, but she is also still treating him as a child who can't be responsible for himself. Yet Jay's dismissal of the computer he was going to get shows how he is changing and growing: he's focused on the truth, not material things. Even so, Jay's father's distance continues to be a mystery that implies there is still much going on that the adolescent Jay doesn't understand and can't see.



Jay realizes that telling some of the truth might be useful in getting what he wants, so he says that Jun's death made him more aware of how disconnected he is from his Filipino family. He doesn't speak Tagalog, nor does he know much about the country. It's like knowing only "half of [himself]." His mom understands, but says that the timing is wrong. Jay changes tack and claims that his cousin Grace asked him to come, since she's having a hard time with her grief. Jay's dad is surprised that Jay and Grace talk at all—Grace doesn't have a phone. Jay's parents silently exchange a glance, and then Jay's dad goes to call Tito Maning and see if the visit would be okay.

This moment is probably the closest that Jay has come to opening up to his parents, so it's ironic (but, perhaps, typically teenager-y) that his truthfulness hides an ulterior motive. When Jay's mom doesn't take the bait, though, Jay shifts from (admittedly ill-intended) honesty to straightforward lies. Meanwhile, the look shared between Jay's mother and father suggests that they also have secrets of their own, and it seems like these secrets might motivate his father's decision to see if Jay might visit the Philippines after all.



Jay's dad speaks to Jay's Tita Chato and Tito Danilo often, but less often to Jay's Tito Maning. Jay hopes this means that no one will follow up on his lie about Grace. He also hopes that Tito Maning will feel like he has to let Jay come: if Tito Maning doesn't, he'd have to admit that Jun's death was a big deal. Jay's dad returns and says that Tito Maning approved the visit. He then warns Jay to stay close to family the whole time he's in the Philippines, and they buy the plane tickets. Jay can hardly believe this is happening, but he can't get too excited, because he's going to the Philippines for a somber reason.

Apparently, Jun wasn't the only one who had a strained relationship with Tito Maning—Jay's dad doesn't seem to get along that well with his brother either, since he speaks to his other siblings more often. The novel continues to set up Tito Maning as a cruel character, if not worse. Meanwhile, Jay continues to manipulate others lies or hidden truths to get what he wants, in this case reasoning that Tito Maning can only maintain the lie of Jun's death being innocent by allowing Jay to come visit.



THINGS INSIDE

Sitting in his room before leaving for the Philippines, Jay reads a **letter** from Jun. In it, Jun says that he wants to be an astronaut someday. He told Tito Maning, but Tito Maning said that the Philippines didn't have a space program, so the dream was stupid. Jun said that the Philippines might have a space program someday, and if not, Jun could go to a country that did. But Tito Maning said that Jun had to stay in the Philippines. Later that night, Grace told Jun that the dream wasn't stupid, but Jun now thinks that his dad is right. He says that Jay will have to be an astronaut instead and take Jun with him.

As Jay reads the **letter** in his bedroom, his dad enters. He points at Jay's decorations, asking if they're new. None are, but eventually, Jay starts lying and saying yes. Jay's dad then tells him that the family moved to the United States because he wanted his kids to be American. Jay might not feel connected to the Philippines, but Jay has had opportunities here. His dad continues, saying that it's easy to romanticize the Philippines when you're not there—the food, the beaches—but there are bad things about the country, too. Jay asks what that means, but his dad won't elaborate.

Instead, Jay's dad lays out Jay's itinerary: Jay will stay with Tito Maning, then Tita Chato, then his grandparents Lolo and Lola, and then Tito Maning again. Tito Danilo was recently assigned to a parish, so he'll be at Jay's grandparents' house, too. Jay's dad warns Jay not to bring up Jun while he's there, because the family doesn't want to talk about him. Jay pretends to agree, but he's good at hiding the truth. He learned that from his dad.

LIKE A FOG

Jay stays home from school to prep for the trip. He messages the anonymous account again on Instagram but gets no response. His dad picks up a bunch of stuff from the grocery store and explains to a confused Jay that the items are *pasalubong* (gifts for the family), which will be placed in balikbayan boxes (boxes you bring home with you). Jay will take the boxes to the Philippines and distribute the gifts upon arrival. At first, Jay tries to help his dad fill the boxes, but he does it wrong, so his dad takes over. After his mom helps him pack, Jay secretly stashes Jun's **letters** in his backpack.

Jun's letter reveals that part of his strained relationship with Tito Maning stemmed from Tito Maning's strong nationalism—he wanted Jun to stay in the Philippines, to be a part of the Philippines, even if it cost Jun his dreams. The letter also begins to establish Grace as a character who was sympathetic to and aligned with Jun's way of seeing the world.



That Jay's dad doesn't know how Jay's room has or hasn't changed over the years demonstrates how little Jay and his dad talk to one another. That Jay is unwilling to correct his father further attests to the way this family finds it difficult to be honest with each other. While Jay's dad's comments about the Philippines are undoubtedly true, what also comes across here is that Jay's dad himself hasn't found a way to reconcile his Filipino and American selves—and this lack seems like it is a big part of what stands between Jay and his father. There is so much his father can't—or perhaps won't—say.



This passage lays out the cast of characters that will show up during Jay's trip. Tito Maning is clearly a dominant presence in the family, because Jay's dad specifically asked him if Jay could come to the Philippines, even though Jay is going to see all of his family members. It's pretty remarkable that Jay isn't supposed to bring Jun up at all, given how sudden and tragic Jun's death was. Note that Tito Danilo's vocation as a priest makes sense given that he was the one who told Jay to take spiritual comfort after the puppy's death.



Balikbayan boxes are a Filipino ritual of sorts—Filipinos either mail them to family overseas or bring them back home after traveling. In this case, Jay's lack of knowledge about the boxes again points to his disconnection from Filipino culture. Yet the fact that he is bringing the boxes at all—boxes that one brings home after traveling—attests to the fact that the Philippines still is a home for him, a legacy that can't be taken from him. Earlier in the novel, Jay closed the box holding Jun's letters “like a coffin,” but now that he believes Jun's murder is unsolved, Jay has “exhumed” the letters. Solving Jun's murder gives Jay a purpose, but it also allows him to repress his grief.



That night, Jay has a dream about Jun that he thinks might actually be a memory. In the dream, the boys are leaving Jun's school in the Philippines and laughing about one of Jun's classmates as they walk down the street together. Suddenly, Jun speeds up. Though Jay tries to follow, he loses his cousin in a crowd.

The meaning of this dream isn't too difficult to parse: Jay has quite literally "lost" Jun, and his dream reflects that reality. But interestingly, this dream also seems related to Jun's final letter and to Jun's dropping out of school. In that letter, Jun described his annoyance with his shallow classmates. In the dream, Jay is laughing at those students with Jun, despite the fact that Jay worried, after learning of Jun's death, that he was just as shallow as those classmates. This dream seems to reflect Jay's guilt.



Jay's parents bring him to the airport before dawn. Jay's dad checks the balikbayan boxes and loads them onto the conveyor belt. Other Filipino travelers are doing the same. Jay and his dad hug, and his dad seems like he's about to say something but doesn't. Jay walks through security without looking back and sits at his gate while the sun rises. As he boards the plane, prepared for his 20-hour journey, he imagines Jun's ghost behind him.

Jay's dad continues to take charge of the balikbayan boxes, although they should be Jay's responsibility at this point. Even now, Jay's dad isn't willing to share any cultural or personal experience with Jay. And, once again, Jay's dad seems unable to communicate in the way he wants to with his son. Feeling as if he is with Jun's ghost captures Jay's intention to solve Jun's murder, but also suggests that Jay is unwilling to mourn Jun or let Jun go. The rising sun could be read as a symbol of this new life that Jay is entering as he embarks on this trip.



THE STRENGTH OF MY CONVICTION

On the plane, Jay wakes up afraid for his own life because he hears an alarm. He then realizes it's coming from his headphones. Now fully awake, Jay observes an old Filipino man sitting absolutely still with a rosary, which is puzzling. Jay then notices that the seat right beside his own is empty; the woman who was sitting there is gone. Jay starts to watch a movie he's already seen: Will Smith's *Hitch*.

Jay is clearly preoccupied with thoughts of death, since that's what his mind jumps to immediately when he hears the alarm. Meanwhile, his experience on the plane upon waking up attests to the different culture he is traveling into: he doesn't understand that the man with the rosary might be scared of flying. Jay then immerses himself in the familiar: an American movie.



The movie gets boring, so Jay reads one of Jun's **letters**. In it, Jun tells Jay about a distressing recent incident. His family was at the mall when a dirty woman approached them, holding out a thin, pale baby and saying "please." Jun tried to take the baby before Tito Maning dragged him away. Jun then says he remembers a recent sermon at church about the Good Samaritan. The moral of the sermon was that you should help people in need, but Jun didn't help that woman, which he now regrets. He adds that Grace says he couldn't have helped, and that makes him feel worse. If everyone helped each other, no one would be hurt. He then wonders if Jay beat his video game yet.

Jun's letter demonstrates his own deep empathy for others, and his distress at the general lack of generosity in the world. This is the Jun whom Jay admires, and why Jay feels so much guilt at his own failure to respond to Jun when Jun was in need. At the same time, Jun's closing question implies that he wouldn't have found Jay shallow, and that there is room in the world to both care about others and to enjoy "frivolous" things like video games.



On the plane, Jay's seatmate returns and touches Jay's arm; apparently, Jay has been crying. Jay claims it was the sad movie he's watching, even though *Hitch* is still playing. Later, Jay waits for his connecting flight in Seoul, South Korea. Jay is impressed by how technologically advanced the airport is; it has electrical outlets everywhere and sliding bathroom doors. Jay was always told that the U.S. is the best country, but now he thinks that's obviously a lie. Adults always lie, sometimes for good reasons—like to make kids feel better or to motivate them by telling them they played great in a game when they didn't. Jay thinks growing up means learning to separate truth from lies.

Jay's crying again indicates how upset he is about Jun's death; his lie about his reason for crying again demonstrate how he hides his true feelings. Jay's ruminations about lies further establish his position that all lies are bad, and that the truth is a fundamentally good thing, even when it's hurtful. These black-and-white ideas might be taken as a sign of his immaturity, but also might be taken as strong ideals. Jay's youth gives him conviction, even as it causes him to see the world in ways that are perhaps too simple. Meanwhile, this trip is already causing Jay to see the world in a new way, so that he can see beyond what might be described as "American-tinted glasses."



Jay knows that he needs to figure out the truth about Jun. Tito Maning is a police officer, and if Jun was murdered as part of the drug war, maybe that's why Tito Maning is refusing to hold a funeral for his son. When Tito Maning picks him up from the airport, Jay vows that he will immediately ask him what happened to Jun. If Tito Maning tries to lie, Jay will demand that he tell the truth instead, and eventually Tito Maning will cave.

Jay's conviction to figure out the truth of Jun's death is once more on display here. But so is his simplistic view that the truth will be simple to figure out.



A NEW SILENCE ARRIVES

Jay smells Manila as soon as he steps off the plane: it smells just like it did when he visited and maybe even like it did when Jay was born. The immigration officer at the airport asks Jay if he's a Filipino coming home, and even though Jay's dad told him to say yes to get a longer visa, Jay doesn't know the answer. The man asks if Jay speaks Tagalog, and Jay says no. The man shakes his head but grants the long visa anyway.

Jay's immediate recognition of Manila's smell proves his mom wrong: Jay will never be a totally neutral observer of the country's goings-on, because he recognizes the Philippines as home on some fundamental level. At the same time, his interaction with the immigration officer highlights the ways in which he does not belong in the country. Jay is caught between worlds, unsure of his place in either of them.



Jay messages Jun's anonymous friend on Instagram to say that he has arrived in the Philippines. Then Jay waits at the luggage carousel. He notices that everyone in the airport looks like him: black hair, brown skin. Still, Jay's skin is lighter and he can't understand the many languages people are speaking. Jay grabs his boxes and waits for Tito Maning, who's nowhere to be found. Jay suddenly feels helpless, since he doesn't have his uncle's phone number and can't text his parents for it—it's the middle of the night in the U.S. If Jay can't even figure this out, how will he solve Jun's murder?

Again, Jay both is and isn't part of the crowd at the airport. Meanwhile, Jay came to the Philippines on a mission, but now he's realizing that his idea of how easy it would be to fulfill his "mission" was simplistic.



Jay's Tita Ami, Tito Maning's wife, eventually arrives without Tito Maning. She greets Jay stiffly, and the family's driver, Tomas, loads Jay's boxes and luggage into the car. Jay's 12-year-old cousin Angel greets him brightly but his 15-year-old cousin Grace is reading a book and simply nods. Grace looks very serious and mature and Angel looks very childlike, but both sisters share Jun's intelligent eyes.

Tita Ami asks about Jay's flight and Angel makes small talk, but for the most part conversation in the car dwindles as the family waits in traffic. Jay asks where Tito Maning is, and Tita Ami says that he's very busy, which Jay takes as a reference to the drug war. Jay doesn't say anything, not because he's trying to avoid talking about Jun but because he thinks only Tito Maning would know the truth about Jun's death. Jay tries to talk to Grace about her book, but she responds with single-syllable answers.

Jay notices that the models on the billboards they pass have skin as light as his or lighter. They drive by small houses, and Jay thinks that this doesn't look like a country at war. This makes Jay more confused: why did Jun run away? Jay asks Grace what book she's reading, and she says it's by José Rizal. Jay has never read a Filipino author. Angel explains that every Filipino student is required to read Rizal, which makes Jay feel out of place. Jay asks Angel about school, and she says that instructors speak English and that there are too many students in public school. She and Grace go to private school, though. Angel asks questions about Jay's sister Em, but then the car is silent.

They pass through a crowded neighborhood in which pedestrians weave through cars. Suddenly, a young girl approaches their car, holding out her hands. Tita Ami reassures Jay that their windows are tinted, but thinking of Jun, Jay rolls down his window and hands the girl money (some is from him, but Grace slips him some, too). Jay hopes it'll help—things are cheap here, so the cash will go a long way.

Jay sees the Philippines through his fixation on Jun, as he notices how much Grace and Angel resemble Jun. The coldness of Tita Ami and Grace, and the absence of Tito Maning, speaks to all sorts of possible family dynamics that Jay can't yet comprehend. He is a part of this family, but also an outsider to it.



Jay had a vision of showing up in the Philippines and meeting Tito Maning at the airport, and then interrogating Tito Maning until he learned the truth of Jun's death. The reality of Tito Maning not even showing up shows how Jay's idea of simply "finding the truth" has no bearing in reality. This also suggests that Jay's other ideas about Jun's "case" might be overly simplistic, such as his belief that only Tito Maning, and not the rest of his family, knows what happened to Jun.



Jay once again is forced to see his disconnection from Filipino society. It turns out that his mom was at least partially correct: he can't know everything about the Philippines from a distance, and his simplistic idea that the Philippines is just a big "war zone" is clearly not accurate. The light-skinned models on the billboards suggest something else though: that the Philippines is in some ways at odds with its own heritage, as it prizes physical attributes that seem connected to whiteness rather than the attributes of its own people. (One can argue that this likely results from the Philippines' colonial history—the country was colonized by Spain from 1521-1898, and then by the U.S. until 1946).



Jay's actions are clearly influenced by Jun's letter in which Jun describes encountering a poor woman. Grace slipping Jay some money—in contrast to Tita Ami's clear desire to have nothing to do with the poor woman—suggests that Grace and Tita Ami's reasons for their coldness toward Jay are not the same.



Tita Ami says Jay shouldn't have helped. Soon, a bunch of kids gather around the car and knock. Tita Ami says that if you help one person, others gather. You can't give money to everyone who asks, because you'll end up poor. Jay thinks about his mom's claim that he can't understand the Philippines and says nothing. Angel says that according to Tito Maning, the beggars will spend the money on *shabu* anyway. Everyone flinches, probably thinking of Jun. Tita Ami casually says that the best they can do is give money to the Church, which Jay knows Jun would disagree with; Jun was always critical of the Church. Jay asks Tita Ami to turn the air conditioner down, because he feels cold.

Tita Ami's reasons for not helping the poor girl are, at once, logical and selfish. It's true that no single person can solve widespread systemic poverty, but it's also true that if no one takes responsibility then nothing will change. And Jun's skepticism about the Church make clear that if you abdicate responsibility to someone else, then you are complicit in what that other person or organization does. Meanwhile, the collective flinch in the car at Angel's comment indicates that everyone clearly is mourning Jun and also, perhaps, affected by Tito Maning's clear disdain for the poor. Jay's comment about the air conditioning has a meaning beyond the literal: it suggests Jay's sense of Jun's family's emotional coldness.



SOME SMALL REBELLION

Eventually, the family reaches their *barangay* (neighborhood). The houses are packed together and most have locked gates and barbed-wire walls. Tita Ami asks if Jay remembers the neighborhood, and Jay says that he barely does. He's been gone for eight years. Tomas remarks that eight years is a long time to be away from home. Tita Ami says that this is not Jay's home. Tomas laughs, arguing that the place is in Jay's blood. He says that maybe Jay will find a Filipina girl and settle down—that is, if he doesn't already have an American girlfriend. Jay says that he doesn't. He also asks Tomas to stop calling him "sir," but Tomas won't.

Though Jay noticed earlier that the Philippines isn't the war zone he expected, the locked gates and wire hint that, once again, the truth of the situation is complicated. Tomas and Tita Ami are having the same type of debate that Jay and his mom had earlier: Tita Ami is saying that Jay can't claim the Philippines as his home since he's been away for so long, while Tomas is arguing that this is Jay's home on a fundamental level, since he has Filipino "blood." That Jay doesn't make any comment during this mini-debate reflects his continued uncertainty about his identity, an uncertainty exacerbated by the fact that he is, like an American, uncomfortable with the commonplace Filipino practice of employees referring to their employers as "sir."



Tito Maning's house is larger and more modern than the other houses in the neighborhood. When they arrive, Tita Ami says that they recently renovated. Jay wants to see Jun's room—eight years ago, it was crowded with posters, a guitar, a Nintendo Wii, bookshelves (Jun was already reading novels at the time). Jun's room was clean, but he didn't let the housekeeper touch it, not wanting someone else to clean up after him. Jay hopes that Jun's room will provide clues about his death.

Tito Maning's job as a police chief clearly pays well, and if the family recently renovated, he's probably making more money now than he was before Duterte was elected. In other words, Tito Maning and his family benefit from Duterte's policies. Jay's memory of Jun's room once again shows that Jun wouldn't find Jay's interest in things like video games shallow at all. Jun was smart, empathetic, and remarkably concerned with his own privilege (as his desire to not have someone else have to clean up after him shows), but he also owned a video game system. Jay's idea that he might find "clues" about Jun's death seems too easy, but Jay is in what might be described as "adolescent detective mode."



The inside of the house looks similar to the way it looked eight years ago, but now there's a new TV and Jun doesn't appear in any of the family photos. Jay sees a woman puttering around—it's the maid, María. Tita Ami takes Jay on a tour, and Jay asks if he'll see Tita Chato and Tita Ines soon. Tita Ami says that Jay will see them when he goes to stay with them, but her family doesn't speak with them anymore. Jay's dad never told Jay this, and Tita Ami won't elaborate.

As Tita Ami shows Jay around, Jay asks why they didn't move houses instead of renovating, and she says that this is their home—they want to "improve it, not abandon it." This is the type of passive-aggressive comment Jay remembers Tito Maning making to Jay's dad the last time they visited. Through Jun's **letters**, Jay learned that the family resented his dad for moving away. Jay says nothing to Tita Ami now, the same way his dad said nothing back then.

