

That Was Then, This Is Now



INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF S. E. HINTON

Susan Eloise Hinton was born in Tulsa, Oklahoma. Hinton wrote her first novel, [The Outsiders](#), while she was still in high school, and it was published in 1967, during her freshman year of college at the University of Oklahoma. Her publishers suggested she write under her initials, noting that her feminine first name might dissuade male readers from reading her books. [The Outsiders](#) garnered widespread critical and commercial success due to its gritty and realistic treatment of issues that teenagers faced while coming of age, such as gang violence, drug use, and poverty. Four years later, she published her second novel, *That Was Then, This Is Now*, which garnered even more critical success. Hinton then published *Rumble Fish* in 1975, *Tex* in 1979, and *Taming the Star Runner* in 1988—all of which, like her first two novels, take place in Oklahoma and focus on young adults. Hinton also published two children's books in 1995—*Big David*, *Little David* and *The Puppy Sister*. Later in her career, she shifted to writing adult fiction with *Hawkes Harbor* in 2004 and a collection of short stories in 2007. Hinton's first four young adult novels have all been adapted into films. She received the inaugural Margaret A. Edwards award in 1988, which recognizes an author whose body of work speaks to young adults. Hinton is credited by many as having introduced the Young Adult genre, and she currently lives in Oklahoma with her husband.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

That Was Then, This Is Now takes place in the late 1960s in Tulsa, Oklahoma. Several historical events shaped the economic and political landscape of the city. First, the Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibited discrimination based on race, color, religion, gender, or national origin. Despite this law, however, the city remained deeply segregated, both in terms of race and class. Additionally, violence permeated the city, with gangs like the Greasers and the Socs frequently fighting in the streets of Tulsa. Although Bryon and Mark do not belong to either of these gangs in the book, they reference the fact that these gangs inspired an increase in street fighting more generally. At the same time, the United States entrenched in the Vietnam War, a conflict between the Soviet Union-backed North Vietnamese government and the American-backed South Vietnamese government in the 1960s. America escalated its involvement in the conflict in 1964, and 2.2 million American men were subsequently drafted into the war. In the book, Charlie receives his draft notice for Vietnam, though he does not ultimately go to war due to his prior police record.

Opposition to the war and this compulsory conscription grew across America, particularly among hippies. Many members of this counterculture movement held protests to voice their opposition to the war. Many hippies also experimented with drugs to rebel against the establishment. Unfortunately, such experimentation sometimes permanently damaged drug users, as Hinton illustrates in the novel through M&M's bad drug trip that permanently warps his brain.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Hinton wrote her young adult novels in part because at the time she was writing, there were so few examples of fiction that spoke to the grittier young adult themes she tackles, such as violence, betrayal, revenge, and responsibility. Her other books—[The Outsiders](#), *Rumble Fish*, *Tex*, and *Taming the Star Runner* all deal with similar settings and themes as *That Was Then, This Is Now*. Other early examples of young adult and coming of age fiction include John Knowles's [A Separate Peace](#), J.D. Salinger's *Catcher in the Rye*, and the anonymously published *Go Ask Alice*. Since Hinton's work, the young adult genre has exploded: other notable works that deal with the darker side of coming of age include Stephen Chbosky's [The Perks of Being a Wallflower](#), Laurie Anderson's [Speak](#), and the novels of Richard Peck.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** That Was Then, This Is Now
- **When Written:** 1970
- **Where Written:** Norman, Oklahoma
- **When Published:** 1971
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary
- **Genre:** Young Adult Novel
- **Setting:** 1960s Tulsa, Oklahoma
- **Climax:** Bryon discovers Mark is selling drugs and calls the cops.
- **Antagonist:** Gang violence, drugs
- **Point of View:** First Person (Bryon)

EXTRA CREDIT

Recurring Characters. Many of Hinton's same characters appear across her novels. For instance, Ponyboy Curtis, who is a minor character in *That Was Then, This Is Now*, is the protagonist of her debut novel, [The Outsiders](#). Curly, Tim, and Angela Shepard also appear in [The Outsiders](#). Similarly, Mark Jennings and Cathy Carlson, two of the main characters in this book, appear briefly in her later novel, *Tex*.

Writer's Block. After publishing her first novel, *The Outsiders*, Hinton experienced a years-long period of writer's block. She has stated that she wrote two pages of *That Was Then, This Is Now* a day in order to force herself out of that writer's block.



PLOT SUMMARY

In Tulsa, Oklahoma, in the late 1960s, 16-year-old Bryon Douglas lives with his mother and his foster brother and best friend, Mark Jennings. Mark's parents killed each other in a drunken fight when he was younger, and he's lived with Bryon and Bryon's mother ever since. The boys are extremely close and enjoy breaking rules together: Mark is a notorious thief who is on probation for hotwiring cars, while Bryon is a perpetual liar who hustles people at pool.

One night, Bryon and Mark sneak into Charlie's bar despite being underage. They plan to make some money playing pool, but there is no one to hustle. Charlie, the bartender and owner, warns them that they could get in trouble for hustling. He also says that they have run up a \$3 tab, and that if they don't pay by the next day, he's going to beat them up.

After Bryon and Mark leave, they run into their 13-year-old friend M&M. Bryon describes M&M as serious, intelligent, very trusting, and a little strange. But when they part ways, Bryon and Mark observe three guys—including their classmate, Curly Shepard—trailing M&M. Their classmates start to mug M&M, but Mark and Bryon attack the three boys, warding them off. Mark is also able to pickpocket the \$3 they owe Charlie from the attackers.

The next day, Bryon and Mark visit Bryon's mother in the hospital where she's recovering following an operation. She asks the boys to go visit a kid across the hall who hasn't had any visitors. Bryon first goes down to get a burger and meets Cathy, M&M's older sister who is working in the snack bar. She has just returned home from private school, and Bryon is immediately smitten with her. Bryon then returns upstairs and visits the kid across the hall, whose name is Mike. Mike is badly injured; he explains that he had stopped his gang from harassing a black girl named Connie and that he had then driven her home. But when they arrived at her address, a group of black men surrounded his car, and she told them to kill Mike—which is how he ended up in the hospital. Still, he says, he doesn't hate Connie and can understand that she was probably sick of white people harassing her.

Soon after, Bryon looks for a job to help pay for his mother's operation because they have very little money. He asks Charlie to work at the bar, but Charlie refuses because Bryon is underage and lies too much. Bryon then asks if he can borrow Charlie's **car** on Saturday, and Charlie agrees. Bryon calls Cathy and asks her to a dance, while Mark plans to go solo with a group of guys. This group includes Ponyboy Curtis, whom

Bryon dislikes because his ex-girlfriend Angela Shepard dumped him to try and go out with Curtis—even though Curtis rejected her.

On Saturday, Bryon and Cathy dance the whole night and have a great time. Later in the evening, however, they hear a scream from the parking lot. Bryon finds out that Angela had convinced a kid to attack Curtis for rejecting her, but when Mark stepped in, the kid hit him over the head with a bottle. Mark now has a deep gash in his head, and Bryon stays with him in the ambulance and the hospital while he gets stitches. At home, Mark expresses how glad he is that Bryon was there to calm him down, and that he feels that Bryon is really his brother. Bryon says he feels the same way.

The next day, Mark and Bryon reminisce about their childhood antics, and Mark laments that he feels like things are changing. After a few days, Mark is back at school. One day, Bryon hears that Mark got in trouble for stealing the principal's car so he could drive to his appointment with his probation officer. Bryon is furious, but when he hears Mark was able to talk his way out of punishment, Bryon says angrily that as long as Mark got away with what he did, it's fine.

Bryon asks Cathy to go out again; he really likes her. Soon after, he and Mark go hustling to make some money. They make \$25 off a pair of tough-looking Texans, but when the boys leave the bar, the two men are waiting for Mark and Bryon in the alley. They pull out a gun, planning to beat the boys up. Charlie intervenes with his own gun to rescue the boys, but he is killed in the resulting crossfire.

In the aftermath of Charlie's death, the Texans are caught and tried, and the police give Charlie's car to Bryon and Mark. Bryon is consumed by guilt over what happened, but Mark tells him that sometimes "things happen." Bryon is frustrated that Mark doesn't understand why he feels guilty, and Bryon spends more and more time talking to Cathy about his feelings. Bryon also starts to make changes in his life. Since his mom has to stay in bed for a month to recover from her operation, Bryon tries more earnestly to get a job. He gets a haircut, puts on clean clothes, and resolves to change his attitude. Bryon also realizes that he loves Cathy, but he has a hard time telling her so.

One day, Bryon, Cathy, M&M, and Mark go driving along a stretch of Tulsa called "the Ribbon," where many kids hang out. Bryon realizes as they hang out that Cathy and Mark don't like each other much. M&M, who feels rejected at home, runs away from the car, saying he's never going to come back. Cathy is distraught.

M&M doesn't reappear for a week, and Bryon and Cathy search for him every day along the Ribbon. Meanwhile, Bryon gets a job in a supermarket, and Mark starts bringing in money as well—though Bryon doesn't know where he's getting it. A few weeks later, Bryon and Mark hang out together, and they soon meet up with a drunk Angela Shepard. She and Bryon

drink a bottle of rum, and she passes out. In revenge for the fight she instigated at the party, Mark cuts off her long hair. The boys then drop her on her front yard and return home. There, Mark reveals that he knows where M&M is, and Bryon is furious, saying that Cathy has been worried sick all this time.

The next day, Bryon and Mark go to search for M&M at a hippie house, but the people in the house say that M&M isn't there. Bryon notes that Mark is very familiar with the house and the people in it. Later that evening, Bryon continues to search for M&M along the Ribbon with Cathy—he decides not to tell her about the hippie house so as not to worry her. After he drops her off, he returns to Terry Jones's house to pick Mark up. While he waits on Terry's steps, Tim and Curly Shepard approach him and beat him up in retaliation for cutting off Angela's hair. As they beat him, Bryon passes out.

When Bryon wakes, Mark is wiping Bryon's face with a washcloth inside Terry's house. He stays with Bryon all night, and the next day Mark takes him to the hospital. Bryon receives 15 stitches in his face and gets his ribs taped. Bryon is adamant that he doesn't want anyone to get even with the Shepards, thinking that it only leads to a cycle of people fighting each other. Bryon then returns home, and Cathy visits him there. Bryon tells her that he loves her, and that he has a lead on M&M. After a few days Bryon feels better; he visits Charlie's grave and thanks Charlie for saving his life.

Two nights later, Bryon and Cathy go to the hippie house, where they discover M&M on a very bad drug trip. He is having terrifying hallucinations and had been trying to jump out a window all day. Bryon carries him into the car, and he and Cathy meet her father at the hospital. The doctor tells Cathy, Mr. Carlson, and Bryon that M&M may never recover from the brain damage that the drug has caused.

Bryon returns home, shaken by the incident. He looks under Mark's mattress for a cigarette to calm him, but instead he finds a bottle of pills. Suddenly, he realizes that Mark has been selling drugs. Thinking about M&M's bad trip, Bryon calls the cops on Mark. Soon after, Mark returns home, and Bryon tells him about M&M and confronts him about the drugs. Mark claims that he never sold the drugs to M&M. He justifies his actions by saying anyone who wants drugs could get them, and so he might as well make money. Bryon tells Mark that he called the cops, and Mark is shocked. The cops arrive and arrest Mark after Bryon describes all the crimes that Mark had committed.

The next morning, Bryon grapples with whether he did the right thing. When Cathy visits him, he is rude to her, presuming that she is happy now that Mark is out of the way. He promises to call her, but he knows that he doesn't love her anymore. Bryon testifies in Mark's trial, and the judge sentences Mark to the state reformatory for five years. Bryon tries to visit him, but he hears that Mark is making trouble at the reformatory. Bryon continues working, and he hears that Cathy is now dating Curtis.

At the end of the summer, Bryon is finally able to visit Mark. Mark says that he hates Bryon, and that he no longer thinks of them as brothers. Bryon thinks that Mark would have killed him if he could. Bryon explains that he hasn't visited Mark again. He wonders what he could have done differently. He wishes he were a kid again, back when he felt surer of himself and had all the answers.



CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Bryon Douglas – Bryon is the protagonist of the novel. When the story opens, he's 16 years old and lives with his mother and his best friend, Mark. Bryon is initially driven by an immature selfishness and a desire to have fun and make money. He and Mark are very close, and they do all kinds of illegal activities together: sneaking into bars, hustling pool, and getting into fights on the street. The physical and emotional support they provide each other during these escapades builds a sense of mutual loyalty and brotherhood between them. Over time, however, Bryon starts to mature. After Bryon is caught hustling, Charlie (the local bar owner) tries to save him from getting beaten up. As a result, however, Charlie is killed, and Bryon feels immensely guilty. He starts to recognize that he is not invincible and that his actions can have severe—even fatal—consequences for others. At the same time, Bryon starts to take responsibility in other aspects of his life: in order to support his mother, who has just had an operation, he cleans up his act and gets a job in a supermarket. He also becomes more selfless when he begins a relationship with a classmate named Cathy, as his love for her prompts him to consider her perspective and prioritize her needs over his own. At the same time, Mark continues to be just as reckless as he has always been. Bryon's frustration at Mark's refusal to take responsibility for his actions ultimately leads Bryon to betray Mark and turn him in to the police for selling drugs. Mark's resulting hatred for Bryon suggests that their brotherhood, once broken, is nearly impossible to repair. The events also draw a distinction between Mark and Bryon: because Mark remains irresponsible, he is unable to grow up. By contrast, Bryon has become responsible and humble—as a result, he feels that he has completely outgrown his childish arrogance by the end of the story.

Mark Jennings – Mark is Bryon's 15-year-old best friend. When Mark was nine years old, his parents killed each other during a drunken fight and Bryon's mother subsequently took him in. Since then, Bryon and Mark have thought of each other as brothers—a bond built by their mutual loyalty and physical and emotional support for one other. Due to his golden hair and eyes, Bryon often describes Mark as a **lion**, which speaks to Mark's wildness and underlying predatory nature. Mark is an inveterate thief who disregards rules and only cares about

getting caught. At the beginning of the book, he is on probation for hot-wiring and stealing **cars**. Despite this, he flagrantly ignores his punishment and steals the principal's car. Even when he is caught doing this, he is able to talk his way out of punishment by arguing that he was going to see his probation officer. This ability to "get away with anything," as Bryon says, only reinforces Mark's feeling of invincibility and arrogance. Unlike Bryon, Mark never truly takes responsibility for his actions or understands the consequences that they might have on others. Mark doesn't seem to care about anyone but himself and Bryon, and therefore he never acts selflessly. While Bryon gains a respectable, legal job in a supermarket, Mark instead sells drugs to kids. Mark observes how he and Bryon diverge over time, and how tension builds between them. This comes to a breaking point when Bryon, frustrated at Mark's continued irresponsibility, decides to turn him in to the police. A judge then sentences Mark to five years in prison. Even in jail, Mark doesn't acknowledge that what he did was wrong—instead, he focuses on how Bryon betrayed him and how much he hates Bryon as a result. Mark's fate suggests that because he refused to act responsibly, he could not fully come of age; rather than becoming a functioning adult in society, he is removed from it entirely.

Charlie – Charlie is the owner and bartender at Charlie's Bar, a local establishment that Bryon and Mark frequent. Charlie allows them to sneak in despite being underage, though he refuses to serve them alcohol. Bryon and Mark like to hustle pool in the bar, ignoring Charlie's warnings that they could get into real trouble by doing this. Charlie spurs Bryon's maturity in several ways—for instance, when Bryon asks Charlie for a job, Charlie refuses, telling Bryon that he lies too much and that he needs to examine his attitude. However, Charlie does loan Bryon his **car**, prompting Bryon to gain a sense of responsibility in making sure that he returns the car in good shape. Then, when Bryon and Mark are caught hustling in the bar, two Texans hold them at gunpoint and threaten to beat them up. Charlie intervenes with his own gun but is killed in the crossfire. Bryon feels very guilty and recognizes the consequences of his actions on others, knowing that if he hadn't been hustling (as Charlie warned him not to do), Charlie would still be alive. After Charlie's death, Bryon finally heeds his advice: he gets a haircut, puts on clean clothes, and changes his attitude in order to get a job at a supermarket.

Cathy Carlson – Cathy is Bryon's girlfriend and M&M's older sister. Bryon describes Cathy as very honest and sensible. At the beginning of the story, Cathy returns to Tulsa from a private school because she ran out of money to pay for it, and soon after, she and Bryon start dating. As their relationship becomes more serious, Bryon's feelings for her deepen, and he starts acting more selflessly as a result. He prioritizes her wants over his own and tries to be a supportive partner. When M&M runs away from home, Bryon helps Cathy look for him

every night. When they ultimately find M&M on a bad drug trip, Bryon helps Cathy bring M&M to the hospital. Yet as Bryon grows closer to Cathy, he grows further away from Mark—particularly because Cathy sympathizes with his guilt over Charlie's death, while Mark doesn't. Thus, Cathy helps guide Bryon into adulthood by inspiring him to be less selfish and more responsible. But at the end of the novel, Bryon falls out of love with Cathy, and she subsequently starts dating Ponyboy Curtis.

M&M Carlson – M&M is Bryon and Mark's friend and Cathy's younger brother. Bryon describes 13-year-old M&M as trusting, intelligent, serious, and "a little strange." His nickname derives from the fact that he is obsessed with M&M's candy. At home, M&M feels rejected because his father, Mr. Carlson, makes fun of his long hair and his poor grades in math and gym. As a result, M&M starts to make friends with the hippies in Tulsa and eventually runs away from home, leading Cathy and Bryon to desperately search for him. He stays in the hippie house (where they call him "Baby Freak"), and when Cathy and Bryon ultimately find him, he is having a bad drug trip with terrifying hallucinations. Doctors say that he may never fully recover from the mental damage. M&M's story illustrates that kids are not invincible, and that breaking the law can have severe consequences.

Angela Shepard – Angela is Bryon's ex-girlfriend and Curly and Tim Shepard's sister. Bryon describes Angela as very beautiful, with long, dark curls—but also as very bitter and mean. He explains that their relationship largely consisted of making out or fighting, and very little else. Just prior to the events of the novel, Angela broke up with Bryon in order to pursue Ponyboy Curtis. After he ignores her advances, she convinces to attack Curtis at a party—but Mark steps in, and the kid hits him over the head with a bottle. This fight results in Mark needing 10 stitches in his head. Mark enacts revenge by finding Angela when she's drunk, plying her with more alcohol until she passes out, and cutting off her hair while she's unconscious. Angela then gets her brothers to retaliate by beating up Bryon severely, illustrating how violence causes more problems than it solves because it usually results in an unending cycle of getting even.

Bryon's Mother – Bryon's mother is characterized primarily by her selflessness. Bryon frequently states that she puts others ahead of herself—proven by the fact that she takes Mark in when he is nine years old, after his parents kill each other during a drunken argument. Bryon also appreciates that his mother frequently leaves him and Mark to their own devices, choosing not to pry too much into their lives. Like his love for Cathy, Bryon's love and respect for his mother causes him to be more selfless, as she tries to put his mother's needs before his own. At the beginning of the novel, Bryon's mother has just had an expensive operation, and she cannot work for a month afterward. Because of this, Bryon gets a job at a

supermarket—sacrificing his rebelliousness in order to support her.

Ponyboy Curtis – Curtis is a classmate of Bryon and Mark. Initially, Bryon dislikes Curtis because Bryon’s ex-girlfriend Angela broke up with him in order to pursue Curtis. Curtis ignores Angela, however—and one night at a party, Angela convinces a kid to beat up Curtis as revenge. Mark intervenes in the fight and is badly hurt. When Bryon subsequently recognizes that Curtis was oblivious to Angela’s advances, Bryon realizes that he isn’t so bad. At the end of the book, after Bryon stops going out with Cathy, Cathy and Curtis go out together. Curtis is also the protagonist of Hinton’s first novel, [The Outsiders](#).

The Texans – The Texans, Dirty Dave and his unnamed friend, are two men whom Bryon and Mark hustle at pool at Charlie’s Bar. When the Texans realize that Bryon and Mark cheated them, they hold the boys at gunpoint in the alley and plan to beat them up. Charlie intervenes with his own gun, however—and in the ensuing crossfire, the Texans kill Charlie. Mark and Bryon later testify against the Texans in their trial, and a judge sentences them to life in prison.

Mr. Carlson – Mr. Carlson is Cathy and M&M’s father and Mrs. Carlson’s husband. Mr. Carlson makes fun of M&M for his long hair and poor grades, and when his son goes missing, he dismisses the disappearance as a phase. However, when Cathy and Bryon find M&M on a bad drug trip, Mr. Carlson shows deep concern for his son and immediately drives to the hospital to make sure M&M is okay.

Curly Shepard – Curly is Bryon and Mark’s classmate and Angela’s older brother. Like Bryon and Mark, Curly enjoys fighting and belongs to a gang headed by his older brother Tim. At the beginning of the book, he attacks M&M, and later he attacks Bryon as revenge for Mark cutting off Angela’s hair.

Mike Chambers – Mike is a young man who’s staying in a hospital room across the hall from Bryon’s mother at the beginning of the novel. Bryon’s mother points out that Mike never gets visitors, so Bryon and Mark visit him at her request. Mike is severely injured: his arms are in slings, his head is bandaged, and he has stitches in his lip. He explains to Bryon and Mark that he prevented his friends from harassing a black girl named Connie. When he drove Connie home, however, she told a group of black men waiting outside the car to kill Mike. Still, he affirms that he doesn’t hate Connie or the men because he knows they were likely getting revenge for previous injustices that Connie experienced. Mike’s story thus illustrates the destructive cycle of revenge, as it can harm even those who advocate nonviolence.

Connie – Connie is a young woman who features in Mike’s story of how he got badly injured. Mike’s friends, who are white, were harassing Connie, who is black, in a drugstore. Mike intervened and offered to drive Connie home. However, when

he arrives at her house, she tells a group of black men waiting outside the car to kill Mike, resulting in his broken arms, bandaged head, and the stitches in his lip. Still, Mike says that he doesn’t hate Connie, knowing that she was likely getting revenge for previous incidents of white people harassing her.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Tim Shepard – Tim is Curly and Angela’s older brother. Tim leads a gang of his brothers that they call the “Shepard Gang.” After Mark cuts Angela’s hair off, Tim and Curly find Bryon and beat him up.

Mrs. Carlson – Mrs. Carlson is Cathy and M&M’s mother and Mr. Carlson’s wife.

Terry Jones – Terry is Mark and Bryon’s classmate and friend.

TERMS

Hustling – Hustling means to misrepresent one’s skill in a game in order to deceive someone, particularly when gambling. In the novel, **Mark** and **Bryon** often seek out pool players in **Charlie’s** bar whom they know they can beat and challenge those players to a game. At first, Mark and Bryon intentionally play poorly and lose money betting on the game so that their opponents will feel confident in their ability to win games and will consequently continue to play with the boys. But once the opponents are lulled into this false sense of confidence, Bryon and Mark suddenly begin playing at their full capacity, winning several games in a row in order to ultimately make up for—and far exceed—the money they initially lost when they were pretending to be bad at pool. While hustling is not strictly illegal, it is considered a form of cheating. This is why, after discovering that they’ve been hustled, **the Texans** attempt to beat Bryon and Mark up.

Hippie House – The hippie house in *That Was Then, This Is Now* refers to a communal space in Tulsa, Oklahoma, where hippies live, and where they can be free from society’s expectations. It is largely filled with teenagers and young adults, many of whom use drugs as a way to rebel against the establishment and conventional societal values. **M&M** makes friends with some of the hippies in town and ends up living in the house, which leads to his having a very bad drug trip.



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.



HUMILITY, RESPONSIBILITY, AND COMING OF AGE

Set in Tulsa, Oklahoma, in the late 1960s, *That Was Then, This Is Now* follows a year in the life of Bryon

Douglas and his foster brother and best friend, Mark Jennings—two smart-talking, troublemaking teenagers who think they know everything. But over the course of the book, Bryon begins to accept that it's time to grow up and slowly comes to terms with the fact that he doesn't have all the answers. He opens himself up to receiving advice from others (namely Charlie, who owns the local bar), cleans up his act, and gets a respectable job at a grocery store to support the family. Mark, however, is resistant to growing up, choosing instead to cling to the reckless, self-assured nature of his childhood. As both boys grapple with the change in their lives, Hinton illustrates that coming of age requires humility and taking responsibility—two things that Bryon successfully does and Mark, who clings to his childhood, refuses to do.

At the beginning of the book, Bryon and Mark are self-assured and irresponsible. They have exploits all over town: getting into a bar even though they're underage, gambling at pool, and fighting. Bryon dismisses anyone—especially the bartender and owner, Charlie—who says that he and Mark will get in trouble someday for their actions. Bryon's superior attitude at the beginning of the book establishes his immaturity, because like many kids, he feels invincible. Mark, who is similarly wild, has been hot-wiring and stealing cars since age 12 and was put on probation for this crime just prior to the events of the novel. But even though he could be thrown in jail if he's caught again, he continues to commit this very crime—ironically stealing the school principal's car in order to see his probation officer. In flagrantly disregarding his punishment and the potential consequences, Mark, too, illustrates his arrogance and irresponsibility.

As the book goes on, however, Bryon's self-awareness increases, and he realizes that growing up means taking on more humility and responsibility in his life. At one point, Bryon sees 12-year-olds smoking on the street, just as he and Mark used to do at that age. He remembers how, at that time, he and Mark were “sure of [themselves], so sure they were the coolest things to hit town,” but now he thinks how stupid the kids look. He wonders if, at 20, he will think about himself at 16 and say the same thing. With this, Bryon exhibits an understanding of his own ignorance and knows that he has a lot of learning and growing still to do. Bryon also starts to face the hardships of adulthood, which prompt him to mature even more and take on more responsibility out of necessity. At one point in the book, two Texans discover Bryon and Mark have been hustling pool—intentionally misrepresenting their skill at the game in order to win money. Angry that they have been cheated, the men hold Bryon and Mark at gunpoint and plan to beat them up. Charlie intervenes with his own gun, but he is killed in their

crossfire. Bryon is overcome by guilt, wishing that he and Mark had acted differently and doubting his earlier assurances to Charlie that they would never get into trouble. He feels the surety of his childhood slipping further away, replaced by a more mature sense of responsibility for his actions. Bryon demonstrates his increasing maturity even further by finally taking to heart the advice Charlie gave him prior to his death. He knows that no one will hire a “mouthy kid who acts like he already knows it all,” so he gets a haircut, puts on clean clothes, and sets out to get a job at the supermarket. In humbly listening to Charlie's advice and taking on more responsibility for himself, Bryon is able to take the first steps into adulthood and leave his childhood behind.

While Mark sees Bryon maturing, he refuses to take responsibility or show humility himself and therefore doesn't grow up in any visible way throughout the book. After Charlie's death, Mark tells Bryon that it's pointless to feel guilty. “You can't keep trying to figure out why things happen, man. That's what old people do. That's when you can't get away with things any more,” he says. Unlike Bryon, Mark refuses to humbly admit that they made a mistake, and he's unwilling to take responsibility for Charlie's tragic death. He suggests that feeling guilty or accountable in a situation like this is “what old people do,” backing up the book's claim that showing humility and responsibility are central to becoming an adult. But in rejecting these qualities, Mark also rejects adulthood itself. Instead, he clings to his youthful arrogance and carelessness, because this attitude allows him to make poor decisions without getting in trouble for them, either by the authorities or by his own conscience. Mark's immaturity is particularly evident when he starts dealing drugs to kids and doesn't grasp why Bryon has a problem with this. Rather than seeing the potential harm of what he is doing—that his drugs might cause kids to have bad trips or fatal overdoses—Mark simply views dealing drugs as a way to make money. Again, while Bryon is taking a more mature path and finds a respectable, legal job at a supermarket, Mark simply continues to act irresponsibly and think only of himself. Because Mark refuses to take responsibility for his actions, Bryon chooses to inform the police that Mark has been dealing drugs. But even after Mark is sentenced to prison for five years, he still seems unconcerned with the fact that he has broken the law. Hinton uses Mark's fate to spin a cautionary tale about resisting adulthood. Because Mark maintains his self-assuredness and recklessness, he never truly grows up: he ends up in jail rather than becoming a functioning adult in society.



BROTHERHOOD, LOYALTY, AND BETRAYAL

Although Bryon and Mark are not actually related to one another, Mark lives with Bryon and his mother as an adoptive part of the family, and they often tell

people that they're brothers. To them, brotherhood isn't limited to biological brothers. Instead, Bryon and Mark see brotherhood as an irreversible pact wherein they are unconditionally loyal to each other—something that is integral to their survival in 1960s Tulsa, Oklahoma, which is overrun by gang violence. But when Bryon and Mark betray one another in big and small ways, their brotherly bond permanently shatters, and the boys develop a seething hatred for one another that runs deeper than anything they feel for other people. While Hinton shows the value of brotherhood—its loyalty, support, and protection—she also suggests that when brothers betray one another, brotherhood is difficult, if not impossible, to rebuild.

Early on in the story, Hinton illustrates how Mark and Bryon's brotherly bond is in part about physical protection. Bryon explains in the first chapter that he and Mark have been best friends their whole lives. After Mark's parents killed each other in a drunken fight when Mark was nine, he moved in with Bryon and his mother, which brought the boys even closer. From an early age, Mark was able to take refuge in his brotherly friendship with Bryon, and it gave him a roof over his head. Years later, Mark is beaten up while he and Bryon are at a party. When Bryon sees the large gash on Mark's head, he nearly cries at seeing his friend in pain. He drops everything to care for Mark, getting him to the doctor and staying with him in the ambulance to calm him. Mark later expresses his appreciation, saying, "Bryon, you're the only family I got, you know that? [...] I feel like you're my brother. A real one." Bryon's friendship makes Mark feel like he has the same physical protection that a biological family might provide. Mark reciprocates this protection later on in the novel when Bryon is beaten up badly and has to have stitches in his face and his ribs taped. Mark takes him to another boy's house to help him recover and then to the hospital. When Bryon wakes up in the hospital, he sees that Mark is almost crying—something he has never seen Mark do before. Hinton thus reinforces their reciprocal bond, as they care about each other more than anyone else and want to protect each other.

The boys' mutual protectiveness also speaks to their deep loyalty to and emotional support of one another, which are also foundations of a strong brotherly bond. That Mark and Bryon grew closer to one another after Mark's parents' tragic deaths implies that from an early age, the boys provided each other with crucial emotional support. They're also fiercely loyal to one another. Bryon recalls how, in their younger days, they "had never had a fight. [They] had never even had an argument"—the boys were always on the same page about things and backed each other up. Bryon and Mark have a stronger bond than even some brothers, because their loyalty to each other cancels out any potential conflict. When Mark and Bryon meet a boy named Mike, Mark tells him that he and Bryon are brothers. Bryon thinks, "For a minute I really felt good about Mark's

telling this guy we were brothers." Later, when Bryon expresses the same thing to Mark, saying, "I always think of you as my brother," Mark smiles in response. Hinton thus illustrates how the fact that they think of each other as brothers, and express that to each other, is a valuable display of loyalty that also constitutes a kind of emotional support.

But when Bryon and Mark eventually betray one another, their brotherly bond shatters irreparably, suggesting that brotherhood, once broken, is hard to piece back together. When Bryon's new girlfriend, Cathy, casually remarks that Mark is attractive, Bryon seethes with jealousy. He thinks, "You know what the crummiest feeling you can have is? To hate the person you love best in the world." Notably, Bryon's hatred isn't directed towards Cathy for making the comment, but towards Mark, because he feels it's a betrayal of their bond that Mark *could* end up with a girl that Bryon likes. This dynamic intensifies later in the book when Cathy's brother, M&M, disappears, and she and Bryon frantically search for him every day. When Mark eventually admits that he knows where M&M is, Bryon is furious at him for withholding this information and letting Cathy panic, which he sees as another betrayal. Bryon and Cathy find M&M in a hippie house on a bad drug trip—one that warps his brain so thoroughly that doctors say he'll never be the same. When Bryon learns that Mark has been selling drugs, he quickly makes the connection between Mark's dealing drugs and M&M's lethal drug trip. Bryon feels exceptionally betrayed, describing Mark as "the cause of all this misery." Even though Mark claims that he didn't sell drugs to M&M, the fact that Mark sells drugs at all implicates him in the tragedy, because he could have easily caused this kind of devastating trip in someone else. Bryon feels so betrayed that he commits a betrayal of his own, calling the cops on Mark for selling drugs. Mark is imprisoned for five years, and when Bryon visits him in jail, Mark looks more hardened and tougher than ever and scathingly tells Bryon that he hates him. Indeed, Bryon thinks Mark would kill him if he had the chance. In betraying one another, both boys violate the contract of their brotherhood, permanently destroying the loyalty and care that once existed between them.



RULES AND CONSEQUENCES

Growing up together in a rough part of Tulsa, Oklahoma, that is riddled with crime and gang violence, Bryon and Mark think that rules are meant to be broken, so they constantly flout the law and defy authority. From Mark's perspective, if they can get away with something, then it isn't technically wrong. Even though Bryon doesn't always share this belief—from the start, he has more of a moral compass than Mark does—he is still relatively unbothered by acting unethically. Yet over the course of the novel, Bryon starts to understand the ramifications of their immoral actions and feels guilty about how they have

negatively affected other people. Hinton uses Bryon's shifting attitude to speak to the importance of rules. For the most part, rules are meant to uphold morality, and breaking rules can cause the rule breaker—and the people around them—to suffer.

At the beginning of the novel, Bryon and Mark are rulebreakers and criminals who fail to see how their actions could potentially affect other people—and when they *do* consider the consequences of their actions, it's only in the context of making sure that they evade punishment. In the very first scene of the novel, Hinton illustrates Bryon and Mark's lack of regard for the rules. They sneak into a bar despite being underage in order to "hustle" adults at pool for money. When the bartender, Charlie, warns them that they could get in trouble if they're caught, Mark immediately dismisses him, confidently declaring that they won't get caught. Not only do Mark and Bryon disregard the rules, but they also disregard the idea that their actions might have consequences. Mark's rule-breaking isn't limited to hustling. At the beginning of the novel, he is on probation for hot-wiring and stealing cars, he shoplifts clothes for Bryon, and he is a notorious pickpocket. Bryon explains that "Stealing was a game to [Mark], something to do for fun and profit, and he was careful not to get caught because that was one of the rules." The only "rule" Mark heeds to in the book is his personal commitment to avoiding punishment. Instead of considering how his actions affect other people—for instance, he could be stealing cars, money, and clothes from people who desperately need these things—the only consequence he considers is that he could get caught.

As Bryon matures over the course of the book, he starts to understand that rules *aren't* meant to be broken and are instead in place for a reason. Rules uphold morality in a society, and breaking those codes of ethics can have dire consequences for the rule-breaker and for other people. Bryon admits early on that "Mark couldn't see anything wrong with stealing stuff. I could." Although Bryon doesn't care about Mark's thefts at this point in the book, he nonetheless senses that, by stealing, the boys are breaking a rule or moral code that shouldn't be broken. But when Bryon witnesses firsthand the wide-reaching consequences that their rule-breaking can have, he learns the hard way why adhering to the rules in society is important. After a group of older Texan men realize that Bryon hustled them at pool, they hold him and Mark at gunpoint and plan to beat them up. Charlie, the bar owner, intervenes with his own gun, but he is killed in their crossfire. Mark flippantly tells Bryon that he shouldn't blame himself for what happened, saying, "Things happen, that's all there is to it." While Mark fails to see Charlie's tragic death as a direct consequence of his and Bryon's own actions, Bryon is plagued with guilt—especially because Charlie warned him not to continue hustling. He logically pieces together that, had they not been hustling, Charlie wouldn't have died. For Bryon, the consequence of hustling that night was twofold: it led to an innocent man's

death, and it also left Bryon riddled with guilt and sadness. In other words, breaking the rules had devastating consequences for Bryon *and* those around him, which is enough to make him stop hustling pool altogether. So while Bryon understood right and wrong before, it is only in witnessing the painful consequences of his actions that he fully grasps that rules are in place for a reason.

Having learned the hard way why rules are so important, Bryon tries to get Mark to see how his rule-breaking can—and often does—cause widespread harm. At the end of the book, Bryon and Mark's 13-year-old friend M&M has a bad drug trip in a hippie house, and doctors don't think he will ever fully recover from the mental damage. Soon after, Bryon discovers that Mark has been dealing drugs, and even though Mark claims that he didn't deal to M&M specifically, Bryon sees that Mark could easily have caused the same experience in another person. Bryon realizes in that moment that "Mark had absolutely no concept of what was right and what was wrong; he didn't obey any laws, because he couldn't see that there were any." Rules are meant to serve and protect a community, but because Mark doesn't care about other people, he also doesn't care about rules. Frustrated at Mark's lack of concern about dealing drugs, Bryon turns him in to the authorities, leading a judge to send Mark to prison for five years. Yet even then, Mark never truly acknowledges that his criminality was harmful. He still fails to see the consequences his actions have had for others (like how he's affected the people he's dealt drugs to or stolen from, or how he's affected Bryon) and instead is angry at Bryon for turning him in.



VIOLENCE AND REVENGE

Violence permeates Bryon and Mark's gang-filled town of Tulsa, Oklahoma, and the boys take part in it themselves. They see violence as a source of entertainment, a way to maintain a tough reputation, and the best way to get revenge on people who have wronged them. However, the excitement of fighting wears off for Bryon over the course of the book, particularly because he realizes that "getting even" traps people in an unending cycle of violence. By the end of the book, Bryon decides that exacting revenge or seeming tough is no longer worth the damage that violence inflicts on himself and others. While violence may seem like an effective way to boost one's reputation or exact revenge, it causes far more problems than it solves. Violence, Hinton ultimately suggests, only breeds more violence.

At the beginning of the book, Bryon and Mark view violence as a source of entertainment and a means of upholding their hardened reputations in the community. The gang violence that saturates Tulsa is real and terrifying, but when Bryon and Mark are children, they emulate it as an entertaining game. When Bryon and Mark get older and begin to take part in violence themselves, they continue to see it as a sport or a game. Bryon

describes how, when they were old enough to participate in real gang violence, they “fought with chains and [they] fought barefisted and [they] fought Socs and [they] fought other grease gangs.” Even as a young adult, Bryon sees violence as fun and exciting—he considers it a natural extension of their childhood play. Bryon also explains that he and Mark fight in order to maintain their rough reputations. He relays that once, they beat up a group of hippies even though the hippies didn’t fight back, simply to keep up their image as “tough guys.” Likewise, whenever Bryon (as the narrator) introduces a male character, he often mentions whether they have a reputation for being tough—which is predicated on the violence they’ve committed in the past.