Tita Ami brings Jay to what she calls the "guest room," which Jay knows is Jun's old room. Jay has seen movies about grieving parents who leave their dead kid's room untouched. But when he enters Jun's room, he sees that it's totally blank, filled with generic furniture. Empty drawers, nothing under the bed. Jay's suitcase and backpack are already here. Jay sits on the floor and tries very hard not to cry—since he's not a kid anymore. But he had expected to find some sign of Jun, not this empty slate. He wonders when Jun's parents tossed all of his stuff, and whether they did it themselves or had Tomas and María do it.

Wanting to return Jun's memory to the room, Jay takes out one of his cousin's **letters** and reads it. In it, Jun asks Jay to write more about Jay's recent trip to Europe. In the letter, Jun comments that Filipinos can't travel much, probably because other countries don't want to let them in for fear they'll never leave. This might be fair, Jun thinks.

The complete erasure of Jun from family photos hints that there are deeper secrets, both about Jun's death and the family's reaction to it. No one is willing to mourn Jun openly or even acknowledge him. Meanwhile, Jay's entire Filipino family has stopped talking to each other, and it's implied that the drug war tearing through the Philippines is also tearing apart Filipino families. There are lots of truths Jay still doesn't know, and they seem to be related to Jun's death (which again suggests that the truth about Jun's death might be more complicated than Jay thinks).



The rift between Jay's dad and his Filipino family seems to be the result of different ideas about what one owes to one's country and culture. And Jay's dad's complete break from the Philippines—and his silence and difficulty communicating more generally—seems to be a reaction to his Filipino family's anger at his decision to leave. In this moment, Jay gets a glimpse of what his father has endured and why his father acts as he does.



Jay is judgmental of Tito Maning and Tita Ami for emptying out Jun's room, and he bases that judgment on American movies' portrayal of the "correct" way to grieve a child. And while the erasure of Jun does seem excessive, it can also be seen as evidence of a deep grief or anger. Jay's refusal to cry while sitting on Jun's floor calls back to when he cried over the puppy. He's growing up, which he thinks means he shouldn't show grief. But the lack of grief shown by Jun's family also repulses him. Meanwhile, he wants Jun's death to have meaning, which is the same thing he wanted from the puppy's death.



Jun's letter hints at both his awareness of the Philippines' political and economic climate and his own deep unhappiness. On the one hand, Jun is suggesting that things in the Philippines are so bad that Filipinos must all want to leave. On the other hand, Tita Ami clearly doesn't want to leave, so it's possible to see Jun's comments as projections of his own desires to escape his unhappy situation at home and never come back.



Jay continues to read the letter. In it, Jun relates how he recently visited the slums with Tito Maning to hand out sandwiches. Tito Maning had wanted Jun to see how spoiled he is. Jun liked helping others and realized the Church is actually doing some good, even if some priests are abusive. Jun also realized that the slums aren't so bad—life goes on, even there. In many ways, Jun thinks it would be better to live in the slums than with Tito Maning. Jay is sad when he finishes reading the **letter**—Jun was clearly so unhappy. Even after he stops reading, Jay keeps thinking about Jun, which Jay thinks is a kind of rebellion in this blank room.

So far in the novel, Jay's worldview has been pretty black-and-white: he thinks all lies are bad, and that people are either bad (Tito Maning) or good (Jun). Jun's worldview was more nuanced—he sees both the bad and the good in the Catholic Church, and he sees value in the lives people live in the slums despite how hard and unpleasant it might be. In fact, it's worth noting that Jay's black-and-white way of seeing the world is similar to Tito Maning's wholly-negative attitude about the slums and the poor. Yet as Jay seeks to solve Jun's murder he also connects more with Jun's ideas, which affect his own way of seeing the world and allow him to see Jun, and Jun's unhappiness, more clearly.



EVERY SINGLE SURVIVING WORD

Jay suddenly wakes up to someone shaking his shoulder. It's Grace, calling him to dinner—Jay napped for eight hours. When Jay goes downstairs, the whole family is at the dinner table, Tito Maning included. He's wearing his striped police uniform and tells Jay that they've been waiting for him. Jay feels panicked at the sight of his uncle. He remembers the righteous speech he was going to make, demanding the truth about Jun, but he can't say anything. He looks away instead, the same way his dad always did.

Jay's encounter with Tito Maning proves that simply demanding "the truth" is going to be difficult. Tito Maning is clearly a dominant presence—and his constant wearing of his police uniform communicates his strong ties to the Duterte regime. Jay is suddenly in his dad's position, unable to contradict his uncle. Jay is forced to experience that open communication isn't as easy as Jay thought it would be.



Jay sits down and starts to serve himself, but this is the wrong move: the family has to join hands and pray before eating. Everyone is silent for a long time, and it's a weirdly formal meal—at home, Jay's family usually eats at different times. But here, everyone eats together and seems to be waiting for Tito Maning to speak before talking themselves. Eventually, Tito Maning asks Jay about his flight and about Jay's dad. Tito Maning also worries aloud that Jay's mom spends too much time away from home and can't raise her children. Tito Maning also asks about Chris and his engineering work, then says that Grace will be even more successful than Chris. However, he says, Angel is lazy. Finally, Tito Maning dismisses Em's graphic design study as useless.

Jay's faux pas once again highlights his disconnection from his Filipino family and culture. Once Tito Maning starts speaking, the way that he wants the culture to be is obvious: he is conservative, believes that women should be in the home, that science is more important than design, and that his own opinions carry so much weight that everyone should accept them as truth. And, yet, beneath Maning's bravado is a hint of insecurity. His bragging that his family will surpass his brothers (i.e. Jay's dad's) suggests how important it is to him that this turn out to be true, which in turn highlights the discord between the brothers.



Tito Maning has heard that Jay got into the University of Michigan and asks why he isn't going to Harvard like Chris did. Jay says that he didn't get in, and Tito Maning nods—Grace will get in, he says. Jay is amazed that Jun dealt with this kind of treatment for so long. Tito Maning asks what Jay will study: engineering, medicine, or law? Jay says engineering just to appease Tito Maning, even though he actually wants to do something related to video games. Jay wants to bring up Jun but finds that he can't. He wonders if he'll be less scared once it's just him and Tito Maning.

Tito Maning defines success conservatively and narrowly, and in doing so excludes anyone who doesn't agree with him. Meanwhile, Jay had thought that he was going to forcibly demand truth from Tito Maning, but he can't even stand up for himself now by telling the truth about his own aspirations. Jay still doesn't acknowledge that the truth about Jun's death might be complicated, but he does acknowledge that getting that truth will be difficult.



Tito Maning begins to ask questions to everyone else in Tagalog. He announces that Grace will take Jay to a historical site tomorrow. He assumes Jay knows nothing about Philippine history. Tito Maning explains that when Jay's brother, Chris, was an infant, Tito Maning told Jay's dad to teach him Tagalog. Jay's dad refused because he believed it would confuse Chris, but Tito Maning says that you don't know yourself if you don't know your "mother tongue." Jay wants to defend his dad but doesn't. Tita Ami warns Jay to stay out of the sun so his skin doesn't darken, which sounds prejudiced to Jay.

Jay tries to leave the table, but his uncle refuses to let him until the food is gone, reminding him that this isn't the U.S. Jay wants to disobey, but Tito Maning is naturally authoritative, so Jay just stands there. Tito Maning wonders whether something is wrong with the food—he says that María is stupid and doesn't speak Tagalog, but she's a good cook. Jay claims his stomach is upset, and Tita Ami encourages her husband to let Jay leave. Jay asks to take his plate to the sink, and Tito Maning agrees.

In the kitchen, María takes Jay's plate, though Jay says he can wash it himself. But she doesn't understand because she doesn't speak English, so Jay has to hand it to her. He notices that her skin is much darker than the family's skin. After dinner, Tito Maning distributes the items in Jay's balikbayan box even though Jay was supposed to do that. Jay returns to Jun's room, feeling like he betrayed Jun. Jay can't even distribute his dad's gifts, so how can he confront Tito Maning?

Jay has a hard time falling asleep—there are lots of noises in the house and neighborhood, unlike at home in Michigan where it's quiet. He reaches for his backpack to read one of Jun's **letters**, but he can't find any. Jay grabs his backpack and searches harder, then checks his suitcase, then his backpack again. But all of Jun's letters are all gone.

Tito Maning's use of Tagalog seems to be a purposeful effort to make Jay feel isolated, and Tito Maning's comments about knowing your "mother tongue" imply that he is trying to make Jay feel isolated because he believes that Jay's dad cut himself and his whole family off from Filipino culture through his choices. Maning's actions, then, are a mixture of pride in his culture and insecure anger at the way that Jay's dad's choices called the value of Filipino culture into question. Meanwhile, Tita Ami's prejudices about dark skin imply a similar kind of pride and insecurity about what it means to be Filipino, and who "counts" as Filipino.



Again, Tito Maning tries to impose his cultural values on Jay. By now it seems clear that in fact Maning relishes imposing such values on his brother's son, since he feels that his brother betrayed those values. But even as Tito Maning promotes his cultural values, he excludes other Filipinos, such as Maria, on the grounds that she doesn't speak Tagalog (she likely speaks a local dialect). For Tito Maning, it seems that the strength of his culture is dependent on his ability to exclude others from it.



Once again, Jay is confronted with subtleties about Philippine culture, such as the prejudice about skin color and its connection to social hierarchy. Meanwhile, Tito Maning continues to find ways to assert that Jay also is not truly Filipino by cutting him out of normal rituals, though it's worth noting that his dad also didn't allow him to pack the boxes. Both of these men's actions suggest that they don't see Jay as being truly Filipino, though perhaps for different reasons.



Jay feels so out of place in the house, neighborhood, and even country—he can't even manage to fall asleep—so it makes sense that he seeks out Jun's letters, which were a connection to a Filipino person to whom he did feel connected. The loss of the letters therefore amplifies Jay's isolation. At the same time, the disappearance of the letters deepens the mysteries surrounding Jun and his death.



NOT AN ANSWER TO THE QUESTION

The following morning at sunrise, Jay is still awake. He realizes that María must have taken Jun's **letters**, since she was the only one who wasn't at dinner. María doesn't speak English, so Jay will have to question someone else, but he's worried it'll sound like he's accusing the maid of stealing.

As he listens for the sounds of anyone else who might be awake, Jay remembers hanging out with Jun on his last visit to the Philippines. The first night, they didn't play video games like Jay used to do at other sleepovers. Instead, Jun asked Jay questions about his life. Jay knows that even though families are bound together, they still might not be close. But Jay thinks that even if he and Jun weren't cousins, they would have been friends. Jun's questions were deep: do you like your family? Do you feel lonely? Jay answered the questions truthfully, because Jun seemed like he really wanted to know. Later, Jun would sometimes bring up Jay's answers in his **letters**.

Jay hears someone moving, so he heads downstairs and encounters María. He tries to tell her that he can't find the **letters** that were in his backpack, but María just nods and smiles, probably not understanding Jay's words. Jay is frustrated: why would María even take the letters? They're in English, so she can't read them. Jay is upset, since he's lost his last connection to Jun.

Suddenly, Jay remembers that María works for Tito Maning, so Tito Maning could have asked her to search Jay's stuff. Jay rushes into Tito Maning's home office to look for the **letters**, happy that no one else is awake yet. He turns on his phone flashlight to avoid alerting anyone in the hall to his presence. Inside the office, there are shelves of books and many knives. Jay checks the desk drawers and finds only chocolate. There's a locked drawer, so Jay starts poking at it for a release, the way they do in movies.

Jay continues to be forced to confront the fact that getting the truth will be harder than he originally anticipated, especially because of his cultural distance in the Philippines. It's also worth noting that he continues to think that the "truth" itself is relatively straightforward.



Again, readers already know that Jun didn't dislike video games or find them unnecessarily shallow; he even had a Wii in his room. It's just that he and Jay could also discuss deeper topics, the kind of things that Jay would never have discussed with Seth. In fact, the relationship Jay had with Jun seems to be a model for the kind of open, honest communication neither boy had with their families (and with their fathers in particular).



Jay's isolation continues to thwart his detective attempts, but here he also realizes that his simple "logic" about María taking the letters doesn't in fact make sense. Jay's devastation about the letters makes sense: Jun's memory currently lives on in those letters. Now Jay has to feel guilty for two things: not responding to Jun and losing the letters.



Jay is basically play-acting at being a movie detective here. He has a hunch and immediately acts on it, breaking into his uncle's office and attempting stealth by not turning on the lights. Jay's actions suggest again that Jay thinks that the truth about Jun will be as simple as the solution in a whodunnit, and that if he finds the right clues, he'll solve the mystery. Meanwhile, Tito Maning's knife collection, while likely decorative, nonetheless hints further at Maning's reverence for strength and violence.



Angel enters the office, asking Jay if he's trying to break into Tito Maning's desk. If so, Jay will need the key. She laughs and shows him the key's hiding place on the bookshelf, though she says Jay won't find anything of interest. Jay is surprised by his cousin's rebelliousness. He pulls out some files from the locked drawer, telling Angel that he's trying to research Duterte and that Tito Maning might have taken his research papers. She accepts the lie and leaves, warning Jay that Tito Maning will wake up soon. Jay needs to return the key first, or else.

This moment, first, punctures Jay's idea of himself as a movie detective—a young girl lightheartedly solves what he can't. At the same time, this moment provides a new sense of Tito Maning's family—in Maning's presence everyone is obedient, but if Angel both knows his secrets and thinks nothing of betraying them, then there must be a lot of rebellion beneath the surface. Angel's reference to Tito Maning's anger explains the surface obedience in the family, hints at the weakness of such efforts at family discipline, and continues to establish Maning as a potential "villain."



The files are all police reports, which Jay finds weird for a home office. At the back of the stack, there's a folded white paper with names and addresses. Jun's name is on there with an "UNKNOWN" address designation. There are a few handwritten sentences on the back in Tagalog—one is a question—so Jay tries to translate them on his phone.

It's really not that strange that Tito Maning would keep some police files at home. That Jay finds it abnormal suggests that Jay might be seeing suspicious activity about Jun's murder where there isn't any. Still, it is a clue that Jun's name is on this list in Tito Maning's desk and that Maning seemed interested in his whereabouts. Once again, Jay's lack of knowledge about the Philippines—in this case, his inability to speak Tagalog—prevents him from discovering the truth.



But Jay hears a toilet flush before he can finish translating and takes a photo of the note instead. He can't remember which book the key was under, so he places it in the bookshelf at random and runs into the bathroom to hide. Tito Maning knocks on the door, wondering why the bathroom lights are off. Jay claims it's peaceful this way and wonders if Tito Maning knows that he's lying. He checks the photo he took, but it's horribly blurred.

Jay continues to bumble as a "detective." The reason Jay was late to leave the office was because he was trying to translate the note he found, so his inability to speak Tagalog will likely be the reason if Tito Maning realizes someone was in his office.



At breakfast, Jay brings up his missing "research" papers and asks if anyone has seen them. Angel and Grace say no. Tita Ami says that she'll ask María to search for the papers today. Tito Maning tells Jay that he should have kept his papers somewhere safe if they were important. Jay thinks that something is up with Tito Maning: his uncle never answered Jay's question.

Jay keeps trying to find clues for simple guilt: he finds Tito Maning's response damning and believes it proves that Tito Maning was involved in the letter theft. But it seems just as likely that Maning may once again have been trying to make Jay look bad—that Maning's behavior is defined by family dynamics Jay doesn't understand rather than movie-style villainy.



LEAD THE WAY

After breakfast, Tomas drives Jay and Grace to see tourist attractions in downtown Manila. Grace is still cold to Jay even though he tries to make small talk. He asks her what it's like not to have a cell phone—he knows Tito Maning won't let her. Grace says that it's better this way, since she's not focused on shallow things. She trusts Tito Maning's decisions, and when Jay presses her about Tito Maning's intensity and strictness as Jun described it to him, she responds that she doesn't want to talk about Jun.

Rather than talk with Grace, Jay seems to be trying to interrogate her about Tito Maning in the hope that she'll reveal some useful information about Jun or about Jun's relationship with Tito Maning. The way that Grace's comment about "shallowness" mirrors things that Jun has said in the past is something to note.



Tomas drops Jay and Grace off in Rizal Park and drives away. To Jay's shock, Grace pulls out a cell phone. He promises he won't tell anyone about it. She tells him to follow her and leads him away from the park into a crowded street, where they hail a jeepney (a taxi) with a Chicago Bulls logo on the side. They're not seeing the monuments, Grace says—instead, they're going to the mall to meet up with someone. The mall is named after a shoe company, which Jay says is similar to the way American stadiums are named after brands like Little Caesars.

It turns out that Grace is just as rebellious as Angel and Jun. She had planned this secret trip all along, and it is implied that her talk of cell phones being shallow and perhaps also of not wanting to discuss Jun were for show so long as she was in Tito Maning's car driven by Tito Maning's driver. The Bulls logo on the cab and mall named for a shoe company suggests that not everyone in the Philippines is as devoutly nationalist as Tito Maning, and that there are ways that Filipino culture is similar to American culture. It's notable that Jay discovers this cultural similarity at the same moment when Grace reveals more about herself to Jay.



When Grace and Jay reach the mall's second floor, two girls are waiting for them. They look like sisters: the taller girl is stylish and the shorter girl has a shaved head and wears all black. Grace introduces the shorter girl as Mia, and Mia's sister is Jessa. Grace tells Jay that she and Jessa will meet up with Jay and Mia later, and the three girls poke fun at Jay in Tagalog. Jay is disappointed, since he won't be able to talk to Grace or ask her questions. Mia asks if Jay wants to play laser tag, and Jay watches Grace and Jessa walk away holding hands.

Grace has a whole life that Tito Maning (presumably) doesn't know about—she and Jessa seem to be secretly dating. hilariously, Jay thought he was going to use Grace to get information about Jun. Instead, Grace used Jay to finagle a date with Jessa, and Jessa obviously brought Mia to keep Jay occupied. Jay can't even protest the plan, since they're using his lack of Tagalog knowledge against him. Jay always thinks he has the upper hand when he's playing detective, but in this instance, Grace was one step ahead of him.



YOU CAN HOLD ON TO ME IF YOU NEED TO

The laser tag place is closed, so Mia and Jay decide to visit the aquarium instead. Jay makes dumb comments about the stores they pass and asks why the models in billboards have such light skin, to which Mia says only, "Colonialism." The aquarium has a jellyfish exhibit and Jay tells Mia that there's a jellyfish that can live forever, because it can revert its cells when it gets old. But the jellyfish is usually eaten before it gets old. Mia wonders what it would be like if humans could revert their ages, too.

Jay finally learns that the Philippines' colonial history plays into the country's beauty standards—in fact, Mia seems to be the first person to answer Jun's questions about the Philippines honestly and openly. Jay's comment about the jellyfish seems related to his fixation on Jun's death. The jellyfish have a lot of potential—they could hypothetically live forever—but almost always die young because of others' violence. Mia's wondering suggests she is a kindred spirit to Jay, a potential new, real friend—a friend, like Jun, across cultures.



Jay asks if Grace and Jessa are dating, and Mia says yes—they met on an anime fan forum. Jay asks how old Mia is, and she says she's 19. Jay says he's 17; Mia jokingly calls him a baby. He points out that he'll graduate soon, and she asks what his plan is. He says he'll go to college but is unenthused. She understands: college "isn't for everyone." It was right for her, though, since she studies journalism now. It's a dangerous profession, she admits—she says that in 2009, 32 Filipino journalists were killed on a politician's orders, and comments that there's no safety if you want to report the truth. Jay wants to ask if she supports the drug war, but he's nervous that she might, since he knows that most Filipinos do.

Here is another sign that Tito Maning's control over his family is just on the surface. Jun had once told Jay that Tito Maning didn't let his kids use the Internet very much—but Grace met her secret girlfriend on an Internet forum! Mia is the first person to immediately empathize with Jay's confusion about college, even though it's not a confusion she had herself—this makes her very different from someone like Seth, who couldn't or wouldn't understand Jay's different experiences. The incident Mia references is a real one, now known as the Maguindanao massacre. On November 23, 2009, a group of people—which included around 34 journalists—were trying to file paperwork for a political candidate when they were kidnapped and killed by people working for the candidate's opponent. Thus far in the novel, Jay has viewed the truth as a purely good thing. Mia's story demonstrates that seeking the truth professionally can also be dangerous. It seems possible that Mia doesn't support the drug war—she seems to be against government corruption, and Jay already knows that the Philippine government is covering up how many individuals have died. Still, Jay's decision not to ask her shows that he listened to his mom, who told him that most people in the Philippines support the drug war.



After the aquarium, Mia and Jay head to the ice-skating rink. At this point, Jay isn't surprised by how much this mall contains. In fact, he thinks the expansive mall sums up the many contradictions of the Philippines. As they lace up their skates, Mia asks why Jay is going to college if he doesn't want to. He says his parents would disown him otherwise, but then, thinking of Jun, he admits that's not totally true. Still, they'd be disappointed. But Mia believes that rebellion can be a good thing. *Her* parents wanted her to study nursing and leave the Philippines. They worry about her safety now, but she had to follow her passion.

When Jay first arrived in the Philippines, he was shocked that the country didn't look like it was in the midst of a war. He no longer feels that shock when faced with the giant mall and all its activities. Now, he knows that the Philippines is more complicated, rich and poor, peaceful and enduring a drug war. This is a nuanced understanding he didn't have before. Meanwhile, Jay is also coming to a more nuanced understanding about his relationship with his parents. He previously thought they'd freak out if he applied to a lower-tier school, but now that he sees how bad Jun's relationship with Tito Maning must have been, he knows that his parents might not have reacted quite as badly as he thinks. Mia's relationship with her parents seems like a potential hopeful model for Jay: they disagreed with her about her intended life path, but she went ahead with what she wanted to do and they eventually accepted it (even if they worry now).



Mia decided that she wanted to be a journalist after reading an investigative piece about child trafficking. The article showed her that she could use her writing skill and intrinsic nosiness to help others. Jay asks how a person finds the truth as a journalist, and Mia says it usually starts with research. In the Philippines, that's hard, since records can be incomplete. So you have to talk to people. Jay continues to ask Mia for tips on finding information without telling her why, thinking of Jun's anonymous friend and Tito Maning. He asks how to get a source to talk, and she says one can steal information or figure out an alternative way.

Jay is beginning to discover his limitations as a detective—he doesn't know how to find information in the Philippines or how to interrogate suspects, and he doesn't know how to follow up on the leads he already has (the anonymous Instagram, the note in Tagalog). Initially, he thought he'd just demand the truth from Tito Maning. When that didn't pan out, he thought he could find (or in his case, steal) clues that pointed to the truth. Now he knows that finding the truth won't be as simple as he thought it would be.



Suddenly, the power shuts off in the mall, which Mia says happens often. Jay worries about the jellyfish in the aquarium, but Mia is sure there's a backup generator. Meanwhile, everyone can keep skating, so they stay at the rink. Mia can tell Jay is upset and asks him why. He decides he'll never learn the truth about Jun if he doesn't ask hard questions, so he asks her if Jessa knows what happened to Jun. Mia is confused: she didn't even know Grace had a brother. Jay can't believe Grace erased Jun from her life so thoroughly.

Jay explains that Jun ran away and was killed. Mia realizes Jay wants to figure out what happened to him and that's why he was asking for journalism tips. He tells her the full story, and she asks to see the photo of the note Jay found. It's blurry, but she can read it. The handwritten question is from a subordinate detective, who says that he found Jun at Tito Maning's request and asks what Tito Maning wants to do. Mia assumes that the list Jay found was of suspected drug dealers. The police are supposed to arrest them before they kill them. Jay wonders whether Tito Maning told the police to kill Jun, and he thinks of the Biblical story in which Abraham was prepared to kill his son.

Mia says that she'll help Jay. She wants Jay to take a photo of the list with Jun's name on it, and in the meantime, Jay should figure out a way to get Tito Maning to talk. Mia will tap into her newspaper and police connections. They exchange phone numbers and finally start to skate. Jay thinks Mia doesn't know how to skate, but she does, and Jay slips while he's trying to demonstrate. Mia laughs.

ALL THAT IT MEANS

Mia and Jay meet up with Grace and Jessa, who look happy. Mia jokes that she had a bad time but then admits that she and Jay had fun. Grace and Jay leave the mall and Grace asks Jay not to tell anyone about Jessa. Jay says he won't but is confused, since the family is fine with Tita Chato and Tita Ines. Grace disagrees: Tito Maning speaks negatively about their aunts now that her family doesn't talk to them anymore. She asks if Jay had fun with Mia, and Jay says yes. Grace says that it's too bad Mia has a boyfriend. She thanks Jay for agreeing not to tell anyone but accidentally calls him "Jun," which unsettles them both. They don't discuss it.

The loss of electricity in the mall—is another sign of the complicated nature of the Philippines, in which even the wealthy places are subject to underlying instability. Jay's worry about the jellyfish suggests that he had begun to associate them with Jun in some way. If they can live forever, he wants them to—he wants something to escape death. Meanwhile, Mia once again proves how different she is from Jay's parents or from Seth. She can see that Jay is upset, and instead of ignoring it, she asks him to open up to her. Because she invites that open communication, he tells her the truth. And in revealing his truth, he discovers how much Grace has hidden hers.



By opening up to Mia, by forging a bond across cultures and discovering there are similarities between people despite cultural boundaries, Jay gets closer to the truth. This revelation does make it clear that Tito Maning was looking for Jun, and perhaps implicates Maning in Jun's death. That said, the novel has shown multiple times that there is often a deeper truth lying beneath what seems like the truth, and Jay has been suspicious of Tito Maning all along. It's notable, also, that in the Bible story Jay references, Abraham doesn't end up killing his son after all (though, admittedly, that's only because God tells him not to).



Jay and Mia are both in detective mode now, but this time, it seems like they have reason to be (unlike Jay's blind assumption that Tito Maning took Jun's letters). And, further, Mia's expertise means they have actual skills to bring to bear in researching what happened to Jun. Though Jay's slip and fall on the ice again signals that his newfound confidence might not be based on as solid a foundation as he thinks.



Tito Maning's bigoted comments about Tita Chato and Tita Ines further solidify the sense that he has a narrowly conservative view of what is proper and right, and excludes anyone who deviates from that view. The fact that Mia has a boyfriend means that their relationship will not be complicated by romance, and they can focus on the work they want to do together. The fact that Grace calls Jay "Jun" makes clear her own grief and sadness about the death of her brother, and that she doesn't talk about it after revealing so much else to Jay on this shows how much she feels she needs to keep her sadness hidden.



A VISIT

At dinner, Tito Maning interrogates everyone about their day. Grace responds with a detailed cover story about visiting tourist attractions. Jay says that it was “powerful” learning about history, which he thinks is a lame lie, and he worries that Tito Maning notices his dishonesty. Tito Maning says that tomorrow after mass, he’ll bring Jay to the Malacañang Palace and the National Museums. All Jay can think about is whether or not Tito Maning had Jun killed. He worries he could be in danger if he brings it up, though that thought feels crazy to him. He decides he’ll confront his uncle tomorrow. Back in Jun’s old room, Jay checks his backpack for the **letters**, but they’re still gone.

When Jay’s mom calls, Jay lies to her about what he’s been doing so far, not mentioning Jun at all. She puts Jay’s dad on the phone. Jay finds that it’s always like pulling teeth talking to him on the phone, and this time is no different. Jay’s dad gives Jay some safety tips and Jay asks him about work, but his dad responds in single-word answers. Jay *wants* to tell his dad about the note he found in Tito Maning’s desk, but can’t do so without admitting he stole it, so instead he asks why Tito Maning’s family doesn’t speak to Tita Chato. Jay’s dad says it’s not any of their business, and the conversation dies out.

After going to bed, Jay wakes up in the middle of the night with the sense that someone is in his room. And indeed, there’s a man sitting at Jun’s desk and writing, head covered by a burlap sack. Jay thinks it might be Tito Maning and gets up, looking over the man’s shoulder to see what he’s writing. It’s all nonsense words, scribbles. The man stands up and walks toward Jay until Jay is backed against the window.

Jay sees that the man’s feet are bare and his jeans are torn. His chest and stomach have bloodstained holes in them—bullet holes, Jay realizes. Jay wants to run away but can’t. The man removes the sack and Jay sees that it’s Jun, but the bottom half of his jaw is missing. Jay asks Jun what happened to him. He apologizes for losing the **letters** and failing to confront Tito Maning. Jun touches Jay’s chest but says nothing, and Jay wakes up. No one is in the room. It was a dream. Or maybe it was a visitation.

Jay had thought—and as this passage makes clear, still thinks—that he can interrogate his uncle and learn the truth. It’s interesting that his uncle has the same sense of the world, as he seems to believe that by interrogating his family he will get the truth out of them. But, as Grace’s response shows, it takes more than a show of force to get the truth, even if Jay fears that his own lies are incompetent. Jay didn’t learn about Philippine history through sightseeing, but his day at the mall with Mia did teach him a lot about the nuanced world of the Philippines that he was blind to before.



Jay and his parents still fall into the same patterns of evasion and lack of communication. Jay’s dad is immensely committed to the idea of other people’s business being off-base for conversation, though it’s not clear if that principle is just a principle or a way of insulating himself and his family from any drama among his relations still in the Philippines.



The initial implication of this scene is that Tito Maning is doing something nefarious in Jay’s room—a sense that is a result of Jay’s suspicion of him and of Maning’s actual somewhat sketchy behavior. However, it soon becomes evident that this is a dream that deals with Jay’s guilt over losing Jun’s lost letters, his inability to understand the “truth” of Jun’s story, and his general anxiety about what happened to Jun.



Like the unreadable letters earlier in the dream, Jun’s lack of a jaw is another way that the dream manifests how upset Jay is that Jun can’t communicate with him. Jay’s question about what happened to Jun again shows how Jay assumes that there’s a simple answer to his question—that if Jun was able to speak, he could tell Jay the simple truth. Jay’s guilt is again on display in his apology for losing the letters and failure to confront Tito Maning.



THE WORD OF GOD

On Sunday morning, the family goes to church. The building is a bigger version of the Catholic churches Jay has been in before, and there's also a larger crowd than Jay is used to. Tito Maning has a reserved section up front, and once the family is in the aisle, Jay begins to scratch at the collar of the *Barong* (formal shirt) he borrowed from Tito Maning. Jay hasn't been to Mass in years. His family used to go every Sunday, though they weren't really religious. When Chris graduated, they stopped. Jay thinks his parents wanted to raise their kids religious because it seemed like good parenting, so the job was done when everyone got older.

Jun would often complain about church in his **letters**. He would also complain about the hypocrisy of churchgoers, who praised Jesus but ignored the poor and the Church's corruption. Jun was disappointed when Tito Danilo was ordained. However, Jun also believed in God. Jay doesn't know if he believes in God, but he always liked going to church, and he liked the general message of doing good. He was sad when his family stopped going, but he never said so. At home, religious kids are considered weird.

Jay listens to the organ and to the priest's blessing. Everyone sings, and then a woman reads a passage from the Bible. It's in Tagalog, so Jay can't understand. His mind wanders to the dream he had. He texted Mia about it this morning, and she said that many Filipinos believe that the dead visit if they have unfinished business. Jay doesn't think he saw Jun's ghost, but he thinks that the dream was a manifestation of his guilty conscience, since he feels bad about losing the **letters** and failing to confront Tito Maning. Mia encouraged Jay to confront his uncle and sent a winking face. Jay almost falls asleep during the sermon, which he realizes Tito Maning has noticed with disapproval.

Tito Maning's reserved seats show that his job gives him status. Jay's cultural dislocation is on display once more through the itchy formal shirt he had to borrow. Jay's thoughts of his own experiences going to church versus what he sees here in the Philippines emphasizes the differences between the two cultures. While such comparisons in the novel up until now have been to the detriment of the Philippines, this comparison gives the sense that there's a degree of emptiness in American culture, at least in terms of religion, where belief and community don't really seem to exist.



Readers already know that Jun disdained what he saw as the church's corruption and hypocrisy, while also admitting that the church was doing some good for poor communities. Clearly, Jun had a complex view of the Catholic church, one that reconciled its better elements with its uglier ones. This was pretty mature of him—even Jay's dad, for instance, can't fully reconcile the bad parts of the Philippines with the good parts. Jay's interest in the message of "doing good" jives with his current idea about solving Jun's death. Meanwhile, the novel again highlights a sense that America is less friendly to religion than the Philippines is.



Once again, Jay's inability to speak Tagalog leaves him feeling out of place. Jay shows some self-awareness to realize that his dream about Jun is a manifestation of his guilt. Mia's comment about Filipino belief in ghosts looking to handle unfinished business is another instance of people seeing a meaning in death—or in this case undeath.



THAT LAST PART ALOUD

After church, Tomas drives the family around Manila, and as he does so, Tito Maning points out the president's palace, known as the Malacañang Palace. Tito Maning tells Jay that Duterte is a great man who is solving the country's problems. Jay assumes that everyone in the car is thinking about Jun, but Jay still says nothing. Instead, Tito Maning begins to explain the palace's history. The longest occupant was former president Marcos, whom Jay knows is widely regarded as a dictator who maintained power by force. He was removed after a nonviolent revolution, which Tito Maning considers shameful. However, Tito Maning thinks that Duterte's legacy will be "even greater."

The family ends up at the National Museum of the Philippines, which contains many sub-museums, such as ones for natural history and art. Tita Ami says that she can take Angel and Grace on errands since they've been here before, and Tito Maning eventually agrees. Jay has mixed feelings: he doesn't want to be alone with his uncle even though he *should* ask him about Jun. Tito Maning tells Jay to keep his *Barong* on, and then the two of them enter the anthropology museum. There's no entrance fee, which Tito Maning says is thanks to Duterte—Duterte wants Filipinos to know their history. Jay keeps wanting to bring up Jun but nervously decides it can wait a bit.

Jay ends up finding the museum interesting—there are plenty of cool objects, like Chinese porcelain. But Tito Maning keeps quizzing Jay, and Jay eventually realizes this trip has nothing to do with educating him and everything to do with making him look bad. Next, the two go to the Museum of Fine Arts. Every time Jay thinks about bringing Jun up, he gets light-headed. At the art museum, Tito Maning explains that this building used to be the home of the House of Representatives and Senate before Marcos declared martial law. This doesn't seem to bother Tito Maning.

This section further portrays Tito Maning's worldview: he believes in powerful men, and the enforcement of a narrow vision of what is right through strength. It is remarkable that he considers the most shameful thing about Marcos—a brutal dictator who lived ostentatiously despite widespread poverty in the rest of his nation—was the fact that Marcos allowed himself to be overthrown without violence. This is another example of how complicated the truth can be: Tito Maning's characterization of Maning and Duterte's legacies are unlikely to be shared by many people outside of the Philippines, but Maning absolutely believes what he is saying.



Tita Ami finds ways to "rebel" against Tito Maning in small ways. He wanted everyone to visit the museums together, but she manages to convince him to let her and the girls go off alone. Tito Maning's praise for Duterte making the museum free is ironic: it seems obviously a good thing to make a museum accessible to all, and to want people to know their history. But, at the same time, Duterte's government actively hides the truth of its own activities, and Tito Maning has "erased" the history of Jun from his family. Meanwhile, Jay's nerves about confronting Tito Maning make him feel how simplistic his original idea of forcefully interrogating Tito Maning was.



It seems likely that Tito Maning is taking his anger at Jay's dad out on Jay, since Tito Maning didn't want Jay's dad to leave the Philippines. This means that Tito Maning's cruelty toward Jay probably has nothing to do with Jay at all. Meanwhile, Tito Maning continues to praise Marcos blindly, even as he discusses Marcos's overthrow of the democratic government. Tito Maning is clearly a loyal government servant philosophically aligned with the exertion of power—in this way, the novel continues to raise the possibility that Maning might have allowed Jun's murder, or worse.



Tito Maning enjoys Christian art in the museum, but rails against Spanish colonialism at the same time, even though—as Jay reflects—colonialism is how Christianity came to the Philippines. They are currently in a part of the museum that showcases the period of Japanese occupation of the Philippines during World War II. Tito Maning then points out that the museum doesn't emphasize American colonialism at all—the Americans did many horrible things, he says, like stealing entire villages. Jay didn't know about any of this, since the American education system doesn't cover the Philippine-American War very thoroughly. Jay wants to see the upper floor with art from the Marcos era, but Tito Maning dismisses it as “garbage,” and the two head for the exit.

This section of the novel makes clear how complicated Philippine history is, and how embracing parts of Philippine culture (Christianity) means embracing something hateful: colonialism. Maning's navigation of all this is itself tortured and contradictory: he's right that colonialism is a huge part of Philippine history and that it's under-discussed, but he doesn't seem to think that this hatred of colonialism contradicts with his praise of Marcos, even though Marcos also forcibly maintained power for over a decade. Meanwhile, though, Maning's comments also make clear that American history is complicated, too, and that Americans such as Jay often have little idea of the sometimes terrible things that the United States has done. Taken together, all of this again emphasizes both Jay's own cultural dislocation and the complexity of what is “true.”



Before they leave, Jay notices a painting: *Spoliarium* by Juan Luna. The painting depicts men dragging dead gladiators in front of a watching crowd. It reminds a suddenly emotional Jay of the drug war photos he saw online. When Tito Maning finds Jay looking at the painting, Jay finally asks his uncle what happened to Jun. Tito Maning is silent, then wonders if Jay's dad told Jay how Jun died. Jay says yes—though his mom actually told him—but he asks if that story is true.

It makes sense that Luna's painting reminds spurs Jay to finally confront Tito Maning. In the painting, the watching crowd does nothing to stop the gladiators' bodies from being taken. Jay feels guilty for his own inaction, and this welling guilt compels him to finally ask Tito Maning what happened to Jun. It's interesting that Jay lies to Tito Maning that his dad was the one to tell Jay about Jun. In this case, Jay is hoping to get the truth of Jun's death, but his own “truth” of who told him about Jun's death would complicate this conversation, so he lies.



Tito Maning looks angry now. He says that if Jay wasn't in contact with Jun when Jun died, he can't know what happened. Jay responds that he read some articles, but Tito Maning scoffs at that and says that Western media has twisted what's happening in the Philippines. That's what he's been trying to teach Jay all day: invaders come to the country and think they understand it. Filipinos used to accept this condescension, but they won't anymore. Jay thinks that this isn't a fair depiction of journalists, but Tito Maning says that the journalists have ignored the country's drug problems. Meanwhile, the U.S. supported corrupt Filipino politicians, and those politicians accepted drug cartel money.