Ultimately, though, violence only breeds more violence, which is especially true where retaliation is involved—committing violence against someone spurs them to get even, which stirs up a seemingly endless back-and-forth of more violence. When Bryon and Mark visit Bryon’s mother in the hospital after she has an operation, they meet another patient named Mike, who has bandages around his head, both arms in slings, and stitches in his lip. He explains that he drove a black girl named Connie home after stopping a group of his friends from harassing her. Even though Connie thanked him for saving her, when Mike dropped her off at her house, black men surrounded his car, and she told them to kill him—which is how he ended up in the hospital with such bad injuries. Mike affirms, however, that he doesn’t hate them for what they did, recognizing that Connie was probably fed up with being bullied by white people, and that they were getting revenge for previous injustices that Connie had faced. Mike’s story thus illustrates the destructive cycle of revenge, and how it can harm even those on the outside of the cycle who try to put a stop to it. Bryon comes to the same realization later: at a dance, Bryon’s ex-girlfriend, Angela Shepard, gets a guy to attack Mark’s friend Ponyboy Curtis, whom Angela believed was ignoring her advances. When Mark steps in, the guy hits him with a bottle, necessitating 10 stitches in Mark’s head. Later, Mark finds Angela when she’s drunk, plies her with even more alcohol, and cuts off her long hair while she’s passed out. Angela’s brothers then beat up Bryon for what Mark did—and he, too, has to get stitches and his ribs taped. Mark was trying to “get even” with Angela, but this only led the Shepards to “get even” in return, reinforcing how violence only creates more violence.

Sick of the never-ending cycle of this “getting-even jazz,” Bryon asks Mark not to fight the Shepards. Mark is shocked, because he is of the eye-for-an-eye mindset that violence must be met with violence. Bryon explains, “I’m sick of this circle of beating up people and getting beat up.” Like Mike, Bryon recognizes the harm of their cycle and wants to break it. But while both Mike and Bryon try to stop the cycle of violence that they’re trapped in, an attitude of nonviolence isn’t necessarily guaranteed to stop violence altogether—after all, Mike’s nonviolent stance in

protecting Connie from his friends is what put him in the hospital. Nonetheless, the book implies that this intention is the right one. Nonviolence might not always be powerful enough to stop the cycle, but the alternative—violence—only perpetuates the cycle.



LOVE AND SELFLESSNESS

Bryon begins the novel thinking only about himself and Mark, and he relishes their routine of fighting, gambling, and stealing together. But over the year during which the book takes place, Bryon develops both maturity and deeper relationships with the women in his life—particularly with his girlfriend, Cathy, as well as his mother. In both cases, Bryon starts to think outside of his own perspective and tries to support Cathy’s and his mother’s needs. Hinton charts the growth of both of these relationships to suggest that being selfless and putting someone else’s needs above one’s own are natural outgrowths of love and respect within a relationship.

Initially, Bryon is portrayed as self-centered in his relationships, as he focuses only on his own desires and feelings. The very first chapter makes it clear that Bryon is the center of his own world. He and Mark only seem concerned with having fun and making money, which they do by going to bars, hustling at pool, and getting into fights. They quickly hop from one activity to the next when they’re bored, illustrating that their choices are based solely on their personal, immediate desires. While it’s clear that Bryon cares about Mark, Bryon seems to view Mark as an extension of himself—he even comments that they think “just alike, as one person.” Thus, caring about Mark doesn’t amount to selflessness, because they share essentially the same priorities and worldview. Initially, even Bryon’s romantic life is marked by this same selfishness. He discusses how he dated his ex, Angela, out of pride rather than out of love—he liked being seen with an attractive girlfriend. Bryon also admits to telling girls that he loved them without meaning it, and he notes that most of the time when he treated these girls badly, “it didn’t even bother [him].” Not considering their feelings illustrates Bryon’s immaturity and underscores the fact that he never truly loved them because, as he soon learns, love entails a greater selflessness and empathy towards one’s partner in a relationship.

When Bryon starts to fall in love with Cathy, he finds that he naturally becomes less self-centered because he genuinely wants to cater to her needs. When Bryon and Cathy get more serious about each other after a few months of dating, Bryon describes how he “had quit thinking only about [himself], quit pushing for all [he] could get.” This is a dramatic shift for Bryon, and it shows how love has a transformative effect on his priorities. Later, when M&M (Cathy’s younger brother and Bryon’s friend) runs away from home to live in a hippie house, Cathy starts to cry in front of Bryon. While it used to bore him

when girls would cry, Bryon now says, “I felt really bad. It was the first time I’d ever felt bad for anyone except Mark.” Equating Cathy with his closest friend shows how much he truly loves her. And it’s because of this deep, genuine love that Bryon is able to access feelings of empathy that he’s never felt before. Not only does Bryon show his selflessness in being able to understand Cathy’s perspective and empathize with her, but he also supports her in other ways. He helps Cathy look for M&M every day after he disappears, and when Mark tells Bryon where M&M is, he brings Cathy there to find him. When Bryon and Cathy discover that M&M is having a bad drug trip, Bryon feels that M&M is “as much as much [his] little brother as Cathy’s.” Bryon carries him into the **car** and drives him to the hospital. Love transforms Bryon from selfish teenager to supportive partner—his love for Cathy naturally makes him want to be more selfless and support her and those she loves in any way he can.

Bryon also supports his mother more after she has an operation, reinforcing the idea that when he truly loves and respects someone, he naturally prioritizes their needs over his own. Bryon loves his mother deeply—he often remarks on how much he appreciates not only her support, but also that she gives him and Mark a great deal of freedom and independence. But following Bryon’s mother’s operation, she has to stay in the hospital, and Bryon tries to support her in any way he can. He visits her in the hospital, and he sells anything he can think of (even their car and TV) to help pay her medical bills. His love and respect for her naturally extends to a desire to put her needs over his own. Bryon also tries to find a job to cover the cost of his mother’s operation, as she has to stay in bed for a month when she returns home and won’t be able to go back to work herself. Resolved to support his mother in this way, Bryon decides he needs “a haircut, clean clothes, and a really big change in attitude” and ultimately finds a job at a supermarket. In cleaning up his act, Bryon sacrifices some of his rebelliousness and tough identity in order to support his mother, once again illustrating how selflessness flows naturally in a loving relationship.

Bryon’s increasing selflessness and loving relationships provide a stark contrast to Mark’s unchanging egotism. Bryon expresses that Mark doesn’t care about anyone except Bryon, and at first, Mark and Bryon’s friendship seems easy and natural because they’re always on the same page—committing the same crimes, maintaining the same attitudes, and living the same lifestyle. But when Bryon begins to grow up and his priorities shift, it seems that Mark doesn’t even truly love Bryon anymore. Even though Mark’s selfish lifestyle might be satisfying, this life leads him to ruin, lands him in jail, and leaves him more isolated than ever. Thus, Mark’s journey just as much as Bryon’s reiterates that selflessness is a natural extension of love, and that Mark was incapable of either one.



SYMBOLS

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



CARS

Cars symbolize Bryon and Mark’s divergent coming of age journeys—namely, the way in which Bryon is able to mature, while Mark is unable to do so. Cars are a particularly apt lens through which to illustrate this journey, as learning to drive is often one of a teenager’s first steps into adulthood. Driving gives teens more independence, but it also comes with a greater degree of responsibility and caution. Mark appreciates the freedom that cars can provide but does not treat them responsibly. Rather than trying to save money to buy his own car, Mark instead hot-wires and steals cars starting at age 12; even when he is caught and is on probation for stealing cars, he continues to steal them anyway. Thus, his treatment of cars reflects both his selfishness and his inability to mature or take responsibility for his actions.

Bryon’s experience with cars—particularly Charlie’s car—contrasts with Mark’s recklessness. Charlie says that he doesn’t trust Bryon’s words but does trust Bryon’s actions, which is why he loans Bryon his car when Bryon asks to borrow it. With this gesture, Charlie’s car comes to represent Bryon’s accountability: he has to make sure that he takes care of the car, refills the gas, and returns it safely. Thus, Bryon differs from Mark, who never has to take care of the cars he steals because he never feels obligated to return them in good condition (if he returns them at all). The police give Charlie’s car to Bryon in the wake of his death, reinforcing the link between Charlie’s car and Bryon gaining responsibility. Mark, on the other hand, never acquires a car of his own, nor does he use Charlie’s car in the story, indicating that Mark never develops the same maturity and responsibility that Bryon does.



THE LION

Hinton frequently describes Mark as a lion, and the image is a recurring metaphor for Mark’s wild, vicious, and predatory behavior. The way in which Hinton’s descriptions develop over time also illustrates Bryon’s increased *understanding* of his best friend’s character. Initially, Hinton uses the lion image in a more literal way, as a simile to describe Mark’s golden hair and eyes. But over time, the lion takes on more figurative meanings. At first, Bryon usually describes Mark as grinning like an “innocent” or “friendly” lion, particularly when he is getting away with illegal activity. This evokes a kind of cartoonish guiltlessness and indicates that even though Mark is reckless, Bryon doesn’t believe that Mark’s actions do much harm to other people. However, using a

wild and ferocious animal like a lion also implies that there is a more sinister nature hidden beneath Mark's sheen of innocence.

Bryon becomes more aware of the mean side to Mark's personality over time. For instance, when it becomes clear to him that Mark doesn't like Bryon's girlfriend, Cathy, he recognizes that Mark can turn on people "like a teased lion." Thus, while Bryon knows that Mark can be gentle and friendly, when provoked, he can quickly become vicious. At the end of the novel, Bryon sees Mark's true character revealed more fully when he realizes Mark is selling drugs to kids, an action befitting a lion's predatory nature. Then, after Bryon turns Mark in to the police and visits Mark in jail, he describes Mark as a "dangerous, caged lion." Accordingly, Bryon feels that Mark would be willing to kill him for his betrayal. Thus, the metaphor of the lion not only suggests Mark's wild tendencies and even his savage hatred when he feels that Bryon has betrayed him—it also symbolizes Bryon's increasing awareness of his friend's vicious nature.

which Mark acts recklessly as a result of feeling invincible. Mark's certainty that he will not face a violent punishment also suggests that even though Mark and Bryon are street smart, they are still very young and irresponsible. The novel tracks the two boys' coming of age, and this initial scene shows them at their most immature. As Bryon develops, he realizes that he doesn't really have all the answers, and he begins to doubt his own self-assured attitude. This doubt arises especially after Charlie's death, which occurs when two men hold Bryon and Mark at gunpoint because they realize the boys hustled them—fulfilling Charlie's prediction here. When this happens, Charlie tries to defend the boys and is killed in the crossfire. Charlie's death prompts immense guilt in Bryon, as he finally understands that breaking the rules can, in fact, carry severe (even deadly) consequences for other people. Here, however, Mark and Bryon don't acknowledge that possibility.

Additionally, Charlie's description in this quote of the consequences they could face illustrates the violent nature of 1960s Tulsa, Oklahoma (where the story is set). The visceral image of a "pool stick rammed down your throats" is only a slight exaggeration, as Bryon later notes that he had heard about hustlers getting their thumbs cut off when their scams were discovered. Hinton makes clear from the outset that the boys are steeped in—and willingly participate in—the violence of their society.



QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Penguin edition of *That Was Then, This Is Now* published in 1971.

Chapter 1 Quotes

“It's just as well,” Charlie said. “You guys are going to get in real bad trouble one of these days. Some guy's going to get hacked off when he finds out what you're doin', and you're gonna get a pool stick rammed down your throats.”

“No we ain't,” Mark said. “Give me a Coke, Charlie.”

Related Characters: Mark Jennings, Charlie (speaker), Bryon Douglas

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 10-11


Explanation and Analysis

In the book's opening scene, Charlie warns Mark and Bryon about the dangers of hustling people at pool. Mark's dismissive response to Charlie illustrates his lack of concern for breaking the rules, as he emphasizes how little he cares about the consequences of their actions for others and downplays any potential consequences for himself and Bryon. Throughout the book, Bryon feels that Mark is able to get away with anything, and this is the first incident in

“I had been friends with Mark long before he came to live with us. He had lived down the street and it seemed to me that we had always been together. We had never had a fight. We had never even had an argument. In looks, we were complete opposites: I'm a big guy, dark hair and eyes—the kind who looks like a Saint Bernard puppy, which I don't mind as most chicks cannot resist a Saint Bernard puppy. Mark was small and compact, with strange golden eyes and hair to match and a grin like a friendly lion. He was much stronger than he looked—he could tie me in arm wrestling. He was my best friend and we were like brothers.”

Related Characters: Bryon Douglas (speaker), Charlie, Mark Jennings

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 12-13



Explanation and Analysis


After Bryon and Mark leave Charlie's Bar in the opening chapter, Bryon reflects on his relationship with Mark. Here, he contrasts the dissimilarity in their physical looks with the similarity of their demeanor and personalities. While their physical differences indicate that they are not biological siblings, they're exceptionally close in all other aspects of their relationship. Bryon's description suggests that they are even closer than some biological brothers, because their friendship hinders any fights between them. Hinton has already established Bryon and Mark as two characters who relish in starting fights, but here Bryon makes it clear that their brotherhood means they fight alongside, and not against, each other. As the story progresses over the next year, however, tensions will rise between the two boys, illustrating how their coming of age also inevitably changes the nature of their relationship as it is described here.

Additionally, this is the first instance of Bryon comparing Mark to a lion. While initially the animal is used as a metaphor for Mark's physical characteristics—his golden hair and eyes—over time Hinton uses the metaphor to describe Mark's mental and emotional state as well. While Bryon describes Mark as a "friendly" lion here, the use of a large and ferocious animal foreshadows the fact that Mark will not always be so friendly with Bryon—his underlying nature is predatory.

☝ It was a long walk to the bowling alley, and I wished for the hundredth time I had a car. I had to walk everywhere I went. As if he'd read my mind, which he was in the habit of doing, Mark said, "I could hot-wire us a car."
 "That's a bad thing to do," M&M said. "Taking something that doesn't belong to you."
 "It ain't stealin'," Mark said. "It's borrowin'."
 "Yeah, well, you're on probation now for 'borrowing,' so I don't think it's such a great idea," I said.

Related Characters: M&M Carlson, Mark Jennings, Bryon Douglas (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 16

Explanation and Analysis

As Bryon, Mark, and their friend M&M are walking to the bowling alley together, Bryon and Mark long to have a car so

they can drive instead of walking places. Their debate over whether it's a good idea to hot-wire a car provides three different perspectives on rules. Of the three, M&M is the only one who recognizes that rules are based in morality, which is why hot-wiring a car is a bad thing to do. He believes that stealing is inherently wrong regardless of the threat of being caught, because a thief is taking something that rightfully belongs to someone else. Mark represents the opposite extreme: he downplays the severity of his crime in order to argue that what he's doing isn't immoral. Bryon later concludes that Mark has no sense of right and wrong whatsoever, and that's why he doesn't think rules are important.

Bryon, on the other hand, dispenses with the morality of the crime entirely and instead focuses on the potential consequences of Mark's crime if he is caught. Yet neither he nor Mark acknowledges that Mark's crimes have consequences on *other* people. But over time, as Bryon becomes more aware of the ramifications of his and Mark's actions on others, he comes to appreciate that rules exist primarily to protect potential victims of crimes from harm—not to protect criminals from punishment. This exchange also illustrates Bryon's selfishness, as he and Mark think only of themselves. Even Bryon's concern for Mark doesn't truly amount to selflessness, because Bryon views Mark essentially as an extension of himself. That Mark can read Bryon's mind reinforces the idea that they're one entity with a shared perspective.

This passage also establishes cars as a central symbol—for Mark, they represent his immaturity and inability to grow up. Driving entails both a greater degree of freedom for teenagers as well as a greater sense of responsibility. However, Mark doesn't treat cars with a sense of responsibility; rather than trying to save up to buy a car himself, he instead chooses to steal them.

☝ Mark suddenly poked me. "You still in the mood for a little action?"

"Sure," I said. Mark motioned toward the next intersection. There was a black guy standing there, waiting for the light to change. "We could jump him," Mark said, but suddenly M&M spoke up.

"You make me sick! You just rescued me from some guys who were going to beat me up because I'm different from them, and now you're going to beat up someone because he's different from you. You think I'm weird—well, you're the weird ones."

Related Characters: M&M Carlson, Mark Jennings, Bryon

Douglas (speaker), Mike Chambers, Curly Shepard

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 23

Explanation and Analysis

After Mark and Bryon save M&M from being beaten up by Curly Shepard, they consider beating up a black guy who is simply standing on the street corner. This exchange captures several ways in which violence operates in the society of the novel. First, they have just finished defending M&M from Curly and other guys by pinning them to the ground and twisting their arms. Even though they were trying to prevent the other boys from harming M&M, they still had to enact violence in order to do so, illustrating how violence only breeds more violence.



Yet here Mark and Bryon also show that they, too, view violence as a source of fun. There's no reason to beat up the guy on the corner—they are simply bored and looking for “action” as a way to entertain themselves, inspired (if unconsciously) by Curly's actions. M&M, who is an advocate for nonviolence, points out the hypocrisy of their attitudes. In this moment, he equates Mark and Bryon with Curly; he argues that if people didn't needlessly instigate violence, there would be no need to put themselves in danger to defend people like M&M and cause further violence. Thus, foregoing violence in the first place is the only real solution.

Hinton supports this argument later in the novel, when another boy named Mike Chambers explains that he was beaten up by a group of black men because he is white—these men wanted to get revenge for past abuse from white people. In showing that Bryon and Mark want to attack this man because he is black, Hinton ties these two incidents together and suggests that if people like Bryon and Mark didn't use violence for entertainment, they wouldn't fuel the hatred and desire for revenge that spurs even more violence.

Chapter 2 Quotes

☝☝ I was the hustler and Mark was the thief. We were a great pair. One thing about it, though. Mark couldn't see anything wrong with stealing stuff. I could. It didn't much matter to me whether or not Mark was a thief, but I still felt that stealing was wrong—at least it's against the law. I think Mark was only dimly aware of that fact. Stealing was a game to him, something to do for fun and profit, and he was careful not to get caught because that was one of the rules.

Related Characters: Bryon Douglas (speaker), Bryon's Mother, Mark Jennings

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 25-26

Explanation and Analysis

After Bryon's mother has an operation, Mark (who lives with Bryon and his mother) starts to bring in some money to pay for it. Bryon simply assumes that Mark stole the money, and his thoughts here summarize the difference between his and Mark's views on morality and rules. Here, Bryon demonstrates that Mark doesn't recognize the immorality of stealing, which is supported by Mark's statement in the previous chapter that hot-wiring cars is “borrowing” rather than stealing. While Mark does recognize that there are consequences for his actions, Bryon implies that Mark cares more about the consequences for himself than the consequences for others—he's only worried about the ramifications of getting caught, not the potential impact that stealing could have on his victims.

Bryon, on the other hand, takes a slightly different position. At this point in the book, Bryon is relatively indifferent to the impact of Mark's thefts. In saying that they are a “great pair” as a hustler and a thief, Bryon even suggests that their crimes add to their brotherly bond—they are literally partners in crime. However, even though Bryon isn't fully able to appreciate the ramifications of their actions on others yet, Bryon (unlike Mark) can still discern that stealing violates a rule or moral code that shouldn't be broken.

☝☝ As we got into the elevator Mark said, “I'm inclined to agree with his old man. That is one stupid guy.”

“You mean it?” I said. I had been thinking about Mike's story, and I could see his point about not hating the people who beat him up.

“Yeah, I mean it. Man, if anybody ever hurt me like that I'd hate them for the rest of my life.”

I didn't think much about that statement then. But later I would—I still do. I think about it and think about it until I think I'm going crazy.

Related Characters: Bryon Douglas, Mark Jennings (speaker), Tim Shepard, Curly Shepard, Connie, Mike Chambers

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 41-42

Explanation and Analysis

After Bryon and Mark listen to Mike Chambers's story in the hospital, they reflect on how they might feel in the same situation. Their exchange, which heavily foreshadows future events in the book, begins to track Bryon's coming-of-age process. Mark, on the other hand, remains immature and self-assured as ever.


According to Mike's story, a black girl named Connie told a group of men to beat Mike up despite his having saved her from his friends' harassment. Following this event, Mike comes to a mature conclusion, explaining that he doesn't hate Connie or the others. This implies that he understands violence only perpetuates violence, and that seeking revenge would only fuel further hatred and violent incidents. Bryon's empathy for Mike's perspective foreshadows the fact that Bryon will feel the same way after Curly and Tim Shepard beat him up for something he did not do later in the book. Mark, on the other hand, does not come to the same conclusion, desperate to get revenge on the two brothers. Thus, their different perspectives here foreshadow their divergent actions later on—reflecting Bryon's maturity and Mark's inability to mature.

This passage also foreshadows the climax of the book, particularly because it includes a time jump in Bryon's narration. Here, it becomes clear that Bryon is reflecting on this episode from an unspecified time in the future—and while he may not have thought much of Mark's words in the past, they now plague him. This foreshadows Bryon's eventual betrayal of Mark—and Bryon lamenting that because he hurt Mark so deeply, their bond is irreparably shattered.

Chapter 3 Quotes

●● I stopped breathing for a second. Cathy was looking at Mark, and I suddenly felt like I'd swallowed a spoonful of red pepper. I felt cold and hot and sick and mad all at once. I only felt it for a second, only for a second and then it was gone—but sometimes now I wonder how it would be to feel like that all your life. You know what the crummiest feeling you can have is? To hate the person you love best in the world.

Related Characters: Bryon Douglas (speaker), Mark Jennings, Cathy Carlson

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 55

Explanation and Analysis

When Bryon and Cathy go to their first dance together, Cathy comments off-handedly that Mark is very attractive. Bryon's resulting spark of jealousy illustrates his deep feelings of betrayal at Cathy's words. Interestingly, however, Bryon's anger and hatred are not directed at Cathy for making the comments; instead, they are directed at Mark—"the person he loves best in the world"—as Bryon is repulsed by the idea that Mark could end up with a girl whom Bryon likes. In this way, Hinton illustrates that betrayals among brothers are felt so deeply because they subvert the mutual loyalty and trust that they've built. Additionally, Bryon's subtle time jump in his narration foreshadows his own betrayal of Mark. He wonders "now"—at some point in the future—what it might feel like to carry this kind of hatred throughout one's life, as Mark will after Bryon turns him in for his crimes later on in the book.

The diction that Hinton uses illustrates the severity of Bryon's feelings of betrayal, even while Mark is ignorant of this entire incident. The simile of swallowing a spoonful of pepper, and the fact that Bryon stops breathing, both connote choking. These figures of speech imply that the situation is so out of character for his and Mark's relationship that it is as if Bryon cannot perform life's most basic functions. Thus, maintaining a sense of trust in Mark is crucial to Bryon's well-being at this point; losing that loyalty would be painful and tantamount to being unable to breathe.

●● Y'know, when I first came around tonight, after that kid cracked me, I was scared stiff. I thought I was dyin', I was so scared. I really felt weird. But after I got to thinkin' you were there with me, I calmed down. Bryon, you're the only family I got, you know that? I mean, your mom's been great to me and everything, but I don't feel like she's really my old lady. But I feel like you're my brother. A real one.

Related Characters: Mark Jennings (speaker), Bryon's Mother, Bryon Douglas

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 63

Explanation and Analysis

When Bryon and Mark return home after Mark gets 10 stitches in his head, Mark tells Bryon how much he values

Bryon's friendship and support. Mark's speech emphasizes the many ways in which Bryon upholds their brotherly bond. Bryon is there as physical support, taking Mark to the hospital and riding with him in the ambulance. But he also emotionally supports Mark, as he makes Mark feel comforted and safe even under potentially dire circumstances. The notoriously tough Mark is able to admit how vulnerable he was, and how deeply he appreciates what Bryon has done for him, which also speaks to the strength of their bond.

Additionally, in making the distinction between Bryon and his mother's support for Mark, Hinton emphasizes how important his bond with Bryon specifically is. Knowing that Bryon has his back makes Mark feel that he has the same protection a biological family would provide. In this way, Hinton demonstrates how valuable brotherhood is for Mark, particularly because he has no other family on whom he can rely.

Chapter 4 Quotes


☝☝ “Yeah, but still, don't you kinda miss that one-for-all, all-for-one routine? It's kinda sad, really, when you get to where you don't need a gang—I mean, like you did before.”

“It's kind of a good thing too,” I said, “when you know your own personality so you don't need the one the gang makes for you.”

“Yeah,” Mark sighed, “but there's a difference. I wonder what the difference is?”

“The difference is,” I said evenly, “that was then, and this is now.”

Related Characters: Bryon Douglas, Mark Jennings (speaker)

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 69

Explanation and Analysis

When Mark is recovering from his head injury, he and Bryon reminisce about their childhood together, and Mark laments that they aren't as close with some of the other boys they used to hang around with. This passage displays Bryon and Mark's diverging attitudes toward growing up: Mark wishes to return to their old childhood dynamic, particularly the ability to simply mess around with a group of guys. Mark's reference to the “one-for-all, all-for-one” motto—made famous by Alexandre Dumas's *The Three Musketeers*—suggests that he wants to preserve the same swashbuckling antics and brotherly bonds as the main

characters of that novel.



Bryon, on the other hand, sees some of the benefits of growing up. He doesn't need the cockiness of the gang; he wants to be more independent and take more responsibility for his own identity and personality. For Bryon, change and growing up are inevitable—as implied by the titular phrase, “that was then, and this is now.” The difference in their attitudes here is characteristic of their journeys over the course of the book. Bryon is able to grow up because of his growing humility and responsibility, but because Mark clings to his childhood, he's unable to truly come of age.

☝☝ “Shut up, O.K.? As long as they ain't doin' nothin' to you, it's O.K. I guess you can get away with anything.”

Mark leaned back in his chair. The sun came through the small kitchen window and glinted on his eyes, turning them a bright yellow. “I guess so,” Mark said. He smiled, like an innocent lion.

Related Characters: Mark Jennings, Bryon Douglas (speaker)

Related Themes: 

Related Symbols:  

Page Number: 75

Explanation and Analysis

When Mark steals the principal's car, Bryon is furious with him for opening himself up to harsh punishment. Their subsequent exchange reinforces Mark's lack of taking responsibility, as he's completely unbothered by his flagrant disregard for the rules. The fact that Mark leans back in his chair and smiles in this moment—despite Bryon's frustration—gives him an air of nonchalance. His actions could have had severe consequences for the principal, for himself, or for Bryon if Mark had been taken to jail and Bryon had lost his best friend—but Mark is completely ignorant of that potential harm.

Bryon concedes that as long as Mark got away with the crime, everything is fine—yet Hinton's choice of words belies Bryon's simmering anger and a shift in how he thinks about Mark's crimes. Hinton's return to the image of the “innocent lion” illustrates that while Mark may maintain a degree of innocence, Bryon recognizes that he is not entirely harmless and can even be quite dangerous. Bryon's shortness with Mark and the added, “I guess,” also imply that Bryon is resentful of Mark's ability to get away with anything, because this ability only reinforces Mark's

behavior. This is perhaps one of the ultimate motivating factors for Bryon to turn Mark in for his crimes at the end of the novel—in that moment, he hopes that he can get Mark to recognize the consequences of his actions for others and for himself.

Chapter 5 Quotes

☝☝ Mark didn't understand and Cathy did. I started spending more and more time with Cathy. Since I had the car, we went for a lot of drives and got a lot of Cokes together. We were always talking to each other about the way we felt—I tried telling her how I felt about Charlie, about how shook the whole thing had me. [...] I could talk to her about anything, talk to her better than I could anyone, even Mark.

After a few weeks we'd drive by the park and make out for a little while. It was different for me though, because I had quit thinking only about myself, quit pushing for all I could get.

Related Characters: Bryon Douglas (speaker), Charlie, Cathy Carlson, Mark Jennings

Related Themes:    

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 87

Explanation and Analysis

After Charlie's death, Bryon grows closer with Cathy, particularly because she understands Bryon's guilt over his involvement in Charlie's death. This passage reinforces Bryon's growth across several dimensions of his life: faced with the reality that breaking the rules led to fatal consequences for Charlie, Bryon takes responsibility for what happened and finally recognizes the importance of rules. Gaining Charlie's car adds to this maturity. When Charlie loaned the car to Bryon earlier in the book, it symbolized Bryon's developing responsibility. Here, that symbolism is reinforced because Bryon's ownership of the car is correlated with his newfound sense of responsibility for his actions. Additionally, Bryon's deepening love for Cathy is naturally leading him to be less selfish, as he notes the change in his behavior toward her versus how he's treated other girls in the past. This represents a dramatic shift for Bryon, as he focuses not only on his desires but also on Cathy's perspective.

Yet while Bryon is changing for the better in certain aspects of his life, he notes that his relationship with Mark has changed for the worse. Because Mark is unable to share the

humility and responsibility for Charlie's death, Mark is not following Bryon's trajectory in coming of age. As a result, Bryon recognizes, the two are growing apart—even to the point where Bryon feels closer to Cathy than he does to Mark, who has up to this point always shared his viewpoints. This foreshadows the eventual break in their brotherly bond, because they no longer share the same unconditional loyalty that they once enjoyed with each other.

Chapter 6 Quotes

☝☝ Mom had to stay in bed for a month, so we were really getting hard up for money. I got to thinking about what Charlie had said when I asked him for a job. I decided I needed a haircut, clean clothes, and a really big change in attitude. I've told you that I don't like authority. This gives people the impression that I'm a smart-aleck kid. I'll admit I'm pretty mouthy. I got to thinking, Who's going to hire a mouthy kid who acts like he already knows it all?

Related Characters: Bryon Douglas (speaker), Charlie, Bryon's Mother

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 90

Explanation and Analysis


Following Charlie's death, Bryon's mom returns home from the hospital, and Bryon realizes that he needs to take his job search seriously. Here, Bryon reaches a turning point in his coming of age: he illustrates a growth in responsibility and humility, both of which are key to Bryon's maturation. First, Bryon takes responsibility for his actions and his family's well-being, knowing that he has to provide for his mother when she cannot provide for him. He sacrifices some of his independence and tough reputation in order to prioritize what his mother needs. This reinforces Bryon's maturity, as well as the fact that loving and respecting his mother leads him to act more selflessly.

Second, Bryon also exhibits a great deal of humility. At the beginning of the novel, Bryon wasn't able to fully take heed of Charlie's advice to examine why he might not be able to get a job. But here, he is finally able to take that advice to heart, be less arrogant, and recognize the aspects of himself that he has to change in order to be hired. In doing so, Bryon sees that part of the problem is his arrogant attitude, lack of regard for authority, and insistence on talking back. Soon after, Bryon is hired at a supermarket and takes those first key steps into adulthood, reinforcing the idea that only

through humility and responsibility is Bryon able to grow up.

☛ I looked across the street, watching some little twelve- and thirteen-year-old teeny-boppers make fools of themselves—smoking, trying to act cool, pushing each other, screaming and swearing so loud I could hear them. I had a sudden recollection of Mark and me at twelve, smoking our heads off, clowning around, hoping someone—usually some little long-haired chick—would notice us and see how cool we were. All of a sudden it seemed like I was a hundred years old, or thirty at least. I wondered if, when I got to be twenty, I would think how stupid I was at sixteen. When I remembered us, it didn't seem possible that we had looked as silly as these teenyboppers, but I guess we had. At least then we weren't worried about looking silly. We were sure of ourselves, so sure we were the coolest things to hit town. Now I wasn't so sure.

Related Characters: Bryon Douglas (speaker), Mark Jennings, M&M Carlson, Cathy Carlson

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 100

Explanation and Analysis

As Bryon is driving with Cathy and M&M, he observes young kids smoking across the street and remembers himself and Mark at that age. This reflection exhibits some of the humility Bryon has gained, and how that humility has been key to his maturation. He recognizes the foolhardiness that accompanies youth: the kids are “trying” to act cool, which implies that they are not succeeding. They are also so wrapped up in what they're doing that they don't care if others see them pushing each other or hear them swearing, highlighting their confidence and self-centeredness. But in observing how silly they look, Bryon implies that he has moved beyond their immaturity.

Rather than confidently asserting that there's no way he and Mark could have looked as silly at that age as these kids do, Bryon humbly admits that they probably did. Bryon even understands that this humility is a marker of his maturity. While at 12 he was confident, he isn't as sure of himself now that he has grown up a bit. Lastly, in leaving open the possibility that at 20, he might think how stupid he was at 16, Bryon acknowledges his own ignorance and the fact that he still has a lot of learning and growing to do.

Chapter 7 Quotes

☛ “Nothing bad happens to you when you're a kid. Or haven't you realized that?”

“Youth is free from worry,” I said sarcastically. “You've been listenin' to too many adults.”


“I don't worry. I'm never scared of nothing, and I never will be,” Mark said, “as long as I'm a kid.”

“You can get away with anything,” I said, because that phrase came through my head whenever I really thought about Mark.

“Yeah, I can.” He was quiet. “You used to be able to.”

I looked at him, and suddenly it was like seeing someone across a deep pit, someone you couldn't ever reach.

Related Characters: Bryon Douglas, Mark Jennings (speaker), Charlie, M&M Carlson

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 106



Explanation and Analysis

Following M&M's disappearance, Mark tells Bryon that the Carlsons shouldn't worry because he's a kid, and nothing bad happens to kids. The ensuing exchange between Mark and Bryon encapsulates how Mark's coming-of-age journey is completely different from Bryon's in that Mark essentially refuses to grow up. Mark implies here that the difference between an adult and a kid is that nothing bad happens to kids, and they can get away with anything. Yet the novel has shown many times that this isn't true: Mark became an orphan at nine years old; he is on probation for hot-wiring cars; he was almost killed in a fight at a party; and he watched Charlie die. The book will further reinforce this point when Bryon finds M&M having a bad drug trip, illustrating once more that kids *can* have harmful, life-altering experiences just like adults can.

Instead, Hinton suggests that the difference between a kid and an adult is that kids maintain the arrogance that nothing bad can happen to them, regardless of whether this is true. Mark clearly retains this feeling of invincibility, and accordingly he doesn't grow up or take on responsibility. Bryon, on the other hand, knows that he has moved beyond this confidence. The metaphor of the chasm signifies the distance between the boys in emotional maturity: Bryon, unlike Mark, recognizes that bad things can happen to him, and this humility enables him to grow up.

“You can’t walk through your whole life saying ‘If. You can’t keep trying to figure out why things happen, man. That’s what old people do. That’s when you can’t get away with things any more. You gotta just take things as they come, and quit trying to reason them out. Bryon, you never used to wonder about things. Man, I been gettin’ worried about you. You start wonderin’ why, and you get old. Lately, I felt like you were leavin’ me, man. You used to have all the answers.”

Related Characters: Mark Jennings (speaker), Charlie, Bryon Douglas

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 117

Explanation and Analysis

On the night when Bryon gets drunk, he again expresses his guilt over Charlie’s death, wishing that things could have happened differently. Mark’s monologue in response underscores the idea that growing up entails taking responsibility and exhibiting humility. Here, Bryon is taking responsibility for what happened to Charlie, knowing that he was partly to blame for what happened because he was hustling. Bryon also shows his humility: as Mark states here, Bryon no longer has all the answers—or the self-confidence to *pretend* that he has all the answers. Instead, he is genuinely trying to understand why things happened in the way that they did, while Mark essentially argues that it is better to be willfully ignorant because it enables them not to worry about their fun and reckless lifestyle.

Both boys are trying to deal with changes in their lives. Amid that struggle, Bryon is able to grow up because he humbles himself and takes responsibility for his actions. Mark, on the other hand, never matures because he refuses to take these steps. Notably, the more Bryon comes of age, the more the boys grow apart—Mark feels as though Bryon is “leaving” him. Thus, the differences in their coming-of-age processes compound the changes that are happening in their personal lives. It even makes Mark feel as though Bryon is betraying their friendship by growing up, because they no longer share the same worldview.

Chapter 8 Quotes

“I don’t want anybody to fight the Shepards.”
“What?”

“I don’t want to keep this up, this getting-even jazz. It’s stupid and I’m sick of it and it keeps going in circles. I have had it—so if you’re planning any get-even mugging, forget it.”

Related Characters: Mark Jennings, Bryon Douglas (speaker), Mike Chambers, Ponyboy Curtis, Angela Shepard, Tim Shepard, Curly Shepard

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 129

Explanation and Analysis



After Curly and Tim Shepard attack Bryon, Bryon tells Mark that he doesn’t want anyone to get revenge on the Shepards for him. This is a big shift for Bryon, and the abnormality of his request is made clear by Mark’s incredulity. He is used to this kind of “getting-even” dynamic—after all, it was Mark’s revenge that perpetuated the cycle. When Angela convinced a kid to attack Curtis and the kid ended up hitting Mark, it was Mark’s decision to cut off Angela’s hair in response, which then led Tim and Curly to attack Bryon. Violence begets violence, and Mark understands that this is simply the norm. Additionally, Mark’s surprise likely stems from the fact that he views it as his brotherly duty to get even with the Shepards. Part of Mark and Bryon’s bond lies in their ability to protect each other physically, and so not being able to get revenge for Bryon (particularly because he was being punished for *Mark’s* actions) further undermines the loyalty and brotherhood that they have built.

While Bryon understands that getting revenge for violence is standard practice in their lives, his recognition of this cycle that leads him to want to stop it. Like Mike Chambers, Bryon doesn’t hate the people who beat him up; he knows that hating them would only fuel the cycle of violence that Bryon describes here. In Mike’s case, the impulse to nonviolence didn’t necessarily stop him from getting beaten up—but the fact that Bryon makes this same mature resolution further endorses this intention as the morally right choice. Nonviolence may not always end the cycle of revenge, but Bryon understand that the alternative will only perpetuate it.