On the one hand, Tito Maning isn't wrong to say that Jay doesn't know anything about Jun or Jun's situation, since Jay stopped writing to Jun years ago. And it's also true that Jay doesn't know much about the situation in the Philippines. At the same time, it's not entirely clear whether Tito Maning is right that drugs are at the root of all problems in the Philippines or if he is just parroting the government's position. Regardless, it's clear that Tito Maning doesn't trust any information that doesn't come from the Philippine government. The “truth,” then, means something different to Tito Maning than it does to Jay. It's also worth noting that Tito Maning is talking about the drug war because he thinks Jun's death is related to drugs, which contradicts what Jun's friend told Jay on Instagram, so it's not clear who's telling the truth.



Jay doesn't know if anything Tito Maning is saying is true. Tito Maning continues: the media never talks about the great job Duterte is doing reducing crime, building bridges, or increasing museum access. Jay insists that Jun wasn't a drug pusher, which Tito Maning dismisses. He found drugs in Jun's room years ago and gave him a choice between quitting and leaving, and Jun chose the drugs. Jay doesn't think this is true, but he can't be sure. Jun's letters contained hints of depression, which could have led to self-medication. Tito Maning says that Jun was an addict, and that as a "spoiled American," Jay wouldn't understand Tito Maning's decision.

Jay can't understand how Tito Maning could be so cruel to his own son—Jay's own dad is distant, but not like this. When they leave the museum, and Jay asks why Tito Maning stole Jun's **letters**. Tito Maning says that he didn't, but now he knows why Jay was in his office; he noticed that the key was in the wrong place. Jay wants to confront him about the list, too, but it's pointless when he can't tell what's true and false.

Tito Maning says that Jay has to learn respect. Jay's mom is a white American, and Jay shouldn't act like he knows anything about the Philippines. Tito Maning announces that when they get home, Jay will go to Tita Chato's, because he can't stay at Tito Maning's any longer. Jay wants to say, "Fuck you" but doesn't.

Jay once believed that if he demanded the truth from Tito Maning, he'd be able to immediately tell if Tito Maning was lying. But Jay was wrong. Jay doesn't have enough knowledge of Philippine politics to assess Tito Maning's statements. And obviously, Jay has no way of knowing whether or not Tito Maning is lying about his interaction with Jun. Jay wasn't in contact with Jun at the time, so he can't be certain that Jun wasn't using or dealing drugs. Once again, Tito Maning uses Jay's American heritage to dismiss him. Tito Maning's is similar to the argument Jay's mom made earlier: as an American, Jay can't understand what's going on in the Philippines.



Experiencing what Tito Maning is like has made Jay more sympathetic to his own father. Meanwhile, Tito Maning here makes clear that even as Jay has suspected that Tito Maning was lying, Tito Maning has known that Jay was lying about being in his office. Jay's decision not to bother asking for the truth about the list indicate he now realizes that truth and lies are blurred, and he has no way of distinguishing the two.



Tito Maning is telling Jay the same thing that Jay's mom told Jay: Jay can't understand the Philippines, since he's an outsider. While Jay's mom was talking about culture and upbringing, though, Tito Maning seems focused on race as the reason that Jay will never be able to understand the Philippines. Interestingly, Tito Maning is now kicking Jay out of his house just like he ultimately kicked Jun out. Tito Maning's demand for respect is also a demand for the right to exclude anyone who he feels doesn't give it to him.



A COMPLETE WASTE

That night, Tomas drives Jay to Tita Chato's house. Jay is furious at himself for how weak he acted in front of Tito Maning. He is sure that Tito Maning was definitely lying about Jun and about the **letters**. However, Jay reflects that Tito Maning is correct that the Philippines isn't Jay's home—it hasn't been his home since Jay's dad convinced his mom to leave when Jay was one year old. Maybe Jay doesn't have any right to know what happened to Jun, and maybe he shouldn't have come at all. He would have gone to school in the fall never knowing anything about Jun's death, and he would have probably been content with that.

Though Jay has just witnessed how complicated and messy the "truth" can be, he returns immediately to his theory that Tito Maning stole the letters. He still believes that the truth about Jun—and about Jun's letters—is simple. That said, Jay also wonders whether seeking the truth, simple or not, is the right thing to do. This is a far cry from Jay's position earlier in the novel, when he believed the truth was unequivocally good. When Jay's mom told Jay that he couldn't understand the Philippines, Jay ignored her. But now that Tito Maning has told Jay the same thing, Jay has internalized the message. This demonstrates both that Tito Maning is a dominating presence, but also Jay's uncertainty about his place in the Philippines. At the same time, Jay's thought that had he not investigated Jun's death he would have been content seems like a lie he is telling to himself; he came to the Philippines because he couldn't live with not knowing what happened to Jun.



Jay's dad texts him while Jay is in the car, asking what happened with Tito Maning. Jay doesn't respond. He texts Mia instead and explains what happened. She responds that now they'll be living nearer to each, since she lives in Tita Chato's village. Mia uses several winking faces, and Jay isn't sure what that means; Mia has a boyfriend. Maybe winking faces are punctuation in the Philippines. Still, Jay thinks that meeting Mia means this trip won't have been for nothing.

Jay's dad's text means that Tito Maning quickly told him that something had happened; but as is typical of this family, Tito Maning didn't open up about just what had happened. Meanwhile, Jay's lack of cultural knowledge about the Philippines now extends into the romantic realm, as Jay doesn't know if Mia is flirting with him because he's not sure if winky faces mean the same thing in the Philippines that they do in the U.S. But at least in this case Jay doesn't beat himself up over it.



FAIL HIM IN DEATH

Jay arrives at Tita Chato and Tita Ines's house. After they hug, Tita Chato says that she's glad Jay made Tito Maning angry, which makes Tita Ines laugh. The three of them sit on the patio while Tita Chato smokes and holds Tita Ines's hand. Smoking in the Philippines is illegal, but only in public. Tita Ines wants Tita Chato to quit, but Tita Chato says that there's many ways to die in the Philippines and she's worried about smoking the least.

Tita Chato and Tita Ines are clearly very different from Tito Maning and Tita Ami, and not just because they openly dislike Tito Maning and joke about that dislike. Tita Chato doesn't seem to have the same unconditional love for the Philippines that her brother does, since she acknowledges that the Philippines can be violent and deadly. And though smoking at home isn't illegal, Tita Chato is still flaunting the rules by keeping up her smoking habit when smoking is banned in public. In contrast, Tito Maning, is someone in charge of enforcing the government's laws, including the law about smoking.



Tita Ines goes to make Jay dinner, and Tita Chato and Jay watch the rain together. She asks what Jay did to make Tito Maning upset. Because she used to be a lawyer, her voice demands truth, so Jay tells her. She tells Jay that Tito Maning is a liar, just like his government. It's true that Tito Maning found drugs in Jun's room, but Tito Maning never gave Jun a choice to stay. She knows because Jun came to her after he was kicked out of the house. Jay is stunned that he's unwittingly followed in Jun's footsteps—Tito Maning kicked him out and now he's at Tita Chato's, too. Jay realizes that this must be why Tito Maning no longer speaks to Tita Chato.

Tita Chato says that Jay's dad has no idea that Tita Chato took Jun in. She thinks that Jay's dad doesn't like to dwell on problems in the Philippines because it makes him feel guilty that he left, something Jay never considered. Tita Ines comes back, and Tita Chato catches her up on what happened between Jay and Tito Maning. According to Tita Chato, Tito Maning believes he was merciful to kick Jun out and not kill him. Maybe he *would* have killed him if the incident happened during Duterte's era (which began about a year after Jun ran away). Apparently, Tito Maning didn't even find *shabu* in Jun's room; it was marijuana. Jay can't believe it: Seth smokes weed all the time, and no one would ever hurt him because of it.

Tita Chato says that Jun lived with her for almost a full year and went to school. After a year, Tito Maning called to tell them that Jay's school had contacted him; Jay hadn't been attending class and was going to fail. Jay is surprised that Tito Maning was still paying for Jun's school—why would he?

Tita Chato confronted Jun, who said that school was pointless. He'd been going to the library instead, even proving it by showing his aunts his checkout history. But one day, Jun left abruptly. He left them a letter saying that he was done "pretending" to be their son. Jay thinks that maybe Jun meant he was done pretending in general, because in his **letters** he often said that everyone was pretending. After he left, Jun would write his aunts letters sometimes but always from a new address, so they couldn't track him down. He took most of his belongings but left a box of his things, which Tita Chato says Jay can examine if he wants.

Jay's search for what happened to Jun has caused Jay to follow in Jun's path. There is a sense in which the search itself continues to connect Jay to Jun. At the same time, this path is also leading Jay to new information about Jun. Once again, though, that information makes the "truth" complicated: Tito Maning told the truth about Jun having drugs, but not about giving Jun an option to stay. Further, Jay now gets a further sense of the family's dynamics: the political disagreements between Tita Chato and Tito Maning that then became personal because of Jun.



Jay is suddenly given a new way to think about his dad: that he has complicated, guilty feelings about leaving the Philippines—even if he thinks he made the right choice—and his refusal to discuss the Philippines is a way to avoid that guilt. Jay is once more presented here with a comparison between American and Filipino values—this time with Tito Maning's anti-drug values seeming strict to the point of insanity. Jay is confronted with the fact that no matter how distant he feels from his parents, that distance is very different from the ice-cold relationship between Tito Maning and Jun.



A fuller picture of Jun emerges here, and it turns out that Jun too had secrets and misled others: he was pretending to go to school when in fact he wasn't. Jay's question about why Tito Maning would keep paying for school after kicking out Jun forces the reader to consider the question as well: it does imply that Tito Maning continued to care about his son, at least in some way.



Jun seems to have lost faith with all of the institutions of his world—the government, the church, school. And his argument that everyone is pretending seems to imply he had lost faith in people as well: he had come to see lies as the primary thing in the world. While one might see Jun as a truth teller fighting against lies, it's also possible to see Jun as a depressive. Regardless, it's unclear whether Jun himself is telling the truth about anything, though Jay himself seems to not yet have realized this.



Jay decides to show his aunts the photo of the note in Tito Maning's office. Tita Chato assumes that this means Jun really was using drugs, but Jay insists that there was a mistake or that Tito Maning added Jun to the list of dealers so that the police would find him. But Tita Chato thinks that Tito Maning would have hired a private detective in that case. No one says aloud that maybe Tito Maning wanted Jun dead. Jay also shows his aunts the profile photo of the anonymous Instagram account, but neither woman recognizes the man in it.

Tita Chato thinks that it doesn't matter what Jay found. Jay had hoped that they could sue the government over Jun's death, but Tita Chato explains that the courts are corrupt. Jun says that they should at least protest, but Tita Chato says that the protest would be small. She says that most people in the Philippines like Duterte's policies and wouldn't believe that Jun was innocent, or they would say that even if there had been a mistake it was okay because the underlying the policies are sound. She says that Jun's death was tragic regardless of what he did, but that they can't bring him back. Jay is angry—it seems to him that, like Tito Maning, Tita Chato thinks Jay can't understand what's happening in the Philippines. But Jay thinks that right and wrong should "transcend nationality," and he feels he needs to clear Jun's name.

THIS POEM IS A TYPHOON

After dinner, Jay sits in Jun's former room at Tita Chato's house and looks at the stuff Jun had left behind, including a guitar pick and some books. It's all junk, but Jay feels like there's a code in it. He goes to bed and wakes up a few hours later. Because he can't fall back to sleep, he practices with the Tagalog book he brought with him, but his pronunciation feels off. Jay is mad that his parents never tried to teach him Tagalog. When he was little, learning Tagalog wouldn't have been an "identity crisis."

Jay begins to text Mia the updates about Jun but hesitates, thinking it might be inappropriate to text her after midnight when she has a boyfriend. He thinks back on a girl in his advanced placement chemistry class last year. They used to study together regularly, and Jay was sure that he loved her. He asked her to prom, but she turned him down. Jay realizes that he's as comfortable with Mia as he was with that girl, even though he just met Mia. She's probably not interested at all, but he needs her help, so he sends the text anyways.

Jay continues to believe that something nefarious was done to Jun—that he was framed, for instance—but that Jun himself did not do anything illegal. Tita Chato's view seems more nuanced and realistic, though, given the evidence. Jay wants to find the truth, but he can only see the truth he's hoping to find.



Jay wants Jun's death to have meaning and purpose. Whether that purpose is clearing Jun's name, finding and punishing the killer, or exposing the unjust reality of the drug war. Tita Chato is arguing that there is no way in the Philippines to do any of these things: that it is too corrupt on the one hand and accepting of Duterte's policies on the other to make any such search for truth worthwhile or even possible. But Jay here insists (to himself) on a different universal standard: he argues that basic right and wrong can and must be measured and enforced regardless of all of the nuances of a particular place. It's possible to see Jay here as naïve, but it's also possible to see him as having a powerful idealism that could create change.



Jay once again shifts into detective mode and assumes that there's a truth he can derive from meaningless, ordinary objects. Jay is also still struggling with his in-between identity. Jay wanted to defend his dad when Tito Maning berated his brother for not teaching his children Tagalog, but now it seems that Jay agrees with Tito Maning, at least to some extent.



Thinking back on Jay's interactions with Mia thus far, it seems likely that he feels so close to her because they were able to have an open, honest conversation in a way he hasn't been with anyone else in the novel. That said, while Mia values honesty it is also true that Mia seems to be (potentially) flirting with Jay behind her boyfriend's back, which suggests that even she can't always follow her own advice.



While he waits for a response, Jay reads a poem by Audre Lorde from one of Jun's books. He imagines Jun reading the poem to him and asking what Jay thinks, not like a teacher but like he actually wants to know. Jay feels sad about Jun's death all over again and flips to the next poem. He finds a business card for a bookstore tucked in the book. Mia responds to Jay's text, and he tells her about the card, saying they should check out the store. She agrees and says that she'll visit Jay tomorrow. Jay reads more poems, including one called "A Litany for Survival." He's stunned by it, calling the poem a "typhoon."

LET'S DO IT

The next morning, Jay wakes up to find Tita Chato and Tita Ines making breakfast. He apologizes for being disrespectful last night, and Tita Chato says it's okay—Jun meant a lot to all of them. Jay watches his aunts cook and notices how happy they are. As the three of them eat, Tita Chato and Tita Ines apologize for not being able to take time off work but tell Jay that they'll do something together when they get home. Jay says he can do his homework while they're gone, and they say goodbye and leave.

Jay looks around the house while he's waiting for Mia to drop by. It's smaller than Tito Maning's house and hasn't been renovated, but Jay notices the family photos all around. Everyone in Jay's family, including Jay, is featured, and there are pictures of Jun at various ages. Jay and Jun are together in one of them. Jay remembers that the photo was taken on a basketball court right after Jun defended Jay from a bully. There's another one of Jun playing the piano—Jay didn't even know that Jun did that—and one of Jun with Tita Chato and Tita Ines when he's much older. In that last photo he doesn't have his tattoos yet, though.

Mia arrives at Tita Chato's house, and Jay greets her in Tagalog. She jokingly starts speaking to him in rapid Tagalog, which Jay can't understand, then has Jay do "mano," a deferential bow of respect to his elder. She tells Jay that he's better off staying with Tita Chato than with Tito Maning and expresses her admiration for Tita Chato's work. Jay agrees, though he doesn't actually know what Tita Chato does. He says that he wishes his aunts could get married, and Mia says that in the Philippines it's still illegal to divorce, which Jay didn't know.

Clearly, part of why Jay felt so close to Jun is that Jun used to take a genuine interest in Jay's honest thoughts about things—again, this makes sense, because open communication is what Jay is lacking in his familial relationships and his friendship with Seth. Jun was also capable of making Jay think about things he hadn't thought about before. And in some ways Jay is learning as much about Jun by reading the poetry books that Jun left behind as he is by investigating "clues" with Mia to learn more about Jun's life.



The contrast between Tita Chato and Tito Maning is stark. Tito Maning would have been upset at any perceived disrespect from Jay, and his relationship with his wife is nothing like the comfortable joyfulness so evident between Tita Chato and Tita Ines. Further, Jay's aunts seem to want to spend time with Jay for the sake of spending time with him. They're not trying to educate him about Philippine history to prove a point. And yet, Jay is lying to his aunts about doing his homework, much like Jun lied to them when he secretly dropped out of school. Once again, Jay is following in Jun's footsteps.



Tita Chato and Tita Ines embrace their entire family, and do not try to erase or hide their past. While Jay is starting to learn the "truth" about what happened to Jun after he left Tito Maning's, Jay is also learning more about the kind of person Jun was—for instance, Jay didn't know that Jun played piano. This discovery of who Jun was feels like another, adjacent truth-seeking quest, but a healthier one, since it's natural to want to know more about someone who passed away. The note about Jun getting tattoos after leaving his aunts' house seems to imply that Jun was rebelling in some way (though nowadays getting a tattoo isn't necessarily rebellious at all).



Jay has been hugely insecure about his inability to speak Tagalog, but when Mia turns this inability into a joke, Jay doesn't seem to mind. Once again, Jay and Mia seem to have a healthy friendship, since she gets Jay out of his own head and also communicates openly with him. While she does inadvertently remind Jay in this passage that he doesn't know much about his Filipino family (since he's not sure what Tita Chato does for work) or Philippine politics (since he didn't know it was illegal to divorce) she does so in a way that isn't meant to show him up—she's helping him learn.



Jay says that his dad is going to be furious with him for confronting Tito Maning about Jun, but Mia says that she admires Jay's bravery. He wonders if he should have said nothing, but Mia thinks it's not healthy to keep silent about things. For instance, Mia told Jessa about Jun, and Jessa talked to Grace about it. Grace is mad at Jessa now, but if their relationship is going to work out, they have to be honest with each other.

Mia then says that she tracked down the owner of the bookstore from the card Jay found. Apparently, Jun used to special-order books from him. The man doesn't know where Jun went after leaving Tita Chato's, but he did provide Jun's most recent address. However, the address is in the slums, so Mia asked her journalism professor to safely guide her and Jay there. The owner also asked Mia who's updating "the site" if Jun is dead, but then he got nervous and wouldn't say more. She says that Jun must have been running a website, but that they won't get any more info about it from the bookstore owner. For now, they should focus on visiting Jun's address.

THE WIDE EYES OF THE LOST

Mia and Jay meet Mia's journalism professor, Brian Santos, at the edge of the slums. The area is even more crowded than it appears in photographs: shacks are built on top of other shacks, buildings "cobbled together," and safety hazards are everywhere. Mia tells Brian Santos that Jay speaks hardly any Tagalog, which makes Jay feel bad. After hearing Jay's name, Brian Santos realizes that Jay is related to Chief Inspector Reguero (Tito Maning). He offers condolences Jun's death.

When Jay and his mom had a conversation about the value of truth, Jay took a strong pro-truth position, arguing that truth was always worth knowing and worth telling. Jay seems less sure of that position now, but Mia strongly argues that his original belief was right: in saying that Jessa had to ask Grace about Jun, she is saying that human relationships can only flourish through open, honest communication.