Chapter 9 Quotes

“Cathy, I am really glad you are here,” I said. “I love you.”
“O.K.,” she sobbed. “O.K.” Then she reached over and held my hand. I took a quivering breath and looked at the ceiling. That hadn’t been so hard after all. If I could do that, maybe there were a few other things I could take care of.

Related Characters: Cathy Carlson, Bryon Douglas (speaker), Charlie

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 133

Explanation and Analysis

After the Shepards attack Bryon, Cathy comes to visit Bryon in his home, and he is finally able to express his love for her. This confession reinforces Bryon's newfound maturity, as it represents another act of selflessness: he is making himself vulnerable in order to tell Cathy how much he cares about her and to make her feel good, particularly in a circumstance when he can tell she is upset. Additionally, Bryon previously stated that he frequently lied for selfish gain—particularly when telling girls that he loved them when he really didn't. Here, he is finally able to be sincere and humble with his words—a big change for someone who has historically been self-assured and sarcastic.


Bryon's ability to tell Cathy that he loves her also prompts him to be even more responsible. Bryon implies here that he has "other things" to take care of, and it soon becomes clear that he means visiting Charlie's grave and thanking him for saving his life. Thus, the ability to be sincere with Cathy inspires Bryon to be sincere and take responsibility in other aspects of his life, demonstrating how taking the first baby steps into adulthood can help spur even bigger and more meaningful steps.

☝ "It's O.K., kid, you're going to be O.K."

"Where am I?" he was screaming in terror. "Why don't I know where I am?"

I was just sick. I didn't know how Cathy was managing to drive the car. I never felt so bad before. I just held onto M&M. There wasn't any sense in trying to talk to him. I felt then that he was as much my little brother as Cathy's. That's how bad I felt.

Related Characters: M&M Carlson, Bryon Douglas (speaker), Cathy Carlson

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 141

Explanation and Analysis

Cathy and Bryon discover M&M on a bad drug trip in a hippie house and immediately drive him to the hospital. Bryon's actions and thoughts illustrate how he acts selflessly not only for Cathy, but for those she loves as well. Bryon carries M&M into the car and holds him while Cathy drives—an intimate action that reflects his genuine care for

M&M. Bryon is so invested in Cathy's needs that this naturally motivates him to care about the things that she cares about—he even thinks of M&M as his own little brother.

The trauma of witnessing M&M's terrifying drug trip is also what spurs Bryon to turn on Mark in the following chapter. Because Mark doesn't fully appreciate the consequences that his drug-dealing can have on someone who is buying his drugs—say, a bad trip like M&M's or an overdose—Mark feels relatively unbothered by his actions. Bryon, on the other hand, is viscerally aware of the consequences that Mark's actions could have on someone. In turning Mark in to the police, he hopes that he can make Mark appreciate how rule-breaking can cause widespread harm both for victims of crimes (like M&M) and criminals like Mark.

Chapter 10 Quotes

☝☝ "Is that what's buggin' you? Listen, I didn't sell M&M anything. He got it from somebody else. Lookit, Bryon, they're going to get it from somebody if they want it, so why can't I make some money? I never forced it on anybody. I never tried to talk somebody into using drugs so I could make a buck."

He could have talked all night and I wouldn't have changed my mind.

Related Characters: Bryon Douglas, Mark Jennings (speaker), M&M Carlson

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 147

Explanation and Analysis



Bryon confronts Mark about selling drugs, and Mark tries to justify his behavior. Mark refuses to acknowledge the ramifications of his actions on others or take any responsibility at all, whereas Bryon has seen firsthand the damage that a bad drug trip had on M&M. Even though Mark claims that he didn't sell drugs to M&M directly, Bryon still implicates him in the crime because he knows that Mark could just as easily have harmed another kid who bought drugs from him. Mark did not see M&M's terrifying experience, and he remains willfully ignorant of those potential consequences. Instead, he cares only about himself and his ability to make money.

Bryon's assertion that Mark could have talked all night and wouldn't have changed Bryon's mind underscores that this is a breaking point in Bryon and Mark's relationship.

Previously, Bryon stated that Mark could have talked anyone into anything, and Mark's dialogue here is characteristically smooth and appeasing. But Bryon is no longer subject to Mark's charms—instead, Bryon exhibits a greater maturity and awareness of Mark, seeing through his appeals and recognizing that they are self-serving.

●● I wondered tiredly why I had never seen it before: Mark had absolutely no concept of what was right and what was wrong; he didn't obey any laws, because he couldn't see that there were any. Laws, right and wrong, they didn't matter to Mark, because they were just words.

Related Characters: Bryon Douglas (speaker), Charlie, M&M Carlson, Mark Jennings

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 147

Explanation and Analysis

After Mark tries to justify selling drugs to kids, Bryon comes to the revelation that Mark has absolutely no sense of morality. Hinton set up a difference between Mark and Bryon's views on right and wrong from the beginning: even when Bryon didn't take issue with Mark's stealing, he still saw that the laws were in place for a reason and that there is a moral code underlying them. After witnessing the severe consequences that breaking rules had on Charlie and M&M's lives, Bryon only gains a deeper appreciation for following the rules. Rules are meant to serve and protect a community—certainly to protect a kid like M&M from being able to buy and take harmful drugs. But because Mark doesn't care about anyone but himself, the rules are unnecessary to him.

Bryon even connects Mark's ignorance of the rules to his own confidence and ability to talk himself out of anything. His assertion that Mark doesn't see that there are any laws is a bit of hyperbole—but Bryon's underlying point is that because Mark is able to easily manipulate people through words, he views laws as just another set of words to manipulate for his own gain. Bryon, on the other hand, has a firmer grasp of morality—he cares about others and understands that breaking rules can have dire consequences.

Chapter 11 Quotes

●● "...you straighten up and they'll let you out early on probation or parole or whatever it is, and you can come home. I'll get you a job at the store—"

"Like hell you will [...] I ain't never goin' back there again. When I get outa here, you ain't never going to see me again."


"We were like brothers," I said, desperate. "You were my best friend—"

He laughed then, and his eyes were the golden, hard, flat eyes of a jungle animal. "Like a friend once said to me, 'That was then, and this is now.'"

I broke out in a sweat and was suddenly glad of the walls and the guards and the bars. I think if he could have, Mark would have killed me.

Related Characters: Mark Jennings, Bryon Douglas (speaker)

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 151

Explanation and Analysis

When Bryon visits Mark in the state reformatory, he tries to convince Mark to straighten out so that he can get out early on parole and Bryon can then find him a job. Mark's dismissive attitude toward Bryon's idea shows that even in jail, Mark does not fully appreciate the fact that he has done something wrong. Rather than trying to better himself and become a productive member of society, Mark instead focuses on Bryon's betrayal. Bryon's affirmation that Mark was his brother once gave Mark great comfort—but now, Mark laughs derisively at the statement. Additionally, Mark's repetition of Bryon's titular statement, "that was then, and this is now," suggests that their relationship is irreparably damaged—part of an irretrievable past. Even Bryon inadvertently indicates that their relationship is in the past, as he uses the past tense to refer to it. Bryon's betrayal and Mark's obvious hatred illustrate that when brotherhood is undermined, it is difficult—if not impossible—to rebuild.


Furthermore, Bryon's reference to the "hard, flat eyes of a jungle animal" calls up the metaphor of the lion once more. Bryon has already described Mark as a "dangerous, caged animal," and this description adds to the image of Mark as laid bare for what he is: dangerous, wild, and predatory, to the point where Bryon thinks Mark wants to kill him. That

Bryon is grateful for the guards and the bars underscores that he no longer feels protected by Mark; instead, he needs to be protected *from* him. Because each of them has violated the unspoken contract of their brotherhood, they have permanently destroyed the loyalty and care that previously defined their relationship.

●● Mostly I wonder “what if?” What if I had found out about Mark some other time, when I wasn’t half out of my mind with worry about Cathy? What if I hadn’t met her in the first place, would I still have grown away from Mark? What if M&M had had a good trip instead of a bad one? What if someone else had turned Mark in—would there still be hope for him?

I am too mixed up to really care. And to think, I used to be sure of things. Me, once I had all the answers. I wish I was a kid again, when I had all the answers.

Related Characters: Mark Jennings, Bryon Douglas (speaker), M&M Carlson, Cathy Carlson

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 159

Explanation and Analysis

In the final passage of the novel, Bryon reflects on how he might have changed the events of the previous year. In Bryon’s rhetorical questions, his repeated use of “what if?” harkens back to Mark’s earlier statement, in which he says that wondering “if” is characteristic of “old people.” Trying to figure out why things happen is counter to Mark’s take-life-as-it-comes attitude, and it places a greater sense of responsibility on Bryon’s shoulders. He knows that so much of what happened is based on chance, but he also realizes that much of it was also based on his actions—like dating Cathy, finding the drugs that Mark was selling, and turning Mark in. Thus, Bryon concludes the story by showcasing his maturity: he is now closer to the attitude of the “old people” Mark referenced than to the flippant attitude that he and Mark used to share.

Indeed, the final lines of the book reinforce the idea that Bryon is no longer a child. In wishing that he were a kid “again,” Bryon suggests that he has moved on completely from the innocence of adolescence. He no longer has all the answers, nor does he have the self-assurance to *think* that he has all the answers. Rather, he has a greater sense of humility and a greater understanding of the world’s complexity. In this way, Hinton once again affirms that because Bryon has been able to achieve this self-awareness and responsibility, he is able to come of age and move into adulthood.



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.

CHAPTER 1

Sixteen-year-old Bryon Douglas and his 15-year-old friend Mark go to a nearby bar in order to hustle people at pool. It's against the law to be in the bar because they're underage, but Bryon is friends with the bartender and owner of the place, Charlie, who helps them avoid the police. Bryon enters the bar and asks Charlie for a Coke. Charlie says that Bryon and Mark have run up a \$3 tab, and so he refuses to give Bryon any more Cokes until they pay—or he'll beat it out of them. Bryon grows nervous, knowing that Charlie is a tough guy and isn't kidding.

Mark comes up to the bar after looking around and tells Bryon that there aren't any guys they can hustle that day. Charlie warns the boys that one day they'll get in trouble when someone figures out their scheme. Mark dismisses him and asks for a Coke. Charlie repeats what he said to Bryon, and Mark says that if Charlie gives them the Cokes now, they will pay him tomorrow. Charlie agrees to this proposal but says that if he doesn't get the money by the following day, he will come looking for them. Bryon observes that Mark has a gift for getting away with anything and for talking people into anything.

Charlie then tells Bryon and Mark that their friend M&M came in earlier looking for them, so the two boys finish their Cokes and leave to find M&M. Outside, Bryon asks how Mark is going to acquire the \$3 to pay Charlie, and Mark replies that he doesn't know. Bryon is frustrated, thinking that Mark is always pulling these kinds of stunts. Mark has lived with Bryon and Bryon's mother since he was nine years old and Bryon was 10, after Mark's parents shot and killed each other during a drunken argument. For their whole lives, he and Mark have always been best friends and have never had a fight.

Hinton establishes two key aspects of her main characters' lives: first, she illustrates that Bryon and Mark have little regard for rules. Not only do they sneak into bars when they are underage, but they also engage in schemes like swindling people at pool. Second, she shows how violence permeates their lives: Charlie's warning suggests that in their world, violence (and a reputation for being tough) is used as a tool to gain status and keep people to their word.



Because of Mark's ability to get away with anything, breaking the rules comes naturally to him. He dismisses any potential consequences for his actions, particularly because he focuses solely on himself rather than how his actions might affect others. This attitude characterizes Mark (and Bryon, as his accomplice) as selfish and very sure of themselves despite their youth—an outlook that's fairly typical of teenagers. However, Charlie's warning foreshadows that the boys may not be able to be reckless forever—at some point, they will realize that their actions have consequences for both themselves and other people.



Bryon and Mark are not just friends but are essentially brothers. This is true not only because they live together, but also because their bonds of loyalty have always precluded any conflict between them. Yet the fact that Bryon is somewhat annoyed at Mark for lying to Charlie hints that Bryon is more attuned to his sense of right and wrong than Mark is, and that he isn't as sure of being able to get away with things as Mark is.



Bryon explains that in looks, he and Mark are opposites: Bryon has dark hair, dark eyes, and is a large guy. Mark, on the other hand, is small and compact, with golden eyes and hair and a grin like that of “a friendly **lion**.” Bryon thinks of Mark as a brother.

Bryon explicitly confirms the idea that he and Mark are brothers because of their friendship and shared loyalty, even though they are not related by blood. Additionally, Bryon’s description of Mark as a lion will be repeated throughout the novel—and the metaphor will develop in turn with Bryon’s changing opinions of Mark. The phrase “friendly lion” is a kind of paradox, given that lions are known for being ferocious predators. This foreshadows the possibility that Mark won’t always be so friendly and hints at his underlying predatory nature.



Bryon and Mark walk around looking for M&M, feeling the cool air of the fall evening. Bryon and Mark find M&M reading in a drug store. M&M is 13 years old, and Bryon describes him as serious, trusting, very nice, and “a little strange.” M&M has dark hair down to his eyebrows and wears a metal peace symbol on a string around his neck. His nickname stems from his addiction to M&M’s—he always has the candy with him.

Although Bryon, Mark, and M&M are all friends, Bryon establishes some of the key differences between the two boys and M&M. While Bryon and Mark are tough ruler-breakers, M&M’s peace necklace indicates that he’s a nonviolent kid. It is also worth noting that Bryon’s choice of the phrase “a little strange,” along with other descriptions of M&M throughout the book, imply that M&M is socially challenged to some degree.



Mark asks M&M why he was looking for them, but M&M can’t remember. Then, M&M tells them that his sister Cathy is home: she went away to private school the previous year, but she had to come home because she ran out of money to pay for it. Bryon and Mark then decide to head to the bowling alley, and M&M tags along. As they walk, Bryon wishes inwardly that he had a **car**. As though reading Bryon’s mind, Mark says that he could hot-wire a car. M&M says that this would be a bad thing to do, as stealing is wrong. Mark replies that it’s not stealing—it’s just “borrowing.” Mark is on probation for hot-wiring cars, however, and so Bryon warns him against it.

Mark can seemingly read Bryon’s mind, which reinforces Bryon and Mark’s strong bond. This also serves as further evidence for Bryon and Mark’s selfishness: even though they look out for each other, they treat each other essentially as extensions of themselves and care little for anyone else. Lastly, Mark is further characterized as a rule-breaker who downplays the severity of his crimes—even while M&M asserts that stealing is immoral. Mark fails to appreciate the consequences of his actions, as Bryon has to remind him that he could get in trouble for hot-wiring a car.



Mark started hot-wiring **cars** and driving them when he was 12 years old; after a few years of doing this, he was finally caught. Bryon was worried that Mark was going to be sent to a boys’ home because he didn’t have a real family. That didn’t happen, however—Bryon thinks that Mark always comes through everything “untouched, unworried, unaffected.”

Bryon recognizes that Mark ignores the rules precisely because he is often “untouched, unworried, and unaffected” by the illegal acts he commits—qualities that also reinforce Mark’s immaturity. Additionally, Hinton establishes cars as a symbol of recklessness and irresponsibility for Mark, as they are tied to his careless nature.



As the boys walk, M&M asks if Bryon was named after Lord Byron, mixing up the two names. Bryon jokes with M&M, reciting a dirty limerick that he knows. Mark mistakenly believes that Bryon thought up the poem on the spot, and Bryon doesn't admit to Mark that he didn't come up with it. Bryon acknowledges inwardly that he often lies if he thinks he can get away with it. He does this especially with girls, telling them that he loves them when he really doesn't. He goes out with a lot of girls and doesn't treat them very well, though he admits that his poor treatment of them doesn't bother him most of the time.

Mark then asks if M&M can lend him and Bryon any money. M&M replies that he only has 50¢, which he earns from babysitting his many younger siblings. He says that he likes babysitting and that he wants a lot of kids when he grows up. When the three boys arrive at the bowling alley, Bryon and Mark watch a few games while M&M stares at the inside of his package of M&M's candy. When Bryon asks what he's doing, M&M says he just likes the colors; then, tells them he has to go home and leaves.

Mark and Bryon soon realize that they're bored, so they decide to walk back with M&M. When they spot him walking down the street, they see that there are three guys about to jump him. The guys approach M&M, and Bryon realizes that one of them is a kid they know named Curly Shepard. Curly pulls out a switchblade and cuts off M&M's necklace. When M&M reaches down to pick it up, Curly knees M&M in the face.

Bryon and Mark both like fights; on a signal to each other, they attack the three guys. One of their opponents runs off in surprise, and the other two are disarmed in the attack. Bryon has Curly in a stranglehold, and Curly pleads with Bryon to let him go. Bryon smugly observes that Curly has a grudge against him because Bryon used to go out with Curly's sister Angela; Curly also belongs to a gang led by his brother Tim. M&M tells Bryon and Mark to let the guys go, and they do so. The two guys run away, and M&M thanks Bryon and Mark for saving him. Mark also reveals that he was able to steal \$3 from the other guys.

While Mark's rule-breaking centers on stealing, Bryon's rule breaking centers on lying. Bryon, too, fails to see the consequences of lying to girls that he dates, because he cares little about hurting their feelings. This also ties into the book's implication that loving someone naturally leads to selflessness and empathy. Bryon could not truly have loved these girls because he is unable to think about anyone besides himself, and because he cares very little about how his lies might have hurt them.



While That Was Then, This Is Now focuses on Bryon's and Mark's coming of age, M&M also goes through his own maturation. At the beginning of the book, however, he's characterized as very innocent, trusting, and self-assured. He's very serious about his wish to have lots of children as an adult despite only being 13. M&M also takes pleasure from simple things, like babysitting his younger siblings and staring at his candy package. Details like this highlight M&M's innocence in contrast to Bryon and Mark's deviancy, which may or may not cause a rift in the boys' friendship as they pursue different paths.



Violence is ubiquitous in Bryon and Mark's lives on the streets of Tulsa, Oklahoma, where the story is set. Even innocent kids like M&M are beaten up on the street for no reason—violence seems to be a source of entertainment in many of the kids' lives.



This episode illustrates another appealing aspect of violence, in addition to entertainment value: it can be used as a defense against those who are needlessly instigating fights. Yet even in defending M&M, Mark and Bryon are still hurting others—reinforcing how violence only breeds more violence, even when intended to put a stop to it. Additionally, Hinton reinforces Mark's penchant for stealing and lack of regard for the rules in highlighting his pickpocketing skills.



As Bryon, Mark, and M&M walk home, Mark points out a black guy on the corner, saying that he and Bryon could jump him. M&M protests, arguing that the boys just rescued him from being beaten up because he was different, and now Mark wants to beat up someone else for the same reason. M&M starts to cry and takes off running. Mark and Bryon conclude that M&M is upset because he was shaken up by Curly's attack.

Despite the fact that Bryon and Mark have just saved M&M from Curly's attack, they are inspired to commit their own assault. This development reiterates that violence simply leads to more violence, as young men in particular are intoxicated by the prospect of dominating others. M&M's argument suggests that the only way to stop persistent violence is to consciously choose to stop this cycle.



Mark and Bryon decide to return to Charlie's to pay him the \$3. Bryon briefly thinks about what M&M said about beating people up because they're different, knowing that there is truth in what he said. Bryon thinks that incidents like Curly jumping M&M happen every day—he doesn't mind the fights though. He walks faster to catch up with Mark, who's his best friend and his brother.