Mia and Jay's detective work is going surprisingly well, since they now have a solid lead as to where Jun was living. It's not totally surprising that Jun was living in the slums—in his letter to Jay, he said that he'd rather live there than with Tito Maning, and that's exactly what he ended up doing. Once again, it seems like there's more to Jun's story, since the bookstore owner cryptically suggests that Jun was running a website of some kind. So far, Jay seems validated in his belief that there's some hidden truth about Jun that he can discover—all the clues certainly seem to be leading to something big.



Much like Jay realized that the photos of the drug war didn't fully represent the Philippines, it seems that photos of the slums don't fully represent the slums, either. Once again, Jay is deeply insecure about his inability to speak Tagalog, even though Mia is only telling Brian Santos this information for practical purposes. Brian Santos's immediate recognition of Tito Maning's name makes clear Tito Maning's stature. His condolences about Jun's death indicate that, even if Tito Maning has erased Jun's memory, other people know of the connection. The condolences also just make Brian Santos seem like a good person.



Mia explains that Brian Santos often guides foreign journalists around the Philippines (and gets little credit for it). He's also an investigative journalist and wrote the piece about trafficking that made Mia want to pursue journalism. Brian Santos acknowledges that journalism in the Philippines is dangerous because people in power don't want inconvenient truths to get out. Recently, he says, a colleague of his wrote a critical piece about the drug war and was arrested on fake charges. The government can't stop foreigners from publishing stories and they can't technically stop domestic reporting either, but they keep a close eye on journalists. Brian Santos suggests that Jay think about becoming a journalist, since Jay cares about the truth. Jay feels both proud and guilty, since he wouldn't care if it weren't for Jun.

Brian Santos guides Mia and Jay through the streets and says that he's familiar with Jun's address, since he's done reporting around there. He asks what Jay will do if he learns the truth about Jun today, and Jay doesn't know. Brian Santos says that he receives death threats every day. Every time he reports a story, he asks himself if he's willing to die to tell the truth. He asks if Jay is prepared to die to find out the truth about Jun. Jay thinks about his insignificant life: he goes to school, plays video games, and helps no one. He tells Brian Santos yes. Brian Santos asks Mia the same thing, and she also says yes.

The three of them walk further into the slums and the streets grow narrower. Jay notices dogs, roosters, cats, and the sound of TVs. Most of all, he notices people everywhere, playing basketball and heading to work. Ashamed, Jay realizes that he expected "more misery." In reality, everyone here is just making the best of things, the same as anyone else. Still, the safety hazards are real, and Jay feels conflicted.

Brian Santos leads Mia and Jay to a structure built atop a basketball court. They knock on the door and an old woman answers it. The woman, Brian Santos, and Mia converse while Jay stands there, feeling useless. Eventually, the woman agrees to let them in and they climb a rickety staircase. After they pass a few levels, the concrete steps become wood planks. They knock on a door at the very top and a young woman peeks through the lock. Mia begins speaking to her in a language that Brian Santos identifies as Bisaya (the dialect from Mia's region). Jay is impressed that Mia is fluent in so many languages, when most kids in America speak just one or two.

The fact that Brian Santos is willing to guide foreign journalists around without being properly credited in their articles demonstrates how important he thinks it is to report the truth about corruption to the public. Earlier Tito Maning claimed that only the government told the truth; now Brian Santos is saying that the government is doing what it can to stop journalists from telling the truth. That Brian Santos recommends a career in journalism to Jay suggests that he sees some of his own determination in Jay. Jay's realization that his motivation has been more about Jun than about a broader interest in the truth is important, but also could be grounds for future growth..



Jay has been play-acting at being a detective. In this moment, Brian Santos presents him with the real stakes of what he is looking into—is he willing to risk his life to find the truth—and Jay accepts. Jay wants Jun's death to have meaning, to impact the world in some way. And, in this moment, he decides that he wants to impact the world, to help people.



Jay's realization that life in the slums isn't as awful as he believed it would be mimics Jun's realization in his long-ago letter to Jay. Earlier, Tito Maning told Jay that Western media sensationalize the Philippines. While his assertion was partly an attempt to rationalize the drug war, Tito Maning is right that someone like Jay—who has only seen the slums in photographs, which were probably taken by foreign journalists—can't get the full story about the Philippines from Western media. That said, Tito Maning also misrepresents the slums, with his emphasis on crime and drugs and his disdain for the people there.



Once again, Jay's inability to speak any Philippine languages or dialects leaves him feeling distinctly out of place, and shows him the cultural differences between the United States and the Philippines. The passage also highlights the poverty in the slums, with the rickety structure built above a basketball court.



Mia asks Jay to show the woman the photo of Jun that Jun's friend sent. Jay does so, and the woman immediately looks grieved. Jay realizes that this woman must know Jun very well and isn't just someone who took over his apartment. She opens the door for them and Jay notices that her skin is darker than theirs. He also notices a small child at her feet.

It seems that the pieces of Jun's life after he left Tita Chato's are falling into place, since this woman must have known the tattooed version of Jun. Her skin is dark, which might mean she's a lower social class than Jun was, since Jun's family looked down on the darker-skinned María. It's not clear whose child this is, but it's worth wondering whether it's Jun's.



A UNIVERSE WHERE PEOPLE DO NOT DIE FOR DOING WHAT IS RIGHT

Mia introduces the woman as Reyna. Reyna says that she and Jun lived in this apartment together for two years. Jay wants to ask about the child but doesn't. Instead, he looks around and wonders how Jun ended up here; he even wonders if Reyna is scamming them. Brian Santos explains that Reyna doesn't want both Jay and Brian going into the apartment, since they're men, so Brian will wait outside.

Jay wants to know the truth about Jun, but he seems unhappy with learning anything that doesn't fit with his preconceived notions about Jun's life—for instance, he doesn't want to learn more about the child, which might be Jun's. And the fact that he thinks Reyna might be scamming mirrors Tito Maning's instinctive mistrust of the poor and the "lower" classes.



Mia and Jay enter the apartment, which is like a loft. It's a more impressive structure than other homes in the slums but still looks dangerous; the floor is rotting and the "windows" are just open gaps in the walls. Reyna invites Mia and Jay to sit in plastic lawn chairs, and the child sits in front of the TV. Reyna brings them crackers and water, which Mia silently warns Jay not to drink. Mia says something to Reyna, and then Mia takes out her phone and begins to record. They begin talking, though Jay can't understand the conversation.

The description of the apartment makes clear the poverty in which Jun and Reyna (and now Reyna) lived. Once again, Mia has to explain something about the Philippines to Jay, but again, it's for a practical purpose: if Jay drank the water Reyna gives them, he'd probably get sick. Similarly, Jay's inability to speak Bisaya excludes him from the conversation between Mia and Reyna, but they're obviously not excluding him on purpose. Jay has to trust Mia to find the truth about Jun's life in this apartment without Jay's help.



Jay looks around for proof that Jun lived here. Mia finally tells Jay that Reyna is speaking in Bisaya, so that she can tell her own story, something crucial in journalism. Jay reflects that Jun must have learned Bisaya, and that maybe he taught Reyna Tagalog. Mia tells Jay that Reyna was part of a big family. When Reyna was 11, traffickers came to her village, though no one knew what they were. They said that they could help girls find domestic work abroad, so Reyna's parents sold her to them.

Jay's search for evidence of Jun in the room indicates that he doesn't necessarily want to believe that Jun was living here, so he's searching for "proof" that would either confirm or debunk Reyna's story. In contrast, Mia is focused on journalism and allowing Reyna to tell her story, to reveal her truth. And that truth is a story of lies and brutal exploitation. Mia takes her ethical responsibility as a journalist seriously, but Jay is caught up in what Reyna's story means about Jun.



After five or six years, Tita Chato's organization helped Reyna get out. Jay is confused: what organization? Mia explains that Tita Chato helps trafficking victims, and Jay is sad to realize Reyna's situation is common. Reyna went to stay with Tita Chato temporarily, where she met Jun. Jay is uncomfortable, because this means that Reyna was in a vulnerable position when Jun met her and he took advantage. Mia continues: Jun was very considerate, since Reyna wasn't the first client to stay with them. She helped out around the house and Jun kept his distance and treated her gently.

Tita Chato found a permanent home for Reyna after a few weeks; she'd care for a family's child in exchange for board. But the husband of this family began to abuse Reyna, something she hid from Tita Chato when Tita Chato checked in. Reyna was ashamed and didn't want to bother anyone, and she was afraid of the husband. Jay thinks she should have spoken up, but Mia says that Jay can't understand Reyna's situation. Mia says that Reyna eventually called Tita Chato to confess, but it turns out that Jun was the one on the other line. He picked Reyna up and asked where she wanted to go. She didn't want to return to Tita Chato, so he helped her settle at this apartment.

Reyna made Jun promise not to tell Tita Chato. Jun continued to help Reyna, though, and brought her food when he could. Jay realizes that this must have been what Jun was doing instead of going to school—the library excuse was a lie. Reyna tells Mia that she and Jun fell in love, and after two weeks she asked if he wanted to have sex. But Jun said no; he was helping her because it was the right thing to do, not because he expected anything. But after another two weeks, he confessed that he loved her and moved in. Jay can't believe that all this happened while his own biggest concern was the new Avengers movie.

Jun still didn't tell Tita Chato, probably because he felt guilty for getting involved with one of her clients. Reyna hands Jay a piece of paper now, which Mia identifies as a love song that Jun wrote for Reyna. Jay wants to ask to keep it, but realizes that the song is Reyna's the way the **letters** were his, and so he remains silent. Reyna recorded many of the songs but had to sell the phone the recordings were on to keep from starving. Mia continues: Jun left school, and they both made enough money to live.

Once again, Jay's lack of knowledge about the Philippines is made clear. Meanwhile, it's ironic that Jay is now worried about the ethics of Jun dating Reyna—while he's right to pick up on the fact that their relationship could have been inappropriate, he was secretly questioning whether Reyna was a grifter only moments before. But it seems like Jun's relationship with Reyna wasn't inappropriate after all, since he kept a respectful distance. The story, like many others about Jun, emphasizes his empathy and kindness.



Once again, Jay is faced with a situation he doesn't have the context or ability to understand. Much like Seth couldn't ever fully understand Jay's experience, Jay can't fully understand Reyna's. In such a situation, the only thing he can do is listen, which is what he wanted Seth to do back when he told Seth about Jun. Sometimes, open communication demands listening as much as speaking, which is what Mia is teaching Jay here. Meanwhile, it makes sense that Jun wanted to help Reyna. Jun was a deeply empathetic person and felt responsible for others, but "helping people" was an abstract concept before Reyna.



After he began to help Reyna, Jun clearly decided that the things he previously valued—like school—no longer mattered. (This is similar to Jay's change in focus upon learning about Jun's death.) And yet, what enabled Jun to help Reyna was his lie about still going to school. So in this case Jun lied in order to try to do good.



Jay's father stopped communicating with his Filipino relatives out of guilt over leaving the country behind. Now it is made clear that Jun left his family because he felt guilty about what he had done, even if he had done it for good reasons. Guilt drives so much of the family breakdown in this novel. Meanwhile, through his whole search for the truth behind Jun's death, Jay (perhaps driven by his own guilt at having stopped corresponding with Jun) has acted as if Jun is his—as if he is Jun's inheritor. But now it's clear that other people knew Jun far better than Jay did, and Jay realizes this too when does not ask for the song lyrics.



Jay asks if Jun was a drug pusher or user. Mia translates, and Reyna says no. Jay knew it: Jun couldn't have lived with himself if he sold drugs. In fact, Reyna says, Jun helped addicts get clean. Mia thinks that Jun's name ended up on the list by accident since he spent time with addicts, though Jay still believes that Tito Maning was involved. Jay wonders why Reyna said that Jun only lived here for two years if he left Tito Maning three years ago. Reyna begins crying and tells Mia that Jun left her on Christmas.

Again, Jay wants to believe that Jun's death meant something, and his death would seem more meaningless to Jay if Jun was killed for using or dealing drugs. After all, dealing drugs would be pretty unethical, since addicts in the Philippines can be legally murdered for their addiction, and drug dealers feed that addiction. Reyna tells Jay exactly what he wants to hear when she reveals that Jun was actually helping addicts get clean, and Jay continues to seize on the simple "answers" that conform with what he wants to believe. However, Reyna's admission that Jun left her complicates Jay's presumption that Jun was entirely innocent, especially since his leaving must have left her in dire poverty if she had to sell Jun's phone to survive.



Jay thinks that Jun must have had a reason for leaving, but Mia sees a pattern: Jun runs when things get hard. He did the same when he stopped writing to Jay, when he left home, and when he left Tita Chato. Jay doesn't listen to this and asks if the child he saw is Jun's daughter. She's not; she's a neighbor's kid. Jay is relieved but also feels a sense of loss. Reyna asks them to go and Jay leaves some pesos on the table secretly, thinking of Jun as he does so. He asks if Reyna knows about Jun's website, and Reyna says no. As they leave, Jay imagines a world in which Jun is alive and married to Reyna.

Jay continues to always see Jun in the most positive life. He wants to find the truth, but he still only wants to find the truth that matches with his expectations and makes him feel better. Jay has advocated for the importance of sharing hard truths, but when Mia tries to share a hard truth about Jun with Jay, Jay dismisses it. While it's not clear that Mia is entirely right in her assessment of Jun, either—for instance, it wasn't Jun who stopped writing to Jay, but Jay who stopped writing to Jun—it seems likely that the truth lies somewhere in the middle of Mia and Jay's separate assessments of Jun. Jay's sadness at finding that the child isn't Jun's is grief that Jun is truly gone—that he doesn't "live on" through a child. And there appears to be still more of a mystery to Jun's life, as Reyna apparently knows nothing about the website that Jun seems to have run.



EVERYONE LOSES THEIR SHIT

That night at dinner, Jay is pensive, because he still doesn't know why Jun left Reyna. He wants to tell Tita Chato and Tita Ines the truth, but he can't do so without lying or sharing Reyna's story against her wishes (she asked Jay and Mia not to tell Tita Chato about her and Jun). Jay's aunts decide to call in sick tomorrow, which makes Jay feel guilty since Tita Chato's work is important. To cheer Jay up, Tita Chato brings out a karaoke machine and sets it up on the patio with chairs for neighbors. Many neighbors show up, including a really old man. He apologizes to Jay for not speaking much English and Jay says the man speaks better English than Jay speaks Tagalog.

Jay knows some of the truth about Jun now, but if anything, knowing that truth has only generated more questions. And, Jay is forced to experience just how complicated "the truth" is: Jay's aunts deserve to know the truth about why Jun left, but Jay is right not to tell them, since Reyna asked him not to. In this case, the truth isn't automatically a good thing, since telling the truth would hurt someone else. Jay's interaction with the old man is the first time anyone has apologized to Jay for not speaking his language—normally, it's the other way around. The novel seems to portray this sort of mindfulness as a way to cross cultural boundaries, as it causes Jay to immediately react with generosity rather than feelings of guilt or isolation.



Jay is allowed to drink beer, which makes him feel grown-up, since his parents don't let him. The first neighbor starts singing a song that Jay doesn't recognize and gets a score of 92. Tita Ines sings and gets a 97. Jay declines to sing, but eventually a neighbor insists that he participate, so Jay belts out "Call Me Maybe" by Carly Rae Jepsen. At first, he's self-conscious, but he soon gets into it, even though his score ends up being low. Jay is having a lot of fun, and then some neighbors start singing a love song and he begins to feel sad about Mia having a boyfriend and about Jun not being present. The old man sings a song and gets a perfect 100, and everyone cheers.

Jay is growing up on this trip as his worldview slowly becomes broader and more nuanced; it makes sense, then, that Tita Chato and Tita Ines treat him like a grown up by letting him drink beer. Jay's choice of song suggests that Jay doesn't always have to choose between cultural identities—he can embrace his own and be embraced by those around him in turn. Meanwhile, this scene shows Jay and others engaging in frivolous fun, and that fun not being "meaningless" but rather meaningful: these sorts of experiences knit communities together, across difference. Meanwhile, Jay himself can balance having fun while feeling some sadness. Life isn't black and white, he's experiencing, and that's not only okay but how it has to be..



TO FLOOD

Because Tita Chato and Tita Ines have taken the next day off of work, they bring Jay to the beach. Tita Chato tells him that the beach they've come to is a good one because it's mostly Filipino families, not tourists. The three of them rent a hut, and Jay heads out to the water. He watches the tide come in and out, and weirdly, he feels at home. He knows it might just be the fact that he's in a beautiful tropical environment, but he thinks it's more than that.

Someone like Tito Maning would lump Jay in with the "tourists" Tita Chato derides, but Tita Chato here implies that Jay belongs on this beach as much as any other Filipino. Jay may feel at home on the beach simply for that reason, but he also may feel at home because of all of the experiences he's had on this trip.



Usually, when Jay tells someone he was born in the Philippines and moved when he was one, they say that it doesn't count because he doesn't remember his home. But now that Jay is standing here, he feels like his first year did matter. Even if he doesn't consciously remember the Philippines, some part of him does. He walks out into the water until his feet don't touch the bottom, and he watches the sea.

When Jay first stepped off the plane after landing in Manila, he instinctually felt comfortable and at home. The events that happened immediately after made him feel out of place, but he now seems to be returning to his initial sense of comfort and belonging. Jay here is insisting that his heritage is his heritage, that being Filipino-American doesn't mean that he is only a hybrid, but that, rather, he is both.



It begins to rain, and Jay starts to wonder whether he should tell his aunts what he learned about Jun. They'd be happy that Jun wasn't dealing drugs but might feel that Jun's relationship with Reyna was inappropriate. Jay thinks about Reyna's situation and realizes that he can't claim the good parts of the Philippines, like the beaches, without also claiming the country's poverty and problems. All of that is part of Jay, because the country is part of Jay. Jay feels angry at Tito Maning, who thinks that a person can't belong to a place if they didn't grow up there. The rain picks up and Jay swims back to shore. His aunts are packing up, and Jay asks if they can stay longer, since the place feels "holy."

But Tita Chato thinks the storm will get worse. They get in the car and the rain pounds, which Jay thinks is holy, too. Tita Chato teaches Jay the word *baha*, which means "to flood." Jay thanks his aunts for bringing him to the beach and imagines Jun sitting with them. Tita Chato says that Jay reminds her of Jun. Jay silently disagrees: Jun was courageous like a storm, and Jay is passive. Jay says that he'll ask his parents to donate to Tita Chato's organization, but Tita Chato says they already do. She adds that Jay's dad also pays for many of his cousins' school fees. The storm ends up passing, so the three of them return to the beach.

ITS CENTER UNSOLVED

That night, Jay lies awake thinking about Jun. He still doesn't know why Jun left Reyna, where he went, or how he ended up on Tito Maning's list. Jay also doesn't know who took Jun's **letters**. Jay knows it doesn't matter if he never learns the truth, since he confirmed that Jun was a good person. But the mystery still bothers him, and time is running short, since he's about to go to his grandparents' in a more rural part of the Philippines and they don't have Internet access.

Jay pulls up Instagram and discovers that Jun's friend deleted their account. Jay browses the account called "GISING NA PHI!" instead, hoping to find a post about Jun but knowing there won't be any. Jay tries to sleep, still upset that the mystery of how Jun died is unsolved.

Again, telling Tita Chato and Tita Ines the truth about Jun and Reyna wouldn't be wholly positive: it would betray Reyna's trust. In this scene, Jay also finally understands what his dad was trying to tell him earlier in the novel: it's easy to appreciate the good parts of the Philippines, but the bad parts of the country—like the drug war and trafficking—are part of the Philippines, too. It seems like Jay's dad was never able to reconcile the good and bad parts of the Philippines, because he told Jay to avoid fixating on the country in general. Jay takes a more nuanced here: he realizes that both the good and bad parts of the Philippines coexist, and he must acknowledge the good and the bad. In doing so, Jay is making a conscious choice to belong in the Philippines. Jay's sense that the beach feels "holy" likely stems from the fact that he just came to terms with his cultural identity, which happened (in part) because of the beach's beauty.



By suggesting that the uglier parts of the storm are "holy," too, Jay is putting his new understanding into practice—he can reconcile the good and bad things about the beach and the storm. The fact that Jay's dad donates to Tita Chato's organization and supports his cousins is perhaps surprising, since Jay's dad seems to want to stay out of affairs in the Philippines. Clearly, there's a lot Jay still doesn't know about his father..



While Jay has learned a lot about Jun—and believes that Jun didn't deal drugs was therefore "good"—the need to know the truth still gnaws at him.



Jay himself has found a measure of connectedness and belonging, but the trail into what he considers the heart of the mystery of Jun's death seems to have gone cold.



ANOTHER DAY IN THE MINEFIELD

The next morning, Jay wakes up after Tita Chato and Tita Ines have left for work. He ignores texts from his parents, then texts Mia and messages Seth, but neither responds. Jay checks his email and discovers that his mom wrote him a long message about how she and Jay's dad learned that Jay got into a fight with Tito Maning. They're unhappy with Jay's lack of communication. Jay responds with a lie, saying that he shared a memory of Jun, which upset Tito Maning. He also tells his mom that his phone died.

Jay tries to do some schoolwork but instead watches a TV show, which is mostly in Tagalog. In the show, two men are about to confront one another, but before they can, there's a commercial. Jay pulls out his laptop and searches for Mia on Facebook, but he doesn't remember her last name. Jay reads another article about the drug war, which he now finds impersonal after learning so much about Jun.

Jay gets a message from Seth, which makes him feel less alone. Seth asks Jay how the "motherland is," and Jay begins to type out the whole story, but then Seth sends another message saying that he's heard people are really poor in the Philippines. He's seen YouTube videos of the slums, which seem "effing depressing." Jay tells Seth that he has to go.

Jay begins searching Instagram posts near his location to see if he can find Mia's account. He finds Jessa's instead, filled with selfies, and Grace is featured in a few. He notices that Grace seems to have a private account, so Jay requests to follow it. He finds Mia's account and requests to follow her, too. Grace approves Jay's request quickly and Jay scrolls through her posts, discovering in the process that Angel also has a private account, which amuses him. Then he freezes: Jun is in one of Grace's posts from four months ago. It was taken in a mall food court. Apparently, when Jun cut everyone out from his life, he didn't cut out Grace. Grace never told Jay, but then again, Jay never asked.

Jay is obviously looking for someone to talk to, since he messages Mia and Seth. And his mother clearly wants to communicate with him—and explicitly references his lack of communication with her and Jay's dad. Yet Jay continues to avoid and lie to his parents.



This scene shows the evolving mix of Jay's connection to and disconnection from Filipino society. On one hand, he doesn't understand the show he's watching (or it's metaphorical connection to his own failure to confront Tito Maning), and he doesn't even remember the last name of his best friend in the country. On the other, he now knows enough about the drug war firsthand to find Western media coverage of it unsatisfactory.



Once again, Seth demonstrates that he's not the world's most empathetic friend. Jay wants to share his experience with Seth, but Seth responds with cultural insensitivity. Of course, Seth's statement about the slums and the Philippines' poverty isn't that different from what Jay initially thought about the slums and about the Philippines in general. So Seth's comments also serve to highlight how much Jay has learned and changed.



The extent of Grace and Angel's hidden rebellion against their father's control becomes more apparent to Jay. The rebellion also establishes both girls as potential allies and confidants for Jay. Further, from the beginning, Jay simplistically assumed that he was the only person in the family interested in what happened to Jun and that Tito Maning was the only member of Jun's family who might know what happened to him. Obviously, that's not the case. Now Jay knows that Grace might have a lot of information to share about Jun's life—and death.



Jay suddenly recognizes one of the photos of Jun as the same photo that Jun's friend sent to Jay. Jay realizes now that there was no friend—Grace made the anonymous account. Jay messages her to confront her, and she admits that she did it; she wanted to see if Jay really cared about Jun. Jay had stopped writing to Jun, after all. At the time, Jun assumed that Jay didn't care about what happened in the Philippines, much like Jay's dad didn't care. She says that even though Jay is here now, it's too late. She adds that Jay can't understand her pain. Jay asks if Jun left Reyna because he was in trouble, and Grace says yes. Jun was running an Instagram account, which Jay realizes must have been the "GISING NA PH!" account.

Jay realizes that Grace must be the one updating the account, which explains the bookstore owner's confusion. Jay tells Grace to stop for her own safety, but she says that Jun believed it was important to honor people's humanity. She's doing this to honor him. She leaves the chat, telling Jay that she'll see him at their grandparents' tomorrow. Jay begins scrolling through the account and realizes that although the people depicted are dead, they're also alive in these images. Maybe Grace is right, and the account is "worth it." Jay messages Mia again and gets no response. He feels both wise and lost.

Later, Tita Chato and Tita Ines take Jay out to an American restaurant to eat burgers. At dinner, Jay considers telling them everything, but he doesn't know what he should say and what he should avoid. Instead, he says nothing at all.

GO BACK TO SLEEP

Jay and his aunts are driving to his grandparents' house, which is a day trip away. They're following Tito Maning's car; Jay looks out at the countryside as they drive. Tita Chato notices that Jay didn't sleep well last night, and she tells Jay that Jun was himself an insomniac; he would play guitar at 2 a.m. His voice was like the ocean, she says, though unfortunately they don't have any videos of him singing. Tita Chato thinks that if Jun was alive, he and Jay would be close. Jay feels guilty for not writing Jun back and for hiding what he's learned from Tita Chato. Jay's mom told him that the truth hurts, and Mia said that the truth is necessary. Jay thinks both of them could be right.

And, in fact, Grace knows a lot! And now Jay (and the reader) get a clearer picture of Jun's life and death: he was running an anti-drug-war Instagram account, left Reyna because he was "in trouble," and suggests that his death was a result of the government disliking what he was doing. This is the sort of simple truth about Jun's death that Jay has wanted. And yet, Grace's other comments are a mix of truth and assumption about both Jay and Jay's father that further demonstrates there isn't a "simple truth"—it's easy to see why Grace would believe the story that Jun's dad doesn't care about his Filipino family, but Jay has learned that isn't in fact the case at all. Every time the novel presents a simple answer, it embeds hints that the truth in fact is likely not so simple.



Grace thinks that Jun died because of the Instagram account—she finds meaning in continuing it as a way of honoring Jun and his beliefs. It's notable that the account itself is engaged in a similar project: it is saying that those who have been killed in the drug war are human beings worth honoring and remembering. In doing so the account is asserting that these deaths should never have happened—that the deaths were meaningless, in a sense—but the account uses that argument to give meaning to those deaths, to create a kind of digital monument standing against the drug war.



The fact that there's a restaurant for American burgers near Tita Chato's village is another indication that despite Tito Maning's position the American and Filipino cultures have in some ways mixed beyond any ability to tear them back apart. Once again, Jay chooses not to tell the truth, but this isn't cowardice—he wants to tell Tita Chato and Tita Ines what he's learned, but telling the truth might be unethical.



Jay knows that the story of why there aren't any videos of Jun playing guitar and singing is even more tragic than Tita Chato can imagine: Reyna had to sell the phone containing the video. Tita Chato is noticing the similarities between Jay and Jun, but she can't know the way that this amplifies Jay's sense of guilt. Jay's position regarding the truth is evolving and becoming more nuanced, and depends on the situation.



Jay thinks he'll tell them the truth soon and clear Jun's name; he just won't mention Reyna. Jay tries to fall asleep but remembers that on his visit to the Philippines during this drive he saw a van that looked like it had recently fallen into a ravine. He pointed it out to his dad, but his dad just said that that sort of thing happens here.

Jay is trying to navigate his way through which truths to reveal to whom, while also fulfilling his responsibilities to those whose secrets he has learned. Jay's memory about his dad again demonstrates his dad's unwillingness to reconcile the good and bad parts of the Philippines—instead, he's always just refused to discuss the Philippines much at all.



BRAVERY AS IF IT WERE MY OWN

Jay and his aunts arrive at Jay's grandparents' *barangay* at sunset. The village has a big Catholic church in the center, and a volcano is visible in the distance behind the village. Jay thinks that the village looks both quaint and "forgotten." He lived with his grandparents—Lola and Lolo—back when he was a baby and his parents were trying to figure out where to go next, and he instinctually remembers it from his last visit. Lola and Lolo greet the family on their porch. Tita Chato, with a bit of skepticism, tells Jay that Tito Danilo was called away on church business, which disappoints Jay, since he likes his uncle.

It seems that religion is just as important in the rural parts of the Philippines as it was for Tito Maning's family in Manila. Once again, Jay recognizes a place in the Philippines "instinctually"—another sign that the Philippines is part of Jay's heritage, regardless of what his mother or Tito Maning say. Tita Chato's skepticism about Tito Danilo's reason for his absence suggests that she thinks he is in fact trying to avoid seeing the family right now—another hint at the factors that have upset the relations between Jay's Filipino family.



Jay hugs Lola, and she welcomes him home. He feels as comfortable with her as he felt when he first got off the plane. Lolo smiles at Jay. Jay wants to speak to them, but his Tagalog isn't good enough and neither is their English. Jay stands between Tita Chato and Tito Maning's family while conversation passes over him. Grace tells Jay that he won't be able to text Mia here, since there's no cell service. Only old people and babies live here, she says, because young people move to cities now. Jay asks if the family is speaking a language other than Tagalog, and Grace says that it's Oasun, a local dialect.

Over the course of the novel, people have had complicated feelings about Jay's place in the Philippines. Like Tomas, Lola seems to think that the answer is simple: the Philippines is Jay's home, or at least one of his homes. This might be why Jay instinctually feels comfortable with Lola, as comfortable as he felt at the airport before interacting with the immigration officer and with Tito Maning. Jay is once again left out of conversation because of his inability to speak Tagalog, but he doesn't feel excluded or panicked—instead, he's curious about what language his family is speaking.



Grace, knowing that Jay has questions for her, says that she and Jay can't talk now. For his part, Tito Maning ignores Jay and calls Grace over in Tagalog. Everyone goes inside. The house is the same as it was when Jay last saw it, filled with photos. Everyone circles around Jay's second balikbayan box, and Tito Maning is about to open it when Jay grabs it first. He dispenses the items, guessing who each object is for. Everyone puts aside certain objects. The last item is a University of Michigan sweatshirt, which Jay gives to Lolo. Strangers begin entering and are introduced to Jay as extended family. Tita Chato grabs the objects everyone put aside and starts to dispense them to the extended family with Jay's help. After, Tita Chato tells Jay that he did a good job.

Jay's initiative in handling the balikbayan box shows his growing comfort and certainty about his place in the Philippines and within his Filipino family. The fact that there's a U of M sweatshirt inside is noteworthy, since Jay's dad must have packed it. Jay had assumed that his dad wasn't enthusiastic about Jay's acceptance at U of M, but it seems like he was after all. Jay clearly didn't know that the items in the balikbayan boxes should also be distributed to extended family, but instead of berating Jay for his lack of knowledge, Tita Chato helps Jay finish the job and praises him.



Everyone heads into the backyard for dinner. Jay can't see much, but he knows the doghouse must be around here, which is where that dog gave birth years ago. Everyone begins to eat, and Jay asks Angel what the dishes are. As they eat, Jay thinks about the last time he was here with Jun. Everyone went to the fishpond, and all the men took an edge of a net and waded in. Jay had started falling behind and swallowed and gagged on some water. Jun dropped his side of the net and pulled Jay out.

Jun's legs ended up covered in leeches, which made Tita Ami call out to Tito Maning, but Tito Maning said that Jun would be fine. Jun just stared at the leeches, pulled them off one by one, and tossed them back into the pond. Tito Danilo was concerned about Jay when the men returned, but Jun just told him, "It is life."

Tita Chato calls Jay's name, bringing his attention back from the memory. She worries that Jay is sick, and Tito Maning jokes that they should have brought McDonald's for Jay. Jay goes inside to use the bathroom, but since the bathroom is a new addition to the house, Jay doesn't know where it is. One of the rooms he checks has Tito Maning's family's luggage in it, and Jay notices papers poking out of Grace's bag. He grabs them and sees that they're Jun's **letters**.

Jay reads one of the **letters**. In it, Jun says that he recently decided to be a vegetarian after watching his dad kill a goat. Jun worried about the goat's family, which, Jun says, isn't something other Filipinos would think about. Jun comments that maybe Jay's American attitude was impacting him. But when Jun told Tito Maning that he was planning to be a vegetarian at dinner, Tito Maning got angry and said that many people in the country were starving. Jun asked—sincerely—if he could bring his bowl of meat to those people instead of eating it.

Tito Maning responded by commanding Jun to eat, and even though Grace began crying, Jun still refused. Tito Maning said that he didn't want his son to be *bakla* (gay). Jun said that he might not want to live with Tito Maning anymore. After that, Tito Maning locked Jun out of the house and Jun walked to a classmate's house, which is where he's writing this letter from. Jun states that he is going to remain a vegetarian. If Tito Maning is against it, then it's probably the right thing to do, and people need to do what they think is right.

Jay had his first experience with death at his grandparents' house (the puppy), and now he's once again grieving in their backyard. Jay's memory of Jun fits with his perception of Jun as fundamentally good: only Jun, of all the men, stopped to help Jay. Finally, it's worth noting that Jay once again doesn't understand a part of Philippine culture—in this case, what the dishes at dinner are—but he asks for help instead of feeling bad about it, again demonstrating how changed he is from the start of the novel.



Tito Maning's careless cruelty is once more on display here, as is Jun's remarkable kindness. Jun even saved the leeches, throwing them back in the pond. Jun's comment about "life" is interesting, and seems to suggest that he sees meaning not in finding or creating meaning, but instead in recognizing life for what it is..



Tito Maning is still trying to taunt Jay for not belonging in the Philippines. Meanwhile, Jay here also solves a big mystery in the novel: that Grace was apparently the person who took Jun's letters, not Tito Maning (or Maria). Jay thought the theft of the letters was tied to Tito Maning's involvement in Jun's death, but that might not be the case. The truth might be more complicated than Jay previously believed.



Jun's distress over the goat mimics Jay's earlier distress about the puppy, which none of his Filipino family members—except Jun—understood. Jun might be partly referencing this incident when he says that Jay's American sensibilities are rubbing off on him. Tito Maning's comment that other people are starving is clearly not rooted in any empathy; instead it's a way to control Jun through guilt. It's remarkably how Jun is able to turn Tito Maning's efforts back against him by doubling-down on kindness.



Tito Maning's version of masculinity doesn't allow for empathy, but instead seems rooted in a blind insistence on "traditional" values without regard for others. He asserts power by excluding others. Even as a child, Jun seems to sense that Tito Maning's rules aren't necessarily rules he should follow. Once again, Jun seems to be a fundamentally good and courageous person.



Grace walks into the room and finds Jay with the **letters**. She quickly gets over her surprise and confirms that she was the one who took them. After she apologizes, she begins to cry. Jay was angry, but now he shares Grace's sorrow, and he wraps his arms around her. She says that she loved Jun, and Jay says that he did, too. Grace remembers that when she was a kid, a boy looked up her skirt. Jun called the boy over so Grace could explain to him why it upset her. The boy apologized and never did it again. Grace says that this was Jun's gift: he could make people care about other people.

But Grace never returned the favor by sticking up for Jun in front of Tito Maning, before or after Jun ran away. She never even insisted on a funeral. Jay wants to comfort Grace by saying Jun is with God now, but instead he just hugs her tighter. Grace says that Tito Maning told the family not to speak about Jun. The first month after Jun left, she and Angel constantly asked about him, but it made Tito Maning so upset that they stopped. Grace feels guilty about this: she was pretending Jun was dead even when he was alive. And she still feels like she's pretending now, when he really is dead.

Grace says that she stole the **letters** when she went to wake Jay up for dinner that first night. She explains that Tito Maning threw away all of Jun's belongings, so Grace just has Jun's digital messages, and those aren't the same as something physical. Jay says that Grace should keep some of the letters and share some with Angel, too. Jay admits that he stopped writing Jun because at the time, Jay had a girlfriend and spent all of his time with her. They broke up after four months because even though they had the same taste in video games, they disagreed on important stuff. Grace thinks she and Jessa are the opposite of what Jay describes, which Jay says is better.

Grace and Jay sit quietly with their arms around each other, and Jay realizes that Grace is now more like a sister than a cousin. But even Jay and Em never hold each other like this. Jay further realizes that Everyone is capable of this kind of love, not just people like Jun, but most people stifle it for some reason. Jay thinks it's time to let it out, like a flood. Grace says that she won't delete the Instagram account; she can finally do something for Jun. She knows the risk involved, but it's the right thing to do. Jay wishes they could post something for Jun, but that would jeopardize the account. Grace says they should head back outside "to the fakeness." But thinking of Jun's bravery, Jay says that he won't pretend anymore.

This is maybe the first time Jay has openly grieved Jun's death with anyone who knew him well. Jay was solely focused on the mystery of Jun's murder when he was at Tita Chato's, and even though he discussed the circumstances of Jun's death with Mia, she never knew Jun. Now, Grace and Jay can share their memories of Jun, since they both knew and loved him. Grace's story about Jun fits with what Jay already knew about his cousin, about how he had an ability to turn conflict into connection.



Grace's guilt about not sticking up for Jun is similar to Jay's guilt about not writing Jun back: both of them regret that they were passive in the face of Jun's suffering. Notably, Jay doesn't try to comfort Grace by suggesting that Jun's death has some religious meaning, or even that comfort is possible. Even though he's been trying to find meaning in Jun's death, all he can do is mourn Jun now. But he mourns with Grace. After so much silence and lack of communication, they mourn together.



Like Jay, Grace sees the letters—because they contain his words and thoughts in a physical form—as a kind of limited embodiment of Jun. In this scene readers finally learn the reason that Jay stopped writing back to Jun back, and it's at once pretty silly and deeply relatable: he got distracted by a romantic relationship, even if it was a bit of a shallow one. Now, though, revealing that information brings him closer to Grace, who shares details about her own relationship with Jessa. Emotional truthfulness leads to more emotional connection, and admitting what you feel guilty about can be a way of taking responsibility.



Throughout the novel, Jay has been craving a genuine connection with someone. Jun seemingly generated those kinds of connections naturally, but Jay now thinks that with effort, he can build honest relationships with other people just like Jun did. Jay's flood comment to a flood can be seen as referencing the Biblical flood that caused destruction but also washed the world clean. He seems to be referring to the nature of truth and honesty here: truth can be painful and destructive, but it's necessary in order to build relationships anew. Jay's refusal to "pretend" is a refusal to avoid the truth. Meanwhile, Grace has chosen to take responsibility for doing the right thing, regardless of the risks.