This passage foreshadows Bryon's eventual change of heart about perpetuating violence, as he acknowledges that M&M is right about the fact that they shouldn't beat people up needlessly. However, Bryon still recognizes the appeal of fighting, as fighting together seemingly adds to the protective brotherly bond between him and Mark.



CHAPTER 2

The following afternoon, Mark and Bryon go to the hospital to visit Bryon's mother. She has just had a big operation, and they sold their car and their TV to pay for it. Bryon has been trying to find a job to make more money, and Mark had scrounged up some money as well; Bryon doesn't ask where Mark got the money, figuring that he stole it. Together, Bryon notes, they make a great pair: he is the hustler, and Mark is the thief. But Bryon explains that Mark doesn't see anything wrong with stealing, while Bryon does. He says that Mark thinks stealing is only a game, and that one of the rules is to avoid getting caught.

The fact that Bryon is trying to find a job to cover the cost of his mother's operation illustrates how his love for his mother naturally grows into a desire to be more selfless, particularly at a time of great need for her. Additionally, Bryon shows that Mark doesn't care about breaking the rules—in fact, he cares more about the “rule” of not getting caught than the morality of stealing and the damage it causes for others. Bryon, on the other hand, recognizes the underlying morality of rules (despite breaking them) and realizes that stealing and hustling are wrong. But because he, like Mark, hasn't suffered any consequences for their crimes, he is relatively undisturbed by their actions as well.



Mark and Bryon hitch a ride to the hospital with a hippie named Randy. Bryon recalls a time when he and Mark beat up a couple hippies to seem tough—but they hadn't realized that the hippies wouldn't fight back. He recalls that what happened to one of the hippies they beat up made him sick, and so they left the hippies alone after that. Randy tells them about a house he lives in with friends, where anyone could come and live in peace. Bryon ignores Randy, but Mark is interested and asks Randy about the place.

Because Bryon and Mark were so disgusted by what they did when a hippie they beat up didn't fight back, they resolved not to beat up any more hippies after that. This introduces the idea that even though nonviolence doesn't always prevent violence in the moment, it can at least influence people to rethink their actions in the future.



At the hospital, Bryon's mom is glad to see Bryon and Mark. Bryon explains that as usual, his mom isn't thinking about herself: she tells them that there is a kid across the hall named Mike who never gets visitors. She asks Mark and Bryon to go see the kid so that he has someone to talk to. Mark agrees, and Bryon concedes to go with Mark. But when they leave Bryon's mom's room, Mark heads over to the kid's room, while Bryon instead goes to the snack bar to get a hamburger.

Bryon sits and eats, explaining that he loves food and can't get enough of it. He thinks that with his build, he could have gone out for football, but he knows he would never put up with a coach because he's not good at accepting authority. Once, when Bryon was 13, he went to the movies and got drunk on cherry vodka. Afterward, he staggered alone on the street until two cops picked him up, drove him to a hill on the other side of town, and beat him up—which ruined his respect for cops.

A cute girl behind the counter asks Bryon for his order. She then recognizes him and asks him how he is, saying that she just got back in town and started this new job. Bryon has trouble placing who she is at first—but after she brings him his order, he realizes that she's Cathy, M&M's older sister. He hadn't recognized her because she grew out her hair and no longer has braces. As Cathy turns away from him, Bryon asks if they can talk sometime, and she agrees. He doesn't ask when, however, as he is worried that he'll seem too eager.

After Bryon eats, he returns to his mother's floor and looks around for Mark. He then ducks into the kid's room across the hall. Mark isn't there, but Bryon starts talking to the kid, who explains that Mark went across the street to buy him some comics. The kid introduces himself as Mike Chambers, and he notes that Bryon and Mark don't look alike for being brothers. Bryon is pleased that Mark told Mike they were brothers. He and Mike share a cigarette, even though they're not supposed to smoke in the hospital.

Mike has bandages around his head, both arms in slings, and stitches in his lip. Mike tells Bryon the story of how he was hurt, explaining that one day he and his gang were hanging around a drug store when a black girl named Connie came in to buy cigarettes. The gang immediately started to harass her and push her around, but Mike had intervened, telling the others to let her go. Knowing that Mike's brother was a tough guy, the gang listened to him.

Bryon's mom is characterized as someone who puts others' needs over her own, as she's seemingly more worried about the lonely boy down the hall than she is about her own recovery. Yet even though Bryon is trying to be more selfless in his relationship with his mother—attempts to support her following her operation—he still can't help but lie about his intentions to visit Mike. Thus, even though Bryon wants to put his mother's desires over his own, at this point he is still a rather smug and self-involved kid.



Here, Bryon explains the origin of his aversion to following rules. Even though he broke the law by getting drunk at 13, the punishment was doled out harshly and unjustly, as the police were following neither morality nor the law in beating him up. It makes sense, then, that this experience led Bryon to be disillusioned with rules, as even those who ostensibly uphold those laws deviate from them. Yet in hating the police, Bryon again focuses on the consequences of his actions on himself rather than understanding how being drunk in the street could have affected others.



Bryon is charmed and even intimidated by Cathy's more grown-up appearance, which foreshadows the ways in which Cathy will help guide Bryon's own coming of age. Given that Bryon has more self-awareness than Mark does, it's likely that he'll mature faster than Mark does.



Mark again affirms the idea that he and Bryon are as close as brothers by telling Mike that they are brothers. Bryon's pleasure at the fact that Mark says this indicates that even the knowledge of their mutual bond makes him feel supported, because it proves that Mark feels exactly the same way about their relationship as Bryon does.



Mark and Bryon have emphasized that violence can be a fun distraction for them, and even here Mike reinforces that having a reputation as a tough guy can give a person higher status. But Mike's story also emphasizes that using violence as entertainment is cruel and unnecessary, as Connie didn't do anything to deserve being harassed and assaulted.



After Connie left the drug store, Mike noticed that she missed her bus, and so he offered to drive her home. She was suspicious but accepted his offer, particularly because she would have to wait an hour for the next bus, and it was getting dark. When they got in the car, Mike started talking to her to try to make her feel better. He apologized for what happened in the drug store, and Connie started to cry. He realized that she was probably fed up with getting harassed by white people. He pulled over to offer her a handkerchief, and even though he didn't have one, she thanked him.

When Mike got to Connie's house, she got out of the car, and a group of black guys surrounded him and pulled him out of the car. They asked Mike if he hurt Connie, which he adamantly denied this. When he told them to ask Connie whether he hurt her, she told the men, "kill the white bastard." Mike finishes his story by saying that he doesn't hate Connie or black people for what happened—he can almost see why they did it.

Mark returns with the comics as Mike finishes his story. Soon after, Mark and Bryon leave Mike's room, and Mark tells Bryon that he thinks Mike is pretty stupid. Bryon disagrees, thinking that he can see Mike's point about not hating the people who beat him up. Mark, however, says that if anyone hurt him like that, he would hate the person for the rest of his life. Bryon explains that he didn't think much about Mark's statement at the time, but looking back on it, it drives him crazy.

CHAPTER 3

Bryon looks all over town for a job but has no luck. He even asks Charlie if he can work at the bar, but Charlie says that he can't give Bryon a job because he's a minor. Even if Bryon was of age, Charlie says, he wouldn't hire Bryon because he lies constantly. Charlie tells Bryon that he's more inclined to trust Bryon's actions than his words, and he says that Bryon should try to figure out why he might not be able to get a job. Bryon then asks if he can borrow Charlie's **car** on Saturday night, given Charlie's statement that he trusts Bryon's actions. Charlie thinks about it and says yes, as long as he returns it with the same amount of gas. Bryon is shocked that Charlie has agreed. He's unable to say thank you, explaining that he's always had a hard time being sincere.

Mike's story also demonstrates how violence can instill hatred for entire groups of people. Regardless of whether Mike personally participated in harassing Connie, she is still suspicious of him. Mike acknowledges that this is because he belongs to a gang of white boys, and he recognizes that similar gangs had likely harassed Connie before.



Mike's resolution that he doesn't hate Connie or the people who beat him up is a key lesson in the book. While his plea for nonviolence in the drugstore doesn't prevent him from being beaten up, he still understands that if he hated Connie or sought revenge on black people at large, this would only reinforce the harmful cycle that caused him to be beaten in the first place. The book therefore takes the position that while nonviolence isn't always successful, it is worth pursuing because the alternative simply perpetuates violence.



Bryon's understanding of Mike's perspective not only illustrates his maturity, but foreshadows the fact that Bryon will come to the same conclusion later in the novel when he is the victim of violence. Additionally, Hinton includes a subtle and notable time shift here. Bryon is reflecting on Mark's statement from an unspecified time in the future—one of the few instances in the book in which this occurs. The fact that Bryon dwells on Mark's statement so heavily in the future foreshadows the fact that a similar kind betrayal and hatred may indeed befall Mark and leave a lasting impact on the two friends.



Bryon starts to take on more responsibility in his relationship with his mother, looking for a job in earnest in order to contribute to their household. This marks a growing selflessness in Bryon as he tries to support his mother and prioritize her over himself. Charlie's comments also reinforce the fact that Bryon often disregards the rules as much as Mark does, via his constant lying. But here, the symbol of cars begins to change for Bryon—Charlie's car in particular symbolizes Bryon's increasing responsibility and maturity, as he has to make sure that he returns the car to Charlie in good condition.



Bryon then leaves the bar and calls Cathy, asking her out to a dance that Saturday at the school gym. Cathy agrees. Later, Bryon asks if Mark wants to double date. Mark is surprised that Bryon is going out, remarking that Bryon hasn't gone out with a girl since Angela Shepard—whom Bryon can't stand now. Mark says he promised he'd go solo with Terry Jones, Williamson, and Ponyboy Curtis because he thought Bryon would go solo too. Bryon says he doesn't like Curtis, and Mark knows it's because Angela dumped Bryon to try and date Curtis—although Curtis ignored her.

Saturday arrives. Bryon is excited for the dance, but he doesn't know what to wear. As Bryon shaves in the bathroom, Mark says that he found a shirt for Bryon to wear. Bryon goes into their shared bedroom and sees the shirt, which happens to be Bryon's size and a good color for him. Bryon wonders if Mark stole the shirt, but he pushes that thought aside and thinks how lucky he is to have a friend like Mark.

Bryon drives to pick up Cathy. While he waits for her to get ready, Mr. and Mrs. Carlson chat with him as M&M reads nearby. Mr. Carlson makes fun of M&M's long hair and the fact that M&M flunked out of math and gym. Cathy then emerges, and she and Bryon leave. In the **car**, Cathy wishes that Mr. Carlson wouldn't pick on M&M. She says that despite M&M's flaws, he's caring and doesn't get into trouble. Cathy explains that she's really close with M&M and figures that Bryon must know about being close with a sibling because of Mark. Bryon agrees.

Bryon and Cathy arrive at the dance, which is in full swing by the time they get there. Most people don't recognize Cathy because she's been away, and everyone stares at the two of them. Bryon likes being the center of attention, and he can tell that Cathy is enjoying the attention as well. He thinks that he really likes Cathy.

Bryon and Cathy meet up with Mark and Curtis, and Bryon is worried that Cathy might want to ditch him for Curtis just like Angela did. As they talk, however, he is relieved that Cathy doesn't seem interested in Curtis. Mark and Curtis then go over to a group of girls, and Cathy comments that she forgot how attractive Mark is. Bryon has a flash of jealousy and anger. He explains that the worst feeling in the world is "to hate the person you love best."

Bryon's and Mark's differing plans for the dance foreshadow how their relationship will change as a result of Bryon dating Cathy. Mark believes that he and Bryon are inseparable, illustrated by his assumption that they will go to the dance solo with a group of guys, as they usually do. Hinton suggests that Bryon, on the other hand, is starting to move away from Mark and their usual dynamic by taking Cathy to the dance and leaving Mark to his own devices.



Again, Hinton indicates that Bryon is questioning some of the crimes that Mark is committing. At this point, however, the bonds of their loyalty continue to outweigh Bryon's concerns about the rules and any potential consequences that Mark's thefts have for other people.



While her father makes fun of M&M, Cathy chooses to focus on the best parts of M&M in order to support him. This is similar to how Bryon chooses to view Mark, and Cathy explicitly connects her loyalty and protective bond with M&M to the bond that Bryon and Mark share. In making a direct comparison, she reinforces the fact that Mark and Bryon have a dynamic similar to that of biological siblings.



Bryon's deepening affection for Cathy is spurring a change in his personality. Whereas before he enjoyed being part of a gang of brothers, now he is starting to enjoy having his own identity away from the others.



Bryon's flash of jealousy constitutes the first genuine conflict between Mark and Bryon—though Mark is completely ignorant of the incident. Bryon's intense "hatred" of the person he "loves best"—even if it is fleeting—suggests that he feels deeply betrayed by Mark in this moment. Even though Cathy is the one who made the comment, Bryon can't stand the idea that Mark might end up with a girl he likes, because it would betray the bonds of loyalty that they share.



Just then, Angela Shepard approaches Bryon and Cathy. She's as beautiful as ever, with long curly black hair, but Bryon wonders at why he ever liked her. Just to rub it in, Bryon asks if she is at the dance with Curtis (knowing full well that Curtis ignored her advances). Angela calls him a few ugly names and walks away. When Bryon explains that he used to go out with Angela, Cathy is relatively indifferent to her, and Bryon realizes that Cathy is very sensible and mature. He also recognizes that she isn't really interested in Mark—she just likes him because he's Bryon's brother and best friend.

Bryon and Cathy dance together through the night. Later in the evening, they hear a scream in the parking lot. Curtis finds Bryon and shouts that Mark has been hurt, and Bryon shoves his way to the parking lot. Mark is lying on the ground, unconscious, with blood running down the side of his face from a bad gash. Bryon is really worried; Curtis tells him that a cop called an ambulance. Bryon then looks around and sees that a cop has the kid who attacked Mark in handcuffs.

Bryon looks at the kid who attacked Mark and says that he is going to kill him for what he did. Curtis tells Bryon that he and Mark were sitting on the **car**, and the kid just showed up and started taking a swing at Curtis. They started to fight, and the kid picked up a beer bottle. Mark stepped between them to calm the kid down, and the kid hit Mark over the head with the bottle. Bryon then sees the kid talking to Angela and realizes that she asked the kid to fight with Curtis because Curtis ignored her. Bryon realizes that the person he really wants to get even with is Angela.

Soon after, the ambulance arrives, and Bryon rides with Mark to the hospital. Bryon almost starts to cry with worry. Mark asks Bryon to stay with him in the hospital, and Bryon promises that he will. At the hospital, a doctor puts 10 stitches in Mark's head. When they discharge Mark, Bryon worries about how they'll get home. Just then, however, Cathy and Curtis arrive at the hospital in Charlie's **car**—Curtis had hot-wired it. Bryon starts to admire Curtis, realizing that he had no fault in what happened between Bryon and Angela.

Bryon drives Curtis home and then drops Cathy off at her house. He apologizes to Cathy for how things turned out, but she assures him that she had a good time. Bryon wants to kiss her, but he decides to play it safe and refrain from doing so, in case she doesn't want to. He tells her that he will call her.

Bryon's progression from dating Angela to dating Cathy parallels his maturation. Angela is characterized with the same kind of smart mouth that Bryon and Mark have, whereas Cathy is much more levelheaded. This mirrors Bryon's own move away from his know-it-all attitude and toward a more mature sensibility. Bryon even observes this change in himself: he recognizes how his feelings for Angela have shifted from affection to disdain, illustrating how he is starting to outgrow his old mindsets.



This incident illustrates why the loyalty that comes with brotherhood is particularly important for boys like Mark and Bryon, because living in a violent community means that they have to have each other's back during fights. That Bryon was absent during this incident, therefore, suggests that he is growing apart from Mark as he grows closer to Cathy.



Here, Hinton underscores how violence perpetuates violence especially when it is used as a tool for revenge. Angela wanted to get revenge on Curtis for turning down her advances. And because the kid's attack resulted in Mark getting hurt as well, this spurs Bryon and Mark's desire to get revenge on Angela. Thus, revenge becomes a violent cycle that only spurs more violence.



Bryon's loyalty and love for Mark is clear here. Not only does he protect Mark physically, but he also supports him emotionally in whatever way he can. Despite Bryon's tough reputation, he almost cries with worry over Mark, emphasizing how important Mark is to him. That Mark explicitly asks Bryon to stay with him also illustrates how valuable Bryon's support is to him.



The fact that Bryon doesn't kiss Cathy shows that he is starting to become more selfless and think about Cathy's perspective. Rather than prioritizing his own desires, he instead thinks about what she might want and chooses to do he thinks would make her most comfortable.



When Bryon and Mark arrive home, Bryon helps Mark into bed. Mark tells Bryon that he was really scared when he got hit—he thought he was going to die. He explains that when Bryon arrived, however, he calmed down. He says that he feels as though Bryon is really his brother. Bryon knows that Mark has never had a real family—even before Mark’s parents died, Mark knew that his dad wasn’t his real father and that he was illegitimate. Bryon says that he thinks of Mark as his brother too, and when he looks at Mark, he sees that Mark is smiling.

This exchange drives home the magnitude of Bryon and Mark’s loyalty and brotherhood. They both protect each other physically, and they feel emotionally supported knowing that they have each other’s backs and think of each other as brothers. This is particularly important for Mark because he never had a true family, and so having a brother makes Mark feel like he has the same physical protection that a biological family might provide.



CHAPTER 4

The next day, when Bryon returns Charlie’s **car**, he learns that Charlie has received his draft notice. When Bryon goes home, Mark still isn’t feeling well. Mark suggests that Bryon read him a book, as Bryon used to do when they were little. They then spend the afternoon talking about their childhood—how they used to play a game based on gang fighting called “Civil War” and before they got caught up in real gang fighting. Bryon thinks that he used to look forward to a fight, but now it’s getting a little boring.

The fact that Mark and Bryon used to play a game in which they emulated gangs illustrates how even as children, they viewed fighting as entertainment—which has led them to view fighting in the same way as teenagers. Yet Bryon also exhibits a degree of growth here, as he recognizes that fighting is immature.



Mark brings up other stories: once, he and Bryon got caught sneaking into a drive-in movie. The manager drove them to the police station, but they jumped out of the car when it was going 30 miles per hour. In another story, they shot water pistols at cops from the roof of a mall. They discuss the poker and pool games they played and the dates and parties they attended. Bryon reflects that other boys would come in and out of their friend group, but he and Mark always stayed together.

Bryon and Mark’s antics built up their brotherly bond, particularly as they did risky and even illegal things together. To them, brotherhood isn’t just about sharing activities, but also making sure that they maintain solidarity whenever they get into trouble.



Mark tells Bryon that he feels like things are changing, and Bryon agrees. Mark points out that they used to think their gang fights were important, and that they and the other boys would have died for one another. Now, he laments, the others have slipped away. Mark says that it was as though the boys all made up a single person; it’s sad that they don’t need a gang as much now. Bryon says it’s kind of a good thing too—that they don’t need a gang to define their identities or personalities. Mark wonders what’s changed, and Bryon simply says, “that was then, and this is now.”