THE DARKNESS UNINTERRUPTED

After Jay and Grace go back outside, they walk up to Tito Maning, who is drinking beer and smoking. Grace asks if Jay is sure about what they're going to do, and Jay nods. Tito Maning steps on his cigarette as they approach but says nothing. Jay asks Tito Maning what happened to Jun. Tito Maning drinks silently, then says that they already talked about this. Jay says that Tito Maning hid the truth, because Jay found that note in Tito Maning's desk. Tito Maning dismisses Jay as a disrespectful American, but Grace steps up to her father and knocks the beer out of his hand. Jay prepares to step between them if needed; Jay couldn't defend Jun, but he'll defend Grace.

The family gathers around the three of them, and Jay loudly says that Tito Maning was keeping tabs on Jun. Tito Maning admits this: he knows Jun lived with Tita Chato, left to live with Reyna, ran the website, and ran away when the police caught wind of it. He even knows Grace was meeting up with Jun. Grace says that this means Tito Maning knew Jun wasn't doing drugs, but Tito Maning says the opposite is true: he knows that Jun was.

Jay says that Tito Maning had Jun killed because of the Instagram account. Tito Maning responds that Jay is engaged in a conspiracy theory; he says that Americans love heroes, and if there's no hero around, they'll invent one. Tito Maning says that maybe *he's* the real hero, since he's ridding the country of drugs. Jay disagrees: Tito Maning murdered his son. At this, Tito Maning grabs Jay's throat and tries to choke him. He only releases Jay when Lola twists Tito Maning's ear. Tito Maning says that he never ordered anyone to kill Jun, and that if Grace and Jay don't believe him, they should ask Tito Danilo.

This passage mirrors the first time that Jay asked Tito Maning what happened to Jun, but it's significantly different, because Jay isn't standing alone anymore. Additionally, he's outright accusing Tito Maning of lying, even though he still doesn't know exactly what the note was referencing. Again, he assumes that the truth is simple and that Tito Maning's explanation will tie all these loose threads together. For his part, Tito Maning once again tries to dismiss Jay's questions by insulting his American heritage, but this tactic doesn't make much sense anymore, since Grace is part of Jay's quest for truth, too. Grace's actions, meanwhile, are even more courageous than Jay's—she is more subject to Tito Maning's control—but nonetheless she now reveals her defiance of him out in the open. Jay is ready to take support Grace, partly because he feels guilty about not helping Jun but also because it's the right thing to do. In fact, it's probably what Jun would have done; Jay's search for Jun has also made Jay more like Jun.



All this time, Jay thought he was discovering new truths about Jun, but it turns out Tito Maning was always a step ahead of him. Of course, Tito Maning's revelation that he knew Jun's whereabouts all along, and that he knew about the Instagram account and about Jun's meetups with Grace generates complicated questions: why didn't Tito Maning intervene? In addition, because Tito Maning knows everything that Jay and Grace know, it signals that his knowledge about Jun using drugs is also true. If Tito Maning is being honest, then Jay may be wrong about why Jun died, and the truth would be more complicated than Jay believed.



Despite Tito Maning's revelations, Jay sticks with the truth that he believes. At this point, that isn't an entirely irrational position—Tito Maning might be concocting a story to protect himself—but it is noteworthy that Jay believes what he wants to believe. Tito Maning, meanwhile, once more bases his dismissal of Jay on cultural terms, arguing that Jay can't see the truth because of his American heritage of wanting to find meaning in life and death. Lola's intervention in the physical confrontation between Jay and Maning—with the stereotypical motherly twisting of the ear—suggests that she is asserting the rules of family over Tito Maning's pure display of personal aggression. Maning's reference to Danilo, meanwhile, draws the final member of the family into Jun's saga.



Grace says that even if Tito Maning didn't pull the trigger, he didn't do anything to stop Jun's murder. Tito Maning says that Jun was an "enemy of the state," and then he storms away. Jay tries to calm himself down the same way he did when he was a kid. He used to look at the night sky, and if a single star was visible, he took it as a sign that things would be okay. But he's afraid to look at the sky now, because he might only see darkness.

Grace here asserts that Tito Maning had a special responsibility to Jun because they were family; Maning responds that his most pressing responsibility is to the Philippines, which he sees himself as serving. These different arguments also lie at the heart of the different interpretations of the truth that different characters take. Jay's fear to search for meaning in the stars suggests that he is similarly about a loss of meaning in life: both from what looks like the falling apart of his family, and also because Tito Maning's revelations about Jun threaten to "steal" the meaning that Jun has taken on for Jay.



NEW LIFE

The next morning, Jay wakes up early and leaves the house. Grace follows him and asks where he's going. Jay tells her that he's going to Legazpi; she lets him know that is actually in the opposite direction. She asks if he's going to talk to Tito Danilo, and Jay admits that he is. He wants to go alone, but Grace says that Jun was her brother, so together they find a taxi driver. Jay knows that they'll get in trouble for this trip, but no one would have let them go. Last night, Jay tried to ask the family what Tito Maning meant when he brought up Tito Danilo, but they all told Jay to drop it.

That Grace and Jay are going to find Tito Danilo suggests that even though they dismissed Tito Maning's claims as lies the previous night, they worry that there might be some truth to them. Jay and Grace have now started to build a relationship built on sharing and honesty, but the family shutting down the conversation shows that secrets remain and the rest of the family fears the impact of having those secrets exposed. Jay initially going the wrong direction is a bit of comedy that again shows his lack of knowledge of the Philippines.



As the taxi maneuvers through the city, the streets begin to get crowded with people on their way to work, and it starts to rain lightly. Jay can feel his phone buzzing now that he has a signal again, but he ignores it. Eventually, Grace and Jay arrive at a huge cathedral. Jay overpays the taxi driver, according to Grace; he gave roughly 60 U.S. dollars. Jay muses that his University of Michigan hoodie probably cost the same amount. The inside of the church is new-looking, with fresh paint and polished pews. Jay says it's beautiful, and Grace says the poor paid for it, which reminds Jay of Jun. Grace checks the rectory while Jay checks his texts. They're mostly from Mia. He's still annoyed at her for not responding earlier.

This trip to Legazpi is somewhat similar to Jay's trip to the slums with Mia. People were on their way to work when Jay arrived at the slums, but this time, Jay doesn't even notice his surroundings and doesn't even bother to check his phone. He was on a similarly single-minded mission in the slums, but back then, he thought that learning the truth about Jun would be a good and meaningful thing, which is why he told Brian Santos that he was willing to die for the truth. Now, he knows that learning the truth might reveal things that he wished he didn't know. Ignoring Mia might be taken as an indication of his partial loss of faith in the idea that all secrets should be exposed. Meanwhile, Jay continues to make tourist-like mistakes such as overpaying the taxi, while Grace's comment about the poor paying for the church indicates that she shares a lot of Jun's political beliefs, including his skepticism about the Church.



While Grace is still looking around, Tito Danilo appears suddenly. Jay tells him that he's here to talk about Jun. When Grace returns, the three of them sit in the pews. Jay says that according to Tito Maning, the police killed Jun for selling drugs, but Jay knows that Jun was killed for his Instagram. They fill Tito Danilo in on everything, beginning with Grace's anonymous Instagram messages to Jay and ending with their journey today (leaving Reyna out). Much of this seems like new information to Tito Danilo. Looking sad, Tito Danilo says that what happened was a tragedy and there's nothing else to say. Jay says that there's still the truth, and Grace says that Tito Danilo needs to come home and tell everyone that Tito Maning is lying.

Tito Danilo is quiet, and Jay worries that his uncle won't be brave enough to stand up to Tito Maning. Finally, Tito Danilo says that what's happening in the Philippines is a shame, and it's a shame that the Church hasn't spoken up. He tells Grace and Jay that Tito Maning called him a few months before Jun died; apparently, he'd heard from his colleagues that Jun was in Legazpi. Tito Maning wanted Tito Danilo to find and save Jun. Tito Maning had already bribed his colleagues to remove Jun's name from the list, but Jun was back on it, and Tito Maning now wanted Tito Danilo to save Jun from drugs. Grace and Jay are confused: they're sure that Jun didn't use or sell drugs.

Tito Danilo continues. He spent weeks looking for Jun and couldn't find him. One day, Jun came to the church looking different: he was skinny and rocked back and forth. Jun wanted to talk to Tito Danilo, and Tito Danilo told him to either go back home or stay here with him. But Jun was angry, saying that no one ever listened; people only told others what to do. Tito Danilo tells a disbelieving Grace and Jay that Jun used and sold drugs; Jun said so himself. Jun may have gotten onto the watchlist because of the Instagram account, but he ran away from Reyna because he'd started using and didn't want to ruin her.

Jay poses his questions to Danilo as if he is only there to get confirmation that Tito Maning is lying. But the fact Jay has to check with Danilo at all means he isn't quite so certain about what the truth is. Danilo's comment that what happened is a tragedy is a sort of "truth" in that it acknowledges the awful waste and sadness that came from Jun's death. By using such a vague term and avoiding the specifics of what happened, Danilo attempts to avoid assigning both responsibility and blame. Jay refuses such a stance, insisting on the value of the actual factual truth of what happened.



Jay still hopes that the truth about Jun is simple and that the only obstacle to telling that truth will be Tito Danilo's bravery or lack thereof. But, apparently, the truth is much more complicated than Jay and Grace thought. The scrawled note in Tagalog now makes sense: Tito Maning wanted someone to track Jun down to protect him, which is the opposite of what Jay initially assumed. Tito Danilo's comment about the failure of the Church in addressing the drug war also broadens the idea of responsibility and guilt to include the ways that one's connection to a larger institution can make one complicit in that institution's actions, and Danilo acknowledges his guilt relative to the Church's silence regarding the drug war.



Tito Danilo makes clear that Jun sold drugs. The truth Jay was searching for—that Jun was an uncomplicatedly good person—has now been made murkier. Jun's angry comment that no one every listened seems like a condemnation of Jay (who failed to write back), Tito Maning (who only ever ordered Jun around), and everyone else in the world who focused on themselves rather than others. Jun's despair also offers an explanation for why he might have turned to drugs. Meanwhile, that he left Reyna before he could spend their money on drugs suggests that he was still trying to protect others, even as he had ceased to protect himself.



Jay says nothing. He thought he knew Jun's story, but now he sees that stories can shift. Tito Danilo continues, saying that Jun later began selling drugs. *Shabu* suppresses hunger, he explains, so many poor people begin using for this reason. Maybe Jun began selling to feed his addiction. Tito Danilo tells Jay and Grace that he's sorry to tell them this, but he has nothing to gain from lying. At the time, Tito Danilo told Jun that he could stay at the church with him. Jun refused but promised to come back. He was dead days later. Jay refuses to believe Tito Danilo at first, but he sees how sad his uncle is and has to acknowledge that Tito Danilo is telling the truth. Jay says that maybe Jun was using the money from selling drugs to help others, but he trails off.

Grace asks who killed Jun, and Tito Danilo says that it doesn't matter, because Jun's murderer was probably someone trying to "feed his family." Apparently, the killer was a vigilante who would have been paid for the kill. Jay is angry that everyone is okay with this system, but Tito Danilo says that this isn't the United States and asks if Jay would have cared about the drug war if it weren't for Jun. Jay asks why the Church isn't doing anything, and Tito Danilo says the Church doesn't interfere in politics. Jay feels that all adults have let him down: Tito Danilo doesn't think the Church should be involved, Tita Chato gave up, Tito Maning is complicit, and Jay's dad doesn't care.

Tito Danilo goes to call the family and tell them that Jay and Grace are here, and that he'll drive them back after breakfast. Jay and Grace sit and cry together. They're losing Jun in a whole new way now. Jay says he can't believe the story, and Grace says that none of it is right. Jay watches a bird fly to a nest in the ceiling, and it reminds him of when the puppy died years ago and Jay's mom told him to listen to the birds. At the time, she claimed that death creates space for life, but no life has emerged from Jun's death.

Tito Danilo is describing a cycle of addiction: people start using shabu to stave off hunger, then they get addicted and end up selling shabu so they can keep using. Poverty is at the root of this cycle, so while Jun would have been responsible for his choice to sell drugs, there are other factors at play, too. In this way, the novel makes clear that using drugs and selling drugs are themselves not reasons to brand someone as being "bad"—which of course is exactly what Tito Maning would do. At the same time, Jay finds that he can no longer continue to tell the story of Jun as being some kind of perfect saint either.



Initially, Jay thought he would use a series of clues to piece together who was responsible for Jun's death, and that in doing so he would reveal Jun to be a hero fighting against the evil government of the Philippines. The truth turns out to be much more complicated. Even the vigilante who pulled the trigger was motivated by external forces, namely poverty and the government's anti-drug policies. And, regarding those drug policies, many people in the Philippines support them, even if many others don't. Jay can't point the finger at anyone, at least not decisively. Even Jun himself isn't entirely innocent, as Grace initially claimed he was in the anonymous DM. In a way, no one can be clearly blamed for being responsible, while at the same time everyone avoids taking any responsibility. Jay's indictment of all the adults seems like the accusations of an angry teenager, and also accurate.



Grace and Jay have lost the story of Jun that they were holding onto. For them, Jun had become the idealistic antidote to various failures and complicities of the adults in their lives (and running the Philippines). But the real story robs them of that version of Jun, and Jay is forced to reckon with the fact that he can't find or make a meaning out of Jun's death. He had thought that revealing the truth of Jun's death would unleash a flood that would lead to new life, but now he finds that it is just what it is—death.



HEADFIRST ACROSS THE MUDDY GRASS

Jay remembers the last time he was staying at his grandparents' house. He and Jun were constantly playing soccer in a field near the local church. At first, they played with Chris and Em, but Chris and Em played competitively, while Jay and Jun didn't really know what they were doing, so Jay's siblings lost interest. Jay and Jun started playing one-on-one, and a crowd of other kids of all ages soon gathered around. Jun invited them to join, which showed the kind of person he was—that's how Jay wants to remember him now. Everyone had fun playing a haphazard game. It began to rain, and Jun and Jay dove for the ball. They ended up covered in mud, and Lola had to wash them outside in the rain.

This memory is significant, because Jay thinks about it after he's learned the truth about Jun. Even though Jun wasn't exactly the saintly figure Jay thought he was, the memory once again shows that Jun offered others a rare kindness and acceptance that included everyone. Jay also seems to want to remember simpler times with Jun, before the two of them grew up and things got complicated.



TO RESURRECT

While driving back to his grandparents' house with Tito Danilo and Grace, Jay realizes he's grieving Jun in a new way now that he knows the truth. Jun was not who Jay thought he was, and maybe Jay will never understand the real Jun. Jay found out at least some of the truth, but he doesn't know if it was worth it. He'd hoped the truth would "resurrect," but instead it ended up being a destructive force.

Earlier in the novel, Jay believed that the truth was a fundamentally good thing. He developed a more nuanced perspective as the novel progressed. Now he takes the opposite position by suggesting that the truth about Jun was entirely destructive—and not in a positive way, as Jay imagined a "flood" of truth would be. It's interesting that Jay once believed the truth would "resurrect." Jay didn't want to mourn Jun and accept his death; rather he hoped that in finding the truth he could "resurrect" Jun— if Jun had been killed because of his Instagram account, he would have lived on as a martyr and his death would be meaningful. Jay claims to be grieving Jun in a new way, but really, he never previously grieved Jun at all. Now that he knows the more complicated truth, or at least a good chunk of it, he's forced to truly mourn his cousin.



HOW TO LIVE WITHOUT HIM

The family is gathered in front of the house when Jay and Grace return. Tito Maning looks smug, probably because he's aware of what Tito Danilo told them. Jay and Grace enter the house and walk to their rooms, but they stop in the hallway. Grace says that she keeps thinking about the last time she saw Jun. She wonders if she missed crucial signs. Maybe she could have done something to help him. Jay thinks about the marijuana Tito Maning found years ago—maybe something was going on with Jun even then.

It's interesting that Tito Maning acts "smug" when Grace and Jay return. If anything, this makes him seem more villainous and crueler than Danilo's story of events would suggest. Grace's confession to Jun implies that she feels guilty about Jun's addiction, since she was around him while he was an addict and didn't notice. And if Jay had written Jun back, he might have picked up on some early warning signs, too. But, also, perhaps they couldn't have helped Jun—after all, Jun outright refused Tito Danilo's help. To some degree, they have to grant Jun the responsibility for his own actions.



Jay says that families are good at hiding things from each other. Grace agrees, then asks how Jay is doing. Jay says that he's confused, and asks whether Grace regrets messaging him on Instagram. If Jay had never come, they would never have known that Jun sold drugs. Jay feels that Jun's memory is "tainted" now, but Grace disagrees. She wonders if she could've helped Jun, but she knows Jun was human, and he was struggling. Even though he dealt drugs, his life meant something, and parts of him were still good.

Jay feels guilty, because he's spent a long time believing the opposite of what Grace is saying. According to Grace, Jun believed that the government wasn't trying to solve the drug problem and was using the poor as scapegoats. Jun believed that addicts needed to be rehabilitated, since addiction is genetic. He also thought drug pushers should be employed, since they're just trying to make a living. And corrupt politicians who allow drugs to enter the country should be removed from office. Grace is summing up what Jun believed, but Jay feels that the words are hers, too—part of Jun lives in Grace.

Jay says he wants to do something to help, but Grace says that even though Jay is from the Philippines, he only just discovered these problems and can't solve them. Jay looks down, ashamed. Grace says that she'll continue to post on "GISING NA PH!" She wants Jun's life to have been for something, and people need to recognize the humanity of those the government murders. Jay almost thinks it's Jun saying these things at first, but when he looks up, it's still Grace.

The failure of Jay's family—both American and Filipino—to openly communicate has been evident throughout the novel. Once again, Jay wonders whether the truth about Jun ended up being worth learning, echoing his mom's argument that truth wasn't always worth telling if it caused pain. But Grace takes a more mature approach and argues that even if Jun wasn't entirely "good," he was human—and for that reason alone his life meant something. Jay has been trying to make Jun's death mean something; but Grace here asserts that it was his life that meant something.



Throughout the novel, Jay has been desperate to prove that Jun wasn't an addict or drug dealer—clearly, he has some preconceived notions about individuals involved with drugs. Grace is able to see past Jun's addiction, while Jay had been fixated on it. Jun's beliefs were that drugs are a systemic problem, and that the blame should be placed on the system and those in the position to control and affect the system—not on those most affected by the system. Jay's sense that a part of Jun lives on in Grace, not because they are siblings but because Grace shares Jun's ideals, offers another way to think about life, death, and meaning—that one's life and meaning can live on through those you've impacted and influenced.



When Grace tells Jay that he can't solve the Philippines' problems, she's not trying to be cruel, the way Tito Maning was. She acknowledges that Jay is from the Philippines, but she's right that he can't swoop in and solve issues he just discovered—it would be arrogant, and dismissive of the people who have long lived in the Philippines, to think that he could. And Grace isn't claiming that she can singlehandedly solve those (largely systemic) problems, either—she's just doing what she thinks is right. Notably, Grace wants to continue "GISING NA PH!" so that Jun's life—not his death—will have meant something.



Jay says that he misses Jun, and Grace says that she does, too. They both cry and hug each other. Jay knows that he'll feel this grief forever, but at least he won't have to feel it alone. They'll figure out how to live without Jun while remembering him. Jay hears the family coming into the house. Grace knows that it's too late for a funeral, but she wonders if she should ask the family if they can hold an impromptu memorial for Jun. Jay says that she should.