Here, Mark and Bryon begin to diverge in their attitudes about growing up. Mark desperately wants to cling to the dynamics of their childhood, implying that he doesn’t want to face adulthood. Bryon, on the other hand, recognizes their immaturity and sees some benefits of growing up and taking on more responsibility. The titular phrase, “that was then, this is now,” indicates that the boys have changed and will continue to change as time goes on and they approach adulthood.



Mark still doesn’t feel well on Monday, so Bryon goes to school alone. There, everyone is mad at Angela, sympathizes with Curtis, and views Mark as a hero. Bryon feels like he’s standing apart from the rest of the kids and like he can see through them—what they are thinking and why they do things. He also gets the sense that his friends don’t actually like him for who he is. The next day, when Mark returns, Bryon shakes off this feeling, and everything seemingly returns to normal.

Bryon’s feelings on this day of school suggest that Mark is holding him back from maturing. Without Mark, Bryon recognizes some of the immaturity of his classmates and has a heightened awareness of their motivations. With Mark, however, Bryon prefers not to question his life others’ feelings, and he clings to his more naïve understanding of the world.



One day the following week, Terry Jones stops by the house and tells Bryon that Mark got caught driving the principal's **car** that day. Terry assures Bryon that Mark was able to get out of punishment because he said he was driving to see his probation officer—he couldn't make his appointment with the officer without a car. Bryon worries that Mark will be in jail the rest of his life, but Terry assures him that the principal laughed it off.

Just then, Mark walks in. Bryon is relieved that Mark isn't in trouble but is furious about what he did. Mark tries to say sorry, but Bryon doesn't believe he's being sincere. Bryon concedes that as long as Mark isn't in trouble, what he did was fine—figuring that Mark can get away with anything. Mark smiles like “an innocent **lion**” and agrees.

Mark isn't concerned with how his actions affect others—he doesn't care that the principal needs his car. Mark cares about avoiding punishment, and he's often able to escape the ramifications of his actions, as he does here. Thus, he is enabled to flout the rules. While cars have shifted to symbolize responsibility for Bryon, they still symbolize irresponsibility for Mark.



More and more, Bryon is shifting away from Mark's attitude toward rule-breaking. Bryon is less assured than Mark is, and he wants Mark to be more responsible. Bryon's concern also stems from the fact that Mark's crimes could have significant ramifications for him, as Bryon would lose his best friend and brother if Mark were sent to jail. Additionally, the image of the “innocent lion” once again evokes a cartoonish guiltlessness—yet as an apex predator, a real lion is anything but innocent. This symbol thus hints at the meaner underside of Mark's personality.



CHAPTER 5

Bryon and Mark visit Bryon's mother at the hospital again, and afterward they stop in to see Mike. Following this visit, Bryon heads to the snack bar to see Cathy. He's called her a few times since the dance, but they haven't been out again. Cathy is on a break, so Bryon buys her a Coke. Bryon finds Cathy's honesty refreshing—particularly after dating Angela—and he appreciates that Cathy is smart. Cathy tells him that Curtis asked her out, but she said she was busy. Bryon is pleased and says that he'll take her out—though he doesn't know how or where they'll go.

Bryon decides to go hustling to get some money. He borrows \$5 from M&M and says he'll pay him back the next day. He and Mark then go to Charlie's and discover Charlie is in a good mood: he tells them that he won't be drafted because of his police record. Bryon asks if there are any people they can hustle, and Charlie says that there are a few guys at the pool table whom they can beat. He asks if it would do any good to tell them to be careful, and Bryon says no.

Bryon and Mark hustle two tough-looking Texans. Mark helps Bryon play up the act as they lose their first game together. Bryon then insists that he can go for another game, and he wins many successive games, unable to stop. By midnight, he has made \$25. One of the men, Dirty Dave, comments that Bryon is a good pool player, and his friend mumbles that Bryon is “too good.”

The fact that Bryon appreciates Cathy's honesty demonstrates how she is helping him to grow up, take more responsibility for himself, and act selflessly. Bryon is notorious for lying in order to get what he wants—but the more his affection for Cathy grows, the more he wants to be honest and open with her as well.



Hinton emphasizes Bryon and Mark's cockiness as they once again choose to ignore Charlie's warnings to be careful. Even though they understand that they could suffer consequences for their crimes, they dismiss this possibility and completely ignore any potential ramifications their actions could have on others.



Bryon's confidence not only leads him to hustle these men at pool but also to overplay his hand by winning too much, illustrating his immaturity and cockiness in the situation.



At closing time, before Bryon and Mark leave, Bryon asks Charlie if he can borrow his **car** again. Charlie agrees, but when he notices that Mark has a beer, Charlie warns him not to sneak one again or he'll beat Mark up. Mark assures Charlie that he left a quarter on the register.

When Mark and Bryon leave, the Texans stop the boys outside. The men say that they have a gun and want to teach the boys a lesson about hustling. Bryon starts to shake as he steps into the alley, envisioning the horrible things they might do to him. But just as Dirty Dave approaches Mark, Charlie steps into the alley with a shotgun. He tells the Texans to drop the gun and freeze, and they do so. Bryon and Mark walk out of the alley, relieved and smug.

Charlie starts to say that he hopes Mark and Bryon learned from the experience—but as they're walking away, one of the Texans dives for the gun and starts shooting. Charlie slams Bryon and Mark to the ground while Mark grabs the shotgun and fires. The Texans run off, and Bryon discovers that Charlie has been shot in the head—he's dead.

The next few weeks are blurry for Bryon. His mother returns from the hospital, and Angela gets married to one of her brother's friends. Mark tells the police about what happened to Charlie, and the police give Charlie's **car** to Bryon. Bryon is guilty because Charlie warned him not to hustle at pool. Mark says that Charlie knew the chance he was taking when he came out with the gun, and that "things happen." Bryon thinks that Mark doesn't understand.

Bryon talks to Cathy about his guilt over Charlie's death. They spend more and more time together, particularly now that Bryon has a **car**. After a few weeks, they drive to the park and make out for a while. But Bryon thinks that this is different than what he used to do with other girls, because he's no longer thinking only about himself.

Mark begins acting strangely, staring at Bryon as if he were a stranger. He grows frustrated that Bryon is spending so much time with Cathy. Bryon thinks that Mark feels like their normal dynamic is slipping away, and that Mark is trying to hang on to what they had. Bryon is surprised that Mark is so jealous; he simply concludes that he is changing while Mark isn't.

This exchange encapsulates Bryon and Mark's diverging approaches to adulthood. While Bryon shows that he is more responsible in taking care of Charlie's car, Mark continues his pattern of reckless rule-breaking and refuses to take any responsibility.



Bryon and Mark's smugness in the moment that Charlie saves them illustrates how, when they and others do not face ramifications for their actions, they are simply able to brush off the terrible things that could have happened to them. Without facing any consequences, they feel entitled to their self-assured attitudes and will likely not change their behavior.



Charlie's death is a significant turning point for Bryon's coming-of-age journey, as he finally recognizes the dire consequences that his and Mark's actions can have on others. No longer is he smug or self-assured—this incident shakes his confidence entirely.



Bryon begins the process of growing up in earnest here. He knows that if he'd heeded Charlie's advice and hadn't hustled the Texans, Charlie would not have been killed. As such, Bryon begins to feel guilty and takes responsibility for what happened. Mark, on the other hand, denies any fault on their part, reflecting his refusal to grow up in the same way. That Bryon also receives Charlie's car reinforces his newfound maturity, as it symbolizes Bryon's increasing responsibility.



The fact that Bryon is no longer thinking about himself is a dramatic shift for him. It illustrates the way in which his love and respect for Cathy leads him to prioritize her needs as well as his own.



Mark's frustration with Bryon reflects two of their changing dynamics: that Bryon is growing up without him and that Bryon is now prioritizing Cathy over Mark. Bryon realizes that Mark views these changes as a betrayal of their brotherhood. Where they once thought exactly like, Bryon now relates more to Cathy than he does to Mark.



CHAPTER 6

Once the Texans have been caught, Mark and Bryon testify in the trial—The Texans are sentenced to life in prison. Bryon thinks that he doesn't really care what happens to them, because Charlie is dead and nothing can change that. At school, Mark and Bryon are treated like celebrities because of their involvement in the trial, but they don't really talk about what happened.

Bryon's mother has to stay in bed for a month, and so Bryon decides to look for a job more earnestly. He remembers that Charlie told him to consider why he might not be able to get a job. He decides to get a haircut, put on clean clothes, and change his attitude, because he thinks that no one would want to hire an arrogant kid. Bryon and Mark start getting along slightly better because Mark gives up on trying to keep things the way they used to be. Bryon doesn't know what Mark does with his time when Bryon is hanging out with Cathy; he doesn't ask.

One day, Mark comments on how seriously Bryon is taking his job search because of his haircut and ironed shirt. Mark says that he'll start bringing in some money, too, because he doesn't want to "sponge forever." Bryon wants to express that Mark is like a brother and has a right to whatever Bryon has, but he can't bring himself to say so. He realizes that he's never been able to sincerely express his feelings about another person.

That night, Cathy tells Bryon that she's worried M&M is smoking marijuana. She's concerned that he's too trusting, and that if he's running around with people who do drugs, he could get involved with something worse—like LSD. She says that Mr. Carlson has been giving M&M a lot of grief, and so M&M doesn't spend time at home anymore. Bryon realizes how much Cathy loves M&M and feels a bit jealous.

Bryon thinks that he loves anything Cathy loves, because he really loves Cathy. But he worries that she'll be able to tell that he loves her, and he worries about looking stupid. Cathy suggests that they pick up Mark and M&M and get a Coke together. Bryon agrees, and they go and find Mark and M&M.

The fact that Bryon doesn't care about getting revenge—or even justice—for Charlie's death illustrates how much responsibility and guilt he feels over what happened. He knows that additional violence won't bring Charlie back, and rather than blaming the Texans for what happened, he takes the blame for not heeding Charlie's warnings.



In looking for a job, Bryon is not only trying to provide for his mother but to act in a way that would make Charlie proud. Charlie's death seems to have brought about a shift in Bryon: he's now determined to take on even more responsibility as he matures. He heeds Charlie's advice and looks at how he might need to change in order to get a job, and then he makes an earnest effort to clean himself up. Mark, on the other hand, makes no such effort and continues to resist any change, pulling away from Bryon rather than maturing alongside him.



Mark's worry that he is too dependent on Bryon and his mother indicates that he no longer feels like Bryon's brother. If Mark felt like a true member of the family at this point, he wouldn't have this guilt that he is "sponging" off of Bryon or his mother. The fact that Bryon isn't able to assuage Mark's guilt and reassure him of their bond only undermines the relationship further.



Like Bryon, Cathy acts selflessly for those she loves. She sees things from M&M's perspective and cares about him, putting her concern for him above all else. Cathy's concern for M&M also illustrates that she and her brother share a bond of trust and loyalty, just as Mark and Bryon do.



Bryon's love has brought about even more selflessness and empathy with regards to Cathy. Not only has he shifted his view to include her perspective, but he is actively taking on her perspective as his own—loving anything that she loves.



Bryon and Cathy have pick up Mark and M&M, and they all sit together in the front seat and drive down the Ribbon—a stretch of road with hot dog and hamburger stands, drive-ins, and supermarkets. At night, the parking lots along the Ribbon are filled with kids sitting on their cars and waving at each other. At a stoplight, a few guys pull up in a green Corvette next to their **car** and make an obscene remark. Mark gets out of the car and punches one of the guys in the nose, then returns to the car while Bryon speeds away.

Cathy is annoyed that Mark punched the guy, and Mark quickly becomes aggravated with Cathy when she criticizes him. Bryon observes that Mark can suddenly turn on people, “like a teased **lion** who’s had enough.” They decide to pull into a drive-in called Jay’s and order hamburgers. There are kids all over the parking area, as well as a cop. Bryon tells Cathy about the time the cops beat him up when he was 13, and she replies that Bryon shouldn’t have been running around drunk in the middle of the night. This aggravates Mark; Bryon realizes then that Mark and Cathy will never be friends.

Mark then spots Terry Jones and goes over to say hi. Cathy remarks that Mark doesn’t like her. Bryon says that she doesn’t like Mark much either. She agrees, explaining that they’re probably fighting over Bryon. Bryon then looks across the street at 12- and 13-year-olds trying to look and act cool. Thinking how stupid they look, he suddenly feels very old. Bryon wonders if at 20, he’ll look back and think about how stupid he was at 16. He thinks that he was so sure of himself at 12, but now he isn’t as sure.

Bryon, Cathy, and M&M continue to drive up and down the Ribbon for fun. M&M asks Bryon to stop at a hot dog stand, and when Bryon does, M&M gets out of the **car**, saying he has friends there. Cathy asks when they can pick him up, but M&M replies that he’s never coming home and walks off. Cars start honking behind Bryon, and so he has to move on. When they drive back through to try and find M&M again, they can’t figure out where he went. Cathy starts to cry, and Bryon thinks it is the first time he hasn’t been annoyed with a girl for crying and the first time he ever felt bad for anyone except Mark.

Mark’s immediate impulse to punch the guy in the next car over an obscene remark demonstrates how Mark treats violence very casually. It’s dangerous to walk out into traffic like he did, and punching the guy doesn’t solve the problem of the rude comment—it’s just senseless violence.



Cathy again represents a more mature voice than Mark. Her perspective causes Bryon to examine his own behavior in the story with the cops, as she points out that he was breaking the rules. Bryon’s actions obviously had bad consequences for himself, but he could have also hurt other people while staggering drunkenly around the street. Additionally, the extended metaphor of the lion illustrates how because Bryon is relating more to Cathy and pulling away from Mark, he can see the meaner and more dangerous side of Mark’s personality.



Bryon’s thoughts about the 12- and 13-year-olds reflect his growing maturity. With this line of thinking, Bryon exhibits an understanding of his own ignorance at that young age, and he also appreciates that he still has a lot of learning and growing to do. He has lost some of the cockiness and self-assurance of that age, but he has also gained a greater wisdom.



Hinton reinforces Bryon’s growing selflessness in his reaction to Cathy. Previously, Bryon relayed that crying girls bore him, but here he has real empathy for Cathy. Equating her with Mark demonstrates how much he truly loves her, and it is because of that genuine love that he is able to feel bad for her rather than simply dismissing her reaction.



CHAPTER 7

Bryon and Cathy return to her house to tell her parents about M&M's disappearance. Mr. Carlson isn't worried, assuring them that M&M is a sensible kid and is just going through a phase. When Bryon returns to the car, where Mark has been waiting, Mark says that the Carlsons shouldn't be worried because nothing bad happens when you're a kid. Mark says that he'll never be afraid of anything as long as he's a kid. Bryon is skeptical but agrees that Mark can get away with anything. Mark says that Bryon used to be able to get away with anything too, and Bryon feels like he is looking at Mark across a chasm.

M&M doesn't come home for a week. Every day, Cathy and Bryon drive up and down the Ribbon to look for him, with no luck. Meanwhile, Bryon gets a job at a supermarket and keeps his attitude in check. Mark starts bringing in money too, but Bryon doesn't ask him where he gets it. He figures that Mark is gambling at poker and stealing.

A few weeks later, Bryon and Mark go out together, driving up and down the Ribbon like old times. They spot Angela and pull up next to her—she's very drunk. She joins them in the **car**, sobbing as she relays that she hates her husband. Mark gets someone to buy some rum for them, which Bryon and Angela start drinking. Angela soon passes out on Bryon's shoulder, and Mark pulls out a pair of scissors and starts cutting off all of her long hair. Bryon still hates Angela, and Curly and doesn't stop Mark as he cuts off Angela's hair. They drive home at three a.m. and dump Angela in her front yard without waking her up.

Mark drives home, since Bryon is drunk. Bryon starts crying as he drunkenly rambles about Mike, frustrated that Mike got beat up because he cared about someone. Bryon wonders why that had to happen. Mark says that he doesn't know, because nothing bad has ever happened to him. Bryon realizes that what Mark truly means is that nothing has affected him, and that Mark doesn't really care about anyone except Bryon. Bryon realizes why everyone wants to be Mark's friend: he can stand between them and the world, like a **lion**. Bryon says that Mark is his best friend and his brother.

Hinton uses the metaphor of the chasm to illustrate the emotional distance between Mark and Bryon. Mark asserts that he will never face negative consequences as long as he is a kid—a view which bolsters his resistance to growing up and taking on responsibility. But Bryon knows that even if Mark specifically escapes punishment, those around him still face consequences—a lesson that he learned after Charlie's death.



By getting a respectable, lawful job at the supermarket, Bryon shows that he has been able to humble himself and take on more responsibility. Additionally, he is putting the needs of Cathy and his mom over his own as an extension of the love he bears for them. He sacrifices some of his independence in order to earn money to cover his mother's operation, and he also prioritizes looking for M&M in order to help Cathy.



This is another example of how violence only breeds more violence, especially where revenge is concerned. Because Angela's actions led to Mark getting 10 stitches in his head, he feels the need to get even with her. Even though getting Angela drunk and cutting off her hair doesn't represent the same kind of physically harmful violence as hitting someone with a bottle, it is still a very violating and aggressive act that doesn't solve anything.



Bryon's thoughts illustrate that Mark is as selfish and untroubled as ever. It's not that nothing bad has ever happened to him, it's that he simply refuses to let it bother him and instead maintains his immature, cocky attitude. And unlike Bryon, Mark doesn't seem to care about other people—even his bond with Bryon has been fraying. However, Bryon's lion metaphor suggests that he is still focusing on the positive aspects of their relationship, choosing to view Mark as a protector rather than a dangerous predator.



Bryon continues to cry, wishing he knew where M&M was. Mark promises that M&M is okay. Bryon is furious when he realizes that Mark knows where M&M is, explaining that Cathy has been really worried. Bryon then tells Mark that he wants to marry Cathy. The boys pull up to their house, and Bryon realizes that Mark didn't drink any of the rum—he and Angela drank it all. As Mark drags Bryon into the house, Bryon thinks that they shouldn't have cut Angela's hair. Mark leads Bryon into their bedroom, takes off Bryon's shoes, and tucks him into bed. Bryon drunkenly thanks Mark.

Bryon then asks Mark why his father shot his mother—something he's never asked before. Mark explains that it's because she revealed that Mark wasn't her husband's son—that Mark was illegitimate. Bryon says that he's glad that Mark came to live with them.

Bryon then starts talking about Charlie, again feeling guilty over his death. Mark says that they couldn't have known what would happen, and that sometimes people get unlucky. He tells Bryon that he can't go through life saying "if." He says that trying to figure out why things happen is "what old people do," and that then he won't be able to get away with things. Mark says that he feels like Bryon is leaving him, because he used to have all the answers. Bryon drowsily says that he can't help thinking about what might have been different, and soon he falls asleep.

CHAPTER 8

The next morning, Bryon is very hungover when he goes to work; he's amazed that he doesn't lose his job. Later that day, when Bryon is feeling better, Mark takes him to search for M&M. As they drive, Bryon tells Mark never to let him drink so much again. Mark says that he had to get Bryon drunk because Bryon couldn't handle cutting off Angela's hair. Bryon fires back with a nasty comment to Mark, and he can feel the gap widening between them again. They start to argue, and Mark makes a hurtful remark about Cathy. Bryon asks if they want to get out of the **car** and have it out. Instead, Mark apologizes.

Although Bryon's anger is softened by his drunkenness, and he feels grateful for Mark taking care of him, Bryon truly feels betrayed by Mark in this moment. This adds even more tension to their already fraught dynamic. By withholding information about M&M's whereabouts, Mark has let Cathy and Bryon panic about M&M's well-being.



Mark's explanation proves why his and Bryon's brotherhood was and remains so important to him. From an early age, Mark was able to take refuge in his brotherly friendship with Bryon—it gave him both a roof over his head and emotional support after he lost his parents.



Humility is a key part of coming of age, as Mark's speech and reference to "old people" implies. Mark argues that self-assurance helps him get away with things and maintain the irresponsibility of childhood. Bryon, on the other hand, has acquired some humility: he knows that he doesn't have all the answers. Rather than taking life as it comes, he has a more mature understanding of responsibility. He wrestles with how his choices have affected the lives of others, like Charlie.



When Bryon is with Mark, he reverts to some of his more immature ways. But it is clear now that he no longer wants to go on the same drunken and violent escapades—he wants to be responsible and keep his job. Pulling away from these traditions, however, makes his and Mark's relationship even more tense. So much of their bond had been based on thinking alike and their having each other's backs—but now, there is so much conflict between them that they are fighting against, rather than alongside, each other.



Mark and Bryon arrive at a hippie house. Bryon realizes that Mark has been there many times before, as people greet him like they know him. The boys walk through the house, and Bryon sees more people smoking pot. Mark asks a group whether they've seen "Baby Freak"—meaning M&M. They say that he hasn't been around and that he's been high. When Bryon asks if they let M&M take hard drugs, they say that they're free to do whatever they want. Bryon and Mark leave.

As Bryon and Mark drive home, Mark says that alcohol gets a person just as high as pot does. Bryon points out that pot could get a person five years in jail, but Mark responds that the law isn't necessarily right. Bryon wonders why Mark is defending pot. Mark tells him he doesn't smoke pot, particularly because he knows people like to beat up hippies like he and Bryon once did.

Later that evening, Bryon takes Cathy out. He doesn't tell her about the hippie house so as not to worry her, but they still drive up and down the Ribbon to look for M&M. Bryon thinks that he is getting more and more serious about Cathy, but he can't bring himself to say that he loves her. Instead, he asks her if she would wear a ring if he got one for her, and she says yes—so they start going steady.

After Bryon drops Cathy off that night, he heads to Terry Jones's house to pick up Mark. No one is home, though, so Bryon sits on his front steps to wait. It is almost spring. Bryon thinks how strange the year had been. Last fall, he and Mark were completely alike—now, they can't even have a conversation. Months ago, Charlie was alive, Bryon was a hustler, and M&M was a babysitter. Everything is different now.

As Bryon is pondering, a car pulls up, and four guys get out—including Tim and Curly Shephard. Bryon grows nervous, as Tim is really tough. Bryon hopes that he can keep them talking long enough for Mark to return. They tell Bryon that Angela said he got her drunk and cut off her hair. Bryon admits that he did and apologizes, deciding to tell the truth. The guys rush Bryon, taking turns punching him until he passes out.

The fact that Mark knows the people in the hippie house foreshadows his own involvement with drugs. Like Mark, the people in the hippie house maintain a self-assured and irresponsible attitude. What they're doing is illegal and potentially dangerous, yet they care more about disobeying authority and living freely than being careful.



Bryon's argument illustrates his newfound appreciation for the law. While Bryon understands that breaking the law can have harmful consequences on both the criminal and the victims of crimes, Mark continues to be ignorant of potential consequences that drugs can have on others.



Even though Bryon isn't yet able to be fully vulnerable and admit that he loves Cathy, he's still showing his selflessness through his actions, if not his words. He prioritizes her feelings by not telling her about M&M, continues to help her look for him, and gives her a ring as a gesture of his love.



Bryon's catalogue of the changes in his life illustrates how much he has matured, and how the different branches of his life have changed as a result. Whereas before he was irresponsible, he now appreciates the harm hustling can cause and takes responsibility for Charlie's death. As a result, he and Mark have started to grow distant—Mark views Bryon's new demeanor as a betrayal of their friendship and former lifestyle.



Here, Mark's revenge comes full circle. After Mark cut off Angela's hair for the beating he received, here the Shepards are now getting revenge for that retaliation. This illustrates how "getting even" never really puts a stop to violence. Instead, it only prompts the injured party to want revenge in turn, breeding more violence in a never-ending cycle.



When Bryon wakes up, Mark is wiping Bryon's face with a wet cloth. Bryon explains the Shepards beat him up. His face and side are throbbing, and he can taste blood in his mouth. He is inside Terry's house, lying on a bed. Mark asks if he wants to go to the hospital, but Bryon says that he'd rather stay where he is. Bryon then tells Mark that he doesn't want anyone to fight the Shepards—he's sick of trying to get even. Mark is confused, but he agrees not to go after the Shepards. Mark goes to call Bryon's mother, and then he spends the night next to Bryon's bed, guarding him.

Bryon finally appreciates the fact that getting even is an infinite circle; therefore, the only way to stop it is to not seek out revenge. Mark's reaction shows how unusual this impulse is, because the violence that plagues Tulsa is founded on this eye-for-an-eye mentality. Additionally, Mark sees it as a part of his brotherly duty to get back at the Shepards, because his and Bryon's bond has been partially built on physically protecting each other.



CHAPTER 9

The next day, Mark takes Bryon to the hospital, where Bryon gets 15 stitches in his face and has his ribs taped. Bryon thinks back to what Mike said about not hating the guys who beat him up. Similarly, Mike doesn't hate the Shepards. When he tries to explain this to Mark, Mark gets upset: he knows Bryon got beaten up because Mark cut off Angela's hair. He says that if the Shepards had killed Bryon, it would have been his fault. Bryon reiterates that he's just sick of fighting and the cycle of people beating each other up.

Hinton connects Bryon's perspective to Mike's earlier resolution not to hate the people who beat him up. While both boys know that nonviolence might not always break the cycle of fighting, the alternative only perpetuates it. This is also a rare moment in which Mark appreciates the consequences of his actions for others, and he takes responsibility for what happened to Bryon. However, this only reinforces Bryon's earlier point that Mark's worldview is essentially limited to caring about himself and Bryon.



At home, Bryon's mother is shocked to see Bryon so beat up. She tells him to go to bed immediately, which Bryon is glad to do. Mark also calls Cathy for Bryon while Bryon sleeps; when Bryon wakes up, Cathy is sitting at his side, crying. Bryon says that he's really glad that she's there and tells her that he loves her. He is relieved to say it, thinking that it wasn't as hard to say as he thought. Bryon assures her that he'll be fine in a few days, and he also tells her that he has a lead on M&M and that they can look for him together. Cathy agrees and kisses him tenderly.

In another act of selflessness, Bryon finally tells Cathy that he loves her—he puts himself in a vulnerable position in order to tell her how much he cares about her and make her feel good. This gesture shows how much Bryon has matured. Through the whole book, he has lied for selfish gain and has been unable to express his genuine sentiments for people—and even while his actions have been honest, his words rarely have been. Here, though, Bryon is finally able to be sincere and humble.



After a few days, when Bryon is feeling better, he takes Charlie's **car** and drives to the cemetery where Charlie is buried. When he finds Charlie's grave, he thanks Charlie aloud for letting him use his car and for saving his life. Bryon wishes that he'd said these things when Charlie was still alive.

Like telling Cathy that he loves her, Bryon's ability to finally thank Charlie underscores his new willingness to take responsibility and be humble rather than remain self-centered.



Two nights later, Cathy and Bryon go out to search for M&M at the hippie house. When they arrive, they learn that M&M has been on a bad trip—all day, he’s had been trying to jump out the window. Cathy grows worried, and they find M&M in a bedroom upstairs, looking thin, dirty, and very suspicious. M&M starts freaking out and describes a hallucination in which he was inside of his stomach and a bunch of spiders crawled out and started chewing on him; he screamed and screamed, but no one came to help him. M&M is shaking, and Bryon says that they should take him to a hospital. Cathy calls Mr. Carlson from another room, and when she returns Bryon carries M&M down the stairs and into his **car**.

Cathy drives to the hospital while Bryon tries to calm M&M and hold onto him. M&M screams in terror, wondering where he is. Bryon is sick to his stomach, feeling that M&M is as much his little brother as Cathy’s. When they arrive at the hospital, Mr. Carlson is already there. He carries M&M into the building as M&M babbles about the spiders.

CHAPTER 10

That evening, a doctor tells Cathy, Bryon, and Mr. Carlson that M&M’s psychological damage could be permanent—he doesn’t think M&M will ever be the same. After the doctor has finished speaking with them, Bryon and Cathy get ready to leave. Mr. Carlson says that he’s really proud of what Bryon has done and calls him “son.” In the **car**, Cathy breaks down crying, and Bryon tries to comfort her. Cathy says that she loves Bryon and that she doesn’t know what she would have done without him.

After Bryon drops Cathy off, he returns to his room, but Mark isn’t home yet. Bryon feels completely worn out. He thinks how simple life used to be, and how now things seem so complicated. Bryon searches for a cigarette under Mark’s mattress, but instead he discovers a bottle of pills. Immediately, Bryon realizes that Mark has been selling drugs. This is where he has been getting his money, and this is why he knew about the hippie house. Bryon then realizes that M&M might be mentally impaired for life, and Mark is selling the drugs that made him that way. Thinking of M&M losing his mind and Cathy in pain, Bryon decides to call the cops.

M&M’s bad drug trip is a turning point not only in his life, but in Bryon’s as well. In observing the horrors of what M&M is experiencing, Bryon understands that breaking the rules and acting irresponsibly can have dire consequences—even on kids. Not only could M&M have been arrested for his drug use, but his trip also nearly spurred him to commit suicide.



Bryon’s protective instinct toward M&M demonstrates how love has transformed Bryon from a selfish teenager into supportive partner. His love for Cathy not only makes him want to be more selfless for her—it also makes him want to support Cathy’s loved ones in any way he can.



The fact that M&M’s brain may be permanently damaged is sobering for Bryon. It undermines any remaining feelings of invincibility that Bryon might have, knowing that—unlike Mark’s earlier assertion—bad things can happen to kids. Meanwhile, Bryon’s love for Cathy and his ensuing selflessness strengthen the love Cathy has for him and creates reciprocal trust and loyalty in their relationship.



This represents the true breaking point for Bryon and Mark’s relationship, as he feels completely betrayed by Mark’s drug-dealing. Even if Mark didn’t necessarily sell drugs to M&M, Bryon connects the events because he understands that Mark could have easily caused this kind of bad trip in someone else. Mark’s decision highlights the differences that have arisen between the boys: Bryon has gained a respectable job and cares about the consequences of his actions on others, whereas Mark simply continues his reckless, illegal activity and cares only about himself.



Soon after, Mark walks in, and Bryon confronts him about the drugs. Bryon explains that M&M may have lost his mind on an acid trip, but Mark claims that he didn't sell any drugs to M&M. Drug addicts can always get drugs from somewhere, Mark says, and so he might as well make some money. Bryon thinks that Mark has no concept of right and wrong—the law doesn't matter to him.

Mark says that if selling drugs bothers Bryon so much, he'll stop. Bryon then admits that he called the cops, and Mark goes into shock. The police arrive, and their sirens wake up Bryon's mother. Mark doesn't resist as the police put him in handcuffs, or while Bryon tells the cops about all the crimes Mark has committed. Just as the police pull him out of the house, Mark cries out to Bryon, asking him not to let them take them away. Bryon doesn't move, and a cop shoves Mark out the door. Bryon's mother sobs, and Bryon goes into the bathroom and throws up.

CHAPTER 11

The next morning, Bryon feels as though he has had a nightmare. He doesn't fully understand why he decided to turn on Mark—he knows that Mark would have quit selling drugs if Bryon asked. He worries that jail will kill Mark. Bryon asks his mother if she hates him, but she assures Bryon that he is her only child—he comes first, and she could never hate him. She hopes that Mark will see that what he had done was wrong and that Bryon's decision was for Mark's own good. While she tells Bryon not to hate himself for what happened, Bryon is frustrated that his mom is trying to stay hopeful about the situation.

Bryon is completely numb at work that day. When he returns home that night, Cathy comes to visit. She says that Bryon's mother told her what happened with Mark, and that she's very sorry. Bryon is curt and angry with her, saying that Cathy must be happy now that Mark is out of the way. He can tell that he is hurting her, but he can't seem to stop himself. Cathy is horrified at this implication. Bryon ends their conversation abruptly and says that he'll call her tomorrow. He knows he won't call, however—he knows that he doesn't love her anymore.

Mark's justification for his actions only proves to Bryon how little Mark cares about the ramifications of his actions on others. Rather than realizing how severely his decisions could harm kids who have bad trips or overdose on drugs, he instead focuses on the prospect of making money.



Bryon's decision to turn Mark in to the police represents another irreparable betrayal, shattering Bryon and Mark's years-long the bond of loyalty. Bryon's throwing up shows how turning on the person he loved most in the world is even physically debilitating for him. Vomiting can even be read as a metaphor for Bryon's betrayal, as in both cases he is ridding himself of something that has been making him unwell in order to feel better.



Bryon's mother understands that Bryon acted according to his conscience. He hoped that by demonstrating to Mark that his actions have consequences, Mark would come to appreciate rules just as Bryon has. Additionally, Bryon's mother's affirmation that Bryon is her only child continues to chip away at the Bryon and Mark's brotherly bond. While Bryon always viewed Mark as a real brother, Bryon's mother emphasizes that despite their loyalty, they were not actually brothers.



Bryon also betrays Cathy here, motivated by the fact that without their relationship, he likely would not have drifted as far from Mark and would not have turned him in to the police. As the love between them dissipates, Bryon begins to revert to selfishness, lying to Cathy about the fact that he will call her and reverting to thinking only about himself.



When Mark goes to trial, Bryon testifies against him. When Bryon describes their relationship as being “like brothers,” Mark laughs out loud. He has a smug attitude throughout the trial and admits to selling drugs. The judge sentences him to the state reformatory for five years, and Bryon thinks that the judge was particularly hard on Mark because of his attitude. Mark seems unaffected by the verdict, but Bryon is stunned.

The next few months pass in a blur. Bryon runs into M&M at the drug store, and he notes that M&M has completely lost his trusting nature. M&M says that the doctors warned him that if he has kids, they could have birth defects. He also says that doesn't remember things very well and that his grades have all tanked. Bryon thinks back sadly to when he and Mark teased M&M about wanting a big family. M&M also tells Bryon that Cathy really liked him, but now she's dating Ponyboy Curtis. Bryon is unmoved by this news—he hopes that they'll hit it off together. Bryon is amazed that was once so emotional about Cathy and now feels nothing.

Bryon spends the summer working and trying to visit Mark, but Mark causes trouble at the reformatory and can't have visitors. Meanwhile, Bryon is promoted; he no longer has an attitude. He feels as though he is a mixture of things that he had learned from Charlie, Mark, Cathy, M&M, his mother, and even Mike. He thinks that he isn't the same person he was the previous year; he is a lot more “mixed up.”

Once, Angela comes into the store, but Bryon realizes that all his hatred toward her has evaporated. She says that what Bryon did to Mark was really low, and he replies that she looks really good with short hair. On another night, Bryon's mother comes into his room. She points out that he got even with Mark for Cathy, and then he got even with Cathy for Mark. Bryon's mother tells him that he should stop getting even with himself.

Because Mark is unable to let go of the smug, superior attitude of his childhood and find some humility, he is unable to grow up. Rather than becoming a functioning adult in society, Mark is sentenced to jail and thus removed from society entirely. Additionally, the fact that Mark laughs at Bryon's assertion that they were “like brothers” illustrates how irreparably broken their bond has become due to their mutual betrayals.



Bryon's conversation with M&M only reinforces the severe consequences that his bad drug trip had on him. Not only has his brain been altered for the rest of his life, but what he did at 13 years old could have consequences on his dream of having a family. This contradicts Mark's previous assertion that nothing bad can happen to kids, illustrating the immaturity of believing that kids are invincible.



The boys' diverging endings underscore how, because Bryon was successfully took responsibility and found humility over the past year, so he is able to successfully transition into adulthood. Mark, on the other hand, was not able to achieve those things, and thus he never truly grows up. Even in jail, he doesn't appear to have learned his lesson, as he is still causing trouble there.



Bryon's mother uses the same language as Bryon when he is talking about violent cycles of revenge. Because Mark indirectly hurt Cathy by selling drugs to kids like M&M, Bryon felt that he had to express his loyalty to her and get revenge on Mark. But because Cathy led to his betrayal of Mark, Bryon then felt he had to get revenge on Cathy. Both examples emphasize that getting even (whether violently or not) can be an expression of loyalty and even love. But because Cathy and Mark disliked each other, Bryon winds up betraying and losing both of his closest relationships.



At the end of August, Bryon visits Mark at the reformatory. Bryon sees that Mark has lost weight; his “sinister innocence” is gone, and instead he has a more “sinister knowledge.” He gives off the impression of a dangerous caged **lion**. Mark explains that the things that happen in the reformatory would make Bryon sick. When Bryon asks about how Mark is doing, Mark says that he hates Bryon. Bryon recalls the time when he seethed at the idea that Cathy had been attracted to Mark; now, he wonders what it would be like to feel that way your whole life. Bryon tries to apologize, but Mark refuses to hear it.

Bryon says he hears that Mark has been causing trouble, and Mark replies that he can't seem to get away with things anymore. Bryon then tells Mark that he can straighten up and get out early on parole, and that Bryon can then get him a job, but Mark scoffs at this idea. When Bryon desperately says that they were like brothers—that they were best friends—Mark says, “that was then, and this is now.” In that moment, Bryon thinks that Mark would kill him if he could.

Bryon explains that he hasn't visited Mark since then, and that he can't seem to care about anyone anymore. He can't even care about Mark, because the guy who was his best friend doesn't exist anymore. Bryon wonders what he could have done differently in the past year. He wonders what would have happened if he hadn't met Cathy, or if M&M had had a good trip, or if he hadn't found out about the drugs when he did. Bryon concludes by saying that he wishes he were a kid again, when he was sure of himself and had all the answers.

Bryon's return to the incident in which he thought Cathy might have been attracted to Mark illustrates how betrayals can fuel hatred. While that moment was only fleeting for Bryon (because he realized that Cathy didn't actually like Mark), here he understands how deeply he hurt Mark and how his own betrayal has irreparably shattered their relationship. The return to the lion metaphor also indicates a shift in Bryon's understanding of his friend. No longer does he view Mark as “innocent” as he once did; he now sees how “dangerous” and predatory Mark's behavior can be.



Even after facing severe consequences for what he has done, Mark feels no remorse—he dispenses with changing his behavior and instead focuses on Bryon's betrayal. His repetition of Bryon's declaration, “that was then, and this is now,” indicates that he's more focused on how Bryon has changed over time (and, as a result, betrayed him) than on his own behavior.



Bryon's musing hearkens back to Mark's earlier assertion that only adults say “if” and try to analyze why things happen as they do. It underscores how Bryon has become an adult, capable of taking responsibility for his actions and of retaining humility, knowing that he might not have made all the right choices. In wishing that he were a kid again and had the answers, Bryon highlights the fact that he no longer has the self-confidence of childhood and instead has fully emerged into the more complex world of adulthood.





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