Grace and Jay once again grieve for Jun together—but, this time, they're grieving the real Jun, rather than their image of who Jun was. Jay has felt alone throughout the novel, but now he's able to connect with Grace and speak openly with her. Jay was always focused on finding the truth about Jun, so he never thought about what would come after. Now, he knows that he'll always be grieving Jun. Notably, he's no longer looking for a way to "resurrect" his cousin's memory, and instead, Jay wants to honor Jun even as he moves on and begins to heal. The impromptu memorial seems like a perfect way to do that, since even though Jay no longer thinks that Jun's death was "meaningful," it's still worth mourning him so the family can heal together (instead of suffering alone).



ALL THE DARKNESS IN THE WORLD

The family gathers in the backyard at dusk. Tito Maning was too ashamed of Jun's manner of death to invite the neighbors, but he didn't stop them from having the memorial. Everyone stands around a picture of Jun and a candle. Tito Danilo has a Bible, and Jay has a **letter**. Tito Danilo steps forward and says that he's going to speak in English so that everyone present can commune with God. He leads the group in a few prayers and then reads from the Bible. The passage says that it's considered a tragedy to lose someone, but the dead are at peace, because God tried them in life and found them worthy.

It's not entirely surprising that Tito Maning allowed his family to have a memorial, even though he previously forbade everyone from bringing Jun up. Tito Maning might be cruel, but he did care about Jun. Tito Danilo's choice to use English seems to be for Jay's benefit, but Tito Danilo doesn't seem to resent speaking English, and Jay doesn't get embarrassed by it—it's an act of inclusion rather than exclusion. Tito Danilo's Bible passage is interesting, because it doesn't suggest that death has inherent meaning. Instead, it suggests that the dead are at peace because their lives had meaning, which God took note of. This isn't that different from Grace's reasoning for wanting to continue the "GISING NA PH!" account.



Jay doesn't know if he believes what Tito Danilo is saying, because he still doesn't understand life and death. He thinks that as a person gets older, they understand less and less. The idea that Jun had to suffer as a test is hard for Jay to stomach, and Jay doesn't even know if Jun would have passed that test. But if Jun didn't, who could? Tito Danilo continues, saying that Jun's death was tragic, but the good he did in life remains. He asks each person to light their candle from Jun's candle to demonstrate how Jun's love and goodness multiplied. They can also speak if they want.

Jay is beginning to realize that he can never know every truth—growing up means accepting that the truth is complicated and sometimes impossible to obtain. Religious truth is no different. Danilo again affirms the meaning of life, and the way that a person's life can multiply through the lives of those that person touched. Danilo's invitation for everyone to speak if they want is, in fact, an invitation to end the silence that has engulfed the family since Jun's death, and, before that, since Jay's dad moved to the United States..



Tita Chato lights her candle first and speaks in what sounds to Jay like either Tagalog or Bikol. Jay wants to know what she's saying but understands that it would be hard to mourn in a different language. Tita Chato starts crying and has to stop speaking. Grace and Angel speak in Tagalog and cry as well.

Once again, Jay doesn't get panicked by his inability to speak Tagalog or Bikol, and he understands that not everyone can include him by speaking English the way Tito Danilo did. Again, it's worth noting that this is the first time the family has grieved together since Jun died. Even though Tita Chato probably mourned Jun with Tita Ines, and Grace and Angel might have discussed Jun's death, that's not quite the same as mourning Jun openly without any secrecy.



Tito Danilo goes next and speaks in English, saying that Jun always challenged his faith, even as a child. Jun wanted to know why Tito Danilo believed the things he did, and he asked questions out of a genuine desire to understand. This helped Tito Danilo explore his own faith more fully, and that faith grew stronger because of Jun, even if Jun never became a believer himself. Lola and Lolo go next, and Lola speaks in Bikol.

It seems that Jun asked questions of everyone, including Tito Danilo. Like Jay, Jun was also seeking the truth, and Jay's truth-seeking lead to positive results: by challenging his uncle's beliefs, he strengthened his uncle's belief. This is the sort of truth-seeking that Jay could believe in. Again, note how Jay isn't hurt or panicked by his inability to speak Bikol when Lola begins speaking, which demonstrates Jay's newfound confidence in his cultural identity.



Jay goes next. He lights the candle, unfolds the **letter** he was holding, and reads it. It's a letter from Jay to Jun, which Jay just wrote. In it, Jay reminds Jun of when the puppy died. The genuine comfort that Jun offers to Jay helped Jay to heal. Jay doesn't want to believe that there was another side to Jun, but he's going to try not to judge his cousin. No one is "just one thing," Jay realizes. Everyone can heal and hurt, and they just have to try to do more good than bad. He thinks that ultimately, Jun did more good. Jay apologizes for the late reply to Jun, and he tells Jun that he loves and misses him. Jay will try to treat others the way Jun treated him after the puppy died.

It's fitting that Jay uses a letter to speak to and about Jun. Jay once again remembers the puppy's death, but this time, he doesn't imply that the puppy's death meant anything. Instead, Jay tells Jun that Jun's kindness in life meant something, since Jun comforted Jay after the puppy died. Earlier in the novel, Jay had a black-and-white worldview: he wanted to find whoever was responsible for Jun's death, and he believed that Jun was entirely good and innocent. Now, he knows this isn't the case, and his letter suggests that he's trying to reconcile the good and bad parts of Jun the same way he reconciled the good and bad parts of the Philippines. By noting that no one is "just one thing," Jay is saying that people can be both bad and good simultaneously. In this letter, Jay once again acknowledges his guilt for not writing Jun back earlier, but by apologizing directly to Jun in letter form, he's also letting go of that guilt. Finally, his promise that he'll treat others as Jun treated him hints that while Jun's death didn't have the "meaning" that Jay thought it would, Jay will work to multiply the meaning of Jun's life through how he lives his own life.



When Jay finishes speaking, he notices that Tito Maning is standing near the back door of the house. Jay remembers that Tito Maning tried to get Tito Danilo to help Jun, which confirms that no one is “one thing.” Jay nods at his uncle, and he thinks Tito Maning nods back. Tita Ami goes next, surprising everyone, since she’s defying Tito Maning by participating. She lets her candle drop to the ground and speaks for a long time in Tagalog, crying occasionally. Tito Maning approaches and wraps his arm around her. Everyone stands silently, and Jay can feel their collective sadness “subside.” He looks up and sees that the sky is dark but full of stars.

Jay is immediately given the opportunity to put his new, more nuanced worldview into practice. He’s forced to acknowledge that while Tito Maning might be cruel, he also loved Jun, which confirms that no one is just good or just bad. Tita Ami’s participation in the memorial service is surprising, since prior to this, she’s only defied Tito Maning in small ways. Tito Maning’s support is even more surprising, and it further proves that he’s not entirely bad, despite all of his cruelties and blind belief in power and obedience. Jay’s sense that the collective sadness subsides once more refers to the idea of a “flood,” and the easing of pain that comes from sharing it openly. Earlier, Jay couldn’t make himself look up at the stars because he was worried—in his despair—that the sky would be entirely dark. Now, he sees that the sky is dark, but there are stars, too, which means that good things are still possible. Jun’s death didn’t generate those good things, but life does go on—maybe this is what Jay’s mom was trying to say all along. Even if the truth about Jun was painful, it also allows the family to move on and heal.



A SEED

On Jay’s last day at his grandparents’ house, he feels lighter than he has since he first learned about Jun’s death. Jay talks to his parents on the phone but doesn’t tell them about anything except the memorial. Tito Maning is quiet all day. Jay hopes that Jun’s memorial might make his uncle think more critically about the policies he’s enforcing.

It’s strange that Jay still doesn’t tell his parents the truth about his time in the Philippines and about Jun’s death, but then again, it would be a long story to tell over the phone. They almost certainly know that something has changed substantially, though, since Jay does tell them about the memorial. Jay’s more nuanced understanding of human nature—which he gained by learning the truth about Jun—gives him hope that his uncle will eventually change. Jay doesn’t condemn Tito Maning, even if the two of them will never be close.



Tito Danilo brings Jay, Grace, Angel, and Tita Chato on an ATV ride to Mount Mayon. He tells an origin story about the mountain: a woman was saved from drowning by a man and wanted to marry him, but another man wanted her, too, and fought her rescuer. In the ensuing fight, both the woman and her rescuer died, and the mountain grew from their grave. Jay gets more texts from Mia, and this time he responds and agrees to meet tomorrow night. He’s no longer resentful that she didn’t respond to him.

Tito Danilo’s story is interesting, because on the surface, the moral of the story seems to be that death generates new life, which is the same thing that Jay’s mom told him. After all, the mountain grows from the grave of the woman and her rescuer. But once can also read the story as simply saying that life continued after their deaths; they died, the world continued to grow and change and be filled with life. This is a subtle distinction, and one Jay is only beginning to understand. When Jay thought he was searching for a simple answer to Jun’s death, he was resentful for Mia not doing everything she could to help him find it. Now that he knows things are more complicated, he cares less about small resentments or worries, which is why he texts Mia back.



EVERY DETAIL OF THIS FINITE MOMENT

As he is leaving his grandparents' house, Jay says goodbye to Lolo, Lola, and Tito Danilo, telling them he loves them. They say they'll see him next time, which Jay knows could be years from now or even never. He hugs them and tries to remember this moment, since there are no guarantees in life.

Openly acknowledging Jun's death has clearly made Jay ponder his own life and mortality and the lives and mortality of others. He seeks now to find meaning in life—to remember and focus on moments from life.



OUR SEPARATE WAYS

Back at Tita Chato's, Jay hangs out by the community pool. Mia runs into him there and says that she's glad he's back. Jay tells her everything that happened at his grandparents' house, and Mia takes his hand. She tells him that Brian Santos messaged her to say that she should publish an article about Jay's experience learning about Jun. Because Jay is American, he has a unique perspective on the drug war that could benefit readers. Mia told Brian Santos that she'd only write the piece with Jay's approval. They could use pseudonyms, and Reyna already agreed.

Jay shares the whole truth about Jun with Mia, and doesn't try to hide that truth, even though it doesn't necessarily flatter Jun. Earlier, Jay thought that Brian Santos was implying that the truth about Jun's death would be significant in some way. Now, it seems like Santos is saying that Jay's experience learning about Jun's death is significant. Meanwhile, throughout the novel, Jay has been told that his American heritage prevents him from understanding the drug war. Santos is now saying that Jay's American heritage gives him a different perspective on the drug war that might benefit readers—in other words, Jay's identity is a boon rather than a hindrance. Moreover, Jay's story would be different from an American journalist telling a story about the drug war, because Jay is Filipino as well as American.



Jay thinks that it's Jun's story, not his, but Mia disagrees: Jay owns his part in things. Jay thinks about "GISING NA PH!" and Tito Danilo's eulogy, in which he said that Jun's love could multiply. Maybe the article can do that. Or maybe people will be dismissive after they learn that Jun sold drugs—they might not see Jun as a "full human." Jay asks if he and Grace can cowrite the article, and Mia says yes. He agrees to try, even if they don't end up publishing it. He asks Mia why she's holding his hand, and she says they're friends. Jay says that there's more going on, even if Mia has a boyfriend. Mia says only that Jay lives far away.

When Jay is hesitant at first to write the article, Mia argues that he must take responsibility for his own part in this story. That is a key point: Jay had to learn both to grant Jun responsibility for his actions, and take responsibility for his own. In his letter to Jun, Jay promised that he'd honor Jun's memory. Now, he's being given an opportunity to do so by sharing his own experience learning the truth about Jun. Jay's concern that people will dismiss the story when they learn that Jun was selling drugs is fair—after all, Jay was immediately horrified when he learned that information. But telling the story is also a way to push past that reaction, to assert Jun's humanity despite his relationship to drugs. Jay seems to value open communication much more now than he did before, since he bluntly asks Mia why she's holding his hand. She seems to cop to their romantic connection, but she apparently doesn't want to pursue a relationship, since Jay lives in the U.S. That makes her flirtation a little questionable. Then again, Jay has already learned that no one is just good or just bad—even Mia.



The two of them talk about their lives. Jay feels almost guilty that Jun will never experience this kind of thing again with Reyna. But then Jay imagines writing to Jun about Mia and imagines Jun's encouragement, and he feels less sad for now. When it's time for Jay to go, he hugs Mia, and the two of them part ways.

Jay has a new guilt now: he feels bad for experiencing romantic attraction when Jun no longer can. But Jay's memory of Jun—of his relationship to Jun in life—helps alleviate his guilt. Earlier in the novel, Jay's thoughts of Jun always made him feel guilty, as he felt he was failing his idealized image of who Jun was. Now his memory of Jun, the real Jun, is a comfort rather than a torment or "ghost."



PATRON SAINTS OF NOTHING

On the plane ride home, Jay listens to a playlist of Filipino music that Mia made him and reads his favorite **letter** from Jun. In it, Jun says that it's All Saints Day in the Philippines. On this day, everyone gathers in the cemetery to remember and celebrate the dead, which might seem strange to an American, because cemeteries are creepy on American TV. But in the Philippines, the day is celebratory, which Jun thinks is a healthy thing.

This plane ride is very different from Jay's plane ride to the Philippines. Jay is now more comfortable in his Filipino American identity and is able to listen to Filipino music without feeling clueless or out of place. Further, on the plane ride to the Philippines, Jay couldn't read a letter from Jun without crying, and he felt like Jun's "ghost" was following him. Now, he takes comfort in Jun's letters. Throughout the novel, Jun's letters have represented the person he was. Jay now knows that Jun was more complicated than Jay initially believed, but that only means that the letters represent all of Jun, not just the good parts of Jun. This letter is particularly fitting, as Jun tells Jay that death isn't always a sad affair in the Philippines. All Saint's Day is a day to celebrate and honor the dead—which is now what Jay does for Jun rather than trying to "solve" Jun's death.



Jun's letter continues: The day is also meant to celebrate the saints. There are saints for almost everything, even ice skates. Jun asked Tito Danilo why, and Tito Danilo didn't know. Jun thinks it's because people want to control their lives and imagine that specific saints can help. Maybe just the act of prayer helps them. Jun asks what Jay would want to be the patron saint of. Jun doesn't know his own answer—that makes him the saint of nothing. Jay finishes reading and thinks about both Jun and himself, two "patron saints of nothing."

This is an example of what Tito Danilo was talking about at Jun's funeral: Jun always asked astute questions about religion. Tito Danilo was right that his answers didn't convert Jun into a believer; in this letter, Jun demonstrates disbelief in the less-important saints. But Jun still supports people praying to those saints, because the act of prayer might be what someone needs to feel better. This is a pretty mature outlook, and it demonstrates that Jun wasn't only interested in the "truth" about God and religion, but rather in understanding why people turned to religion and how it helped them. This fits in with Jun's overall interest in the lives of others. Jay has felt adrift throughout this novel, but in this passage, he claims his own in-between identity by suggesting that he and Jun are both "patron saints of nothing." In other words, neither boy fit into a clear-cut, specific category (like the highly specialized saints do). Jun never fit in at home and chafed against Tito Maning's authority, and Jay has struggled with his cultural identity as a Filipino American. Now, Jay proudly claims the title of "patron saint of nothing" for himself and for Jun.



Jay's dad picks Jay up from the airport, shaking Jay's hand, which Jay finds strange. As they drive home, Jay tries to imagine his dad donating to Tita Chato's organization. Jay feels that he has almost too much to say. Jay's dad doesn't seem mad that Jay broke his promise not to bring Jun up, but he doesn't mention it at all. Jay imagines going to school tomorrow with people who don't know about the drug war, discussing video games with Seth, graduating, starting college. It doesn't seem like his life.

Jay tells his dad that he's been thinking about college. He's nervous to continue, but then he remembers everything he's gone through. He tells his dad that he's going to defer his enrollment, since he doesn't know why he's going to school yet. He wants to take a gap year and return to the Philippines to learn the country's history and languages. Jay's dad responds neutrally, which encourages Jay. Jay's dad says that they moved to the U.S. for a better life and that Jay's siblings didn't go back, but Jay says that he's not like his siblings. Jay's dad assumes there's a girl involved, and Jay mentions Mia but says that she's not the only reason.

Jay's dad laughs and says that they can speak to Jay's mom about the gap year. He asks what happened in the Philippines—Jay seems older now. Jay tells him everything, and though his dad is shocked by how much Jay is saying, he asks genuine questions and listens to Jay's answers without judging them. Jay finds it strange to be so open with his dad, but he feels he needs to be transparent to avoid old patterns. No one understood Jun's life, so Jay wants his family to understand him. He thinks that this process of opening up is "salvation through honesty."

When Jay and his dad get back home, they pause in the foyer. Usually, they would disperse and return to separate parts of the house. Now, Jay's dad offers to make coffee and asks Jay to meet him at the front of the house; he's going to take the day off work. Jay sits on the porch and watches his neighbors begin their day. Jay knows that Jun is gone, but there are still things that Jay can change. The world is flawed, Jay thinks, but it's important to really listen to people and end harmful silences. Jay's dad brings coffee, and the two of them keep talking.

In this passage, it seems like Jay and his dad are going to remain as distant from each other as ever, even though Jay has gone on a great personal journey. The fact that Jay's dad shakes his hand rather than hugs him demonstrates this distance, as does Jay's inability to sum everything up. Jay's vision of what his life might be like at home seems pretty bleak: he'll maintain surface-level relationships and begin college without really knowing what he wants to study. That this life he is imagining doesn't seem like his life—when it was his life just a short while ago—shows how much Jay has changed.



Jay finally speaks openly with his father, and his experiences in the Philippines are what give him the strength to do so. His plans for his gap year are about finding purpose and connection to his heritage and himself, not just about going with the flow or following what he assumes are the expectations for him. That his dad assumes the real reason is a girl is a little bit humorous, as the reason his dad moved the U.S. was also, at least in part, because of a girl.



Jay finally opens up fully to his father; in response to his father recognizing the changes in him and treating him like an adult. Jay's openness is also partly motivated by Jun's strained relationship with Tito Maning; Jay has seen where that leads, and seeks to create a different relationship for himself and his dad. Jay no longer thinks the truth is a purely good thing, but he does seem to have adopted Mia's earlier position; she suggested that open communication was the key to good relationships, and Jay is putting that advice into practice now.



It seems like Jay's attempt to break old, harmful patterns was successful, since he and his dad end up continuing the conversation they began in the car. Earlier in the novel, Jay's dad took off work after learning about Jun but wouldn't communicate with Jay about it. This time, Jay's dad takes off work explicitly to communicate with Jay. In this final scene of the novel, Jay implies that truth is valuable when it enables you to begin an open dialogue with someone. Truth isn't always "good," but communicating openly allows Jay and his dad to begin to repair their strained relationship, which was previously full of silences and secrets. Jay can't change everything about "the world," but he can take responsibility for his own life, for his own actions, and for his relationships with others.





HOW TO CITE

To cite this LitChart:

MLA

Blackwood, Nicole. "Patron Saints of Nothing." *LitCharts*. LitCharts LLC, 28 Jan 2021. Web. 28 Jan 2021.

CHICAGO MANUAL

Blackwood, Nicole. "Patron Saints of Nothing." LitCharts LLC, January 28, 2021. Retrieved January 28, 2021. <https://www.litcharts.com/lit/patron-saints-of-nothing>.

To cite any of the quotes from *Patron Saints of Nothing* covered in the Quotes section of this LitChart:

MLA

Ribay, Randy. *Patron Saints of Nothing*. Penguin Books. 2020.

CHICAGO MANUAL

Ribay, Randy. *Patron Saints of Nothing*. New York: Penguin Books. 2020